

New initiatives launched

Welcome to the first edition of Education Now's new newsletter. In these days of educational uncertainty, a growing number of teachers, trainers, parents and politicians are looking to a wider set of ideas than those which enslave the Government. Ed Now exists to fuel this interest by

- reporting on positive educational initiatives through its Special Reports
- publishing substantial texts that provide argument and analysis
- holding conferences to exchange ideas and support
- developing networks
- providing consultancy

... and now by issuing a quarterly newsletter.

People who can't think are ripe for dictatorship

Carl Rogers

Underpinning all Ed Now's work are the key ideas of choice, democracy, flexibility and autonomy. Each is central to the Co-operative's recently agreed Statement of Purpose which is hereby officially launched ... may she float happily upon the sea of change. The full text appears on page six. Warmly, even hotly received, this declaration was forged from fierce debate between the people of varying persuasions and life-styles who make up the Directors and Associate Directors of the Company. You can see that a non-party political line is followed; Ed Now is interested in dialogue, not dogma.

Since a democratic society repudiates the principle of external authority, it must find a substitute in voluntary disposition and interest; these can be created only by education.

John Dewey

What's more we have a cheerful outlook. We believe that authoritarian education systems, like Britain's, can get better - through optimism, awareness, thought and will. Packed with reports, news, comment and reviews, this newsletter is intended to promote these qualities and thereby support people who want to work for alternatives in, and to, common schooling.

I have never allowed schooling to interfere with my education

Mark Twain

Collectively, Education Now is made up of: primary and secondary school teachers, home educators, heads and deputies, lecturers, interested parents, inspectors and advisers, teacher trainers, independent consultants.

If you are interested in joining us, or just finding out more - read on ...

If you think education is expensive try ignorance

Derek Bok

Inside this issue

- Poland - new initiatives and **Ed Now's** recent lecture tour
- Review - John Taylor Gatto's 'Dumbing Us Down'
- Don't just sit there ... join the network
- **Education Now** conference - Choice in education : escaping from uniformity
- Sharing power in schools : - a new special report
- Compulsory Schooling Disease

Education Now in Poland

In May, four of Ed Now's Directors undertook their latest lecture tour of Poland.

The core of the visit was Professor Roland Meighan's presentation 'Twelve Principles of Educational Reconstruction' derived from his own research and from the work of Education Now over the last five years. Roland's argument was that the current mess in our educational system requires clear-headed analysis and positive, constructive action with the intention of creating a flexible education system in which diversity of provision and practice co-exist.

Roland gave the lecture three times:

- to a conference of 180 teachers from all over Poland at Gdansk University, convened by Professor Marta Bogdanowicz, founder of the Polish Dyslexia Association.
- to a conference on 'Alternatives in education' convened by Professor Aleksander Nalaskowski at Torun.
- to the whole Education Faculty at Poznan University, convened by Professor Eugenia Poteluska and headed by the Chair of Education, Professor Zbigniew Kwiecinski.

In addition, Janet Meighan, and Philip and Annabel Toogood led workshops and seminar discussions with many groups ranging from a parents' meeting in Gdansk at Piotr Bogdanowicz's 15-19 'School for Individual Students', to students at Professor Nalaskowski's 15-19 'School for Creativity', and to the Psychology Department in the Faculty of Education at Poznan University.

In particular, Philip explained how the principles of reconstruction were being followed up in practice at Dame Catherine's School and were planned to operate in the establishment of the first Flexi College in September 1993 in Melbourne, South Deryshire.

Some Reflections

It was hoped, by Polish Solidarity activists before the Communist state collapsed (and particularly during the dark days of martial law which followed the 500 days of free debate after the Gdansk shipyard protest of 1980), that when the Communist totalitarian centralist state fell, a new era of freedom in education would follow. Similarly, the voice of **Education Now** is a voice which is being raised in constructive protest against the centralising of power in education and towards just such a practice of democratic education in the UK.

Specifically, through the idea of Flexischooling, **Ed Now** is proposing an alternative in education which is feasible, less expensive and attuned to the needs of today and tomorrow rather than to a stale repetition of the mistakes of the past decade. It was therefore with a feeling of solidarity with Polish people in their efforts to find a way out of the imprisonment of a state-controlled system that the visit took place..

On reflection, the background situation in Poland, as it has developed since our first visit in October 1989, may perhaps be colour coded conveniently:

- there is the possibility of a RED solution ... the not very serious option that a reaction back to some form of communism may set in;
- the BLACK (clerical) solution is the power of the Roman Catholic Church naturally filling the vacuum left by the demise of the Communist state. Even under the Communists, more than 90% of all Poles were practising Roman Catholics and the Church played a key role in keeping Polish hopes alive during the Communist regime;
- the GREY solution is petty and unstable, authoritarian Fascism, perhaps in the guise of selective education, private schooling, a romantic ideal of an intellectual elite whose 'philosopher kings' may save Poland from herself and take her through the 'temporary misfortunes' which are the understandable legacy of a tragic and unjust past;
- the GOLD solution was, and still is, the most evidently attractive in the outward appearance of things in Poland. If the swing in one sense is from the Totalitarianism of Communism to the Authoritarianism of the Catholic Church, then there is also a swing from the Directed Economy of Communism to the Market Economy of Capitalism with its glitz and glamour, squalour and glaring inequalities;
- the GREEN solution is complex. For example, it is evident that pollution of the air and water is still bad, yet nowhere was it easy to buy unleaded petrol for the old gas-guzzling vehicles which were everywhere to be seen. There is also evidence that Poland could feed itself and export valuable currency-raning products as well. Tariff problems with the EEC do not help this.

The general frame of mind in Poland created by 40 years of a national curriculum, is that of dependency - "who will tell us what to do next?". The few initiatives in autonomous and co-operative action will peter out without a new vision for education that produces young people with a more flexible and independent approach to living who will sustain and develop the "green" option.

We are grateful to our Polish friends for three things above all; their friendship, their sharing of the problems of their emergent society with us so frankly and their intelligent reception of our critique of the UK educational situation.

Philip Toogood

Early Childhood Report

Watch out for a new **Education Now** Special Report in the autumn. Edited by Janet Meighan and Philip Gammage it has as its overall theme 'Early Childhood Education: where are we now?' Price £5.

Don't just sit there - join the Network

As interest in **Education Now** has grown many people have asked how they can get involved. **Education Now** has a series of initiatives through which people may participate in and support its work. There are a variety of ways to get involved:

Subscribe to the newsletter

The **Education Now** Newsletter is a forum for providing and sharing news, views and information every quarter about alternatives in education. It is intended for be a means of keeping people in touch and encouraging a wide range of positive activity. We hope it will help to forge links between people around the country who share many of the values of **Ed Now**. Subscribers will receive at least 4 mailings a year which will include the newsletter, plus news of the latest publications and resources and invitations to conferences.

Don't be put off by our modest first issue - our funds for new initiatives are somewhat limited at present. We had plenty of material for a much longer issue and it was not easy keeping the length down. However, we expect the newsletter to expand and develop as interest in **Ed Now** continues to grow - watch this space!

The annual subscription for individuals is just £6. However we suggest this is a minimum and if you can give more to support **Ed Now** please do - if you can't don't worry. The rate for organisations is £10 - this includes 3 copies of the newsletter in each mailing .



Join the Support Group

The **Education Now** Support Group was established in 1991 with the start of the Special Reports Project. Three reports have been published in each of the last two years. The second series consisted of Clive Harbers's 'Democratic Learning and Learning Democracy', Damian Randle's 'Green Issues in Education' and the recently published 'Sharing Power in Schools : Raising Standards' by Bernard Trafford.

Support Group members receive the three Special Reports published each year - hot off the press - plus other news and information. The scheme has now been extended so that members automatically receive the **Education Now** newsletter. Membership of the Support Group keeps people up to date on the latest developments and publications and in return it helps to support and develop **Ed Now's** publishing programme.

The Reports planned for the next series are:

- Early Childhood Education edited by Janet Meighan and Philip Gammage
- The Skills of Learner-managed Learning by Mike Roberts
- Equal Opportunities in Colleges edited by Frank Reeves

The subscription to the Support Group is £15 minimum which includes the Newsletter; there is a special student rate of £10.

Spread the word

Please tell your friends and colleagues about **Education Now** or pass on copies of the newsletter. We will happily provide you with leaflets and complimentary copies of this first newsletter free of charge.

Leaflets available include

- * Books in Print and Special Reports
- * **Ed Now's** statement of purpose
- * Flyers for individual publications including

Run a bookstall

If you are participating in a local event - or even a national conference - running a bookstall is an excellent of introducing people to the work of **Education Now**. Our extensive range of books and reports makes an ideal bookstall - and we can supply free leaflets for people to read at their leisure. Contact **Ed Now** for further details.

Organise a meeting or seminar

One way to communicate ideas is to organise an event at which ideas about alternatives in Education can be discussed and shared. This could simply be a small meeting involving friends and colleagues - sometimes the most modest of meetings can be the most productive. Alternatively you may wish to arrange a seminar or dayschool. **Education Now** has plenty of experience in this area and can offer help with speakers and advice on content. If you are organising an event do have a stock of appropriate publications on hand, especially extra copies of the newsletter.

Donate!

Finally, don't be afraid to donate money to **Education Now**. Publishing books and reports, arranging conferences, producing a regular newsletter etc. all cost money. We have no shortage of ideas for new projects, initiatives or publications but money is a major constraint. If you can give a donation please do - it will be much appreciated and will be used directly to further develop the work of **Education Now**.

Contact address

For all the above you can contact **Education Now** at 113 Arundel Drive, Bramcote Hills, Nottingham NG9 3FQ Telephone 0602-257261

Review : Dumbing us Down

DUMBING US DOWN: THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM OF COMPULSORY SCHOOLING

by John Taylor Gatto
Philadelphia: New Society Publishers 1992
available in UK at £6-95

It is hard not to draw parallels with *Dumbing Us Down* from the USA and *Compulsory Schooling Disease* by Chris Shute published earlier this year in UK. Both are teachers with over twenty years experience and neither is impressed with schools as currently organised. John Taylor Gatto began to wonder if he had been hired as a teacher to enlarge the powers of children or to diminish them. He concluded that it was the latter.

"I began to realise that the bells and the confinement, the crazy sequences, the age segregation, the lack of privacy, the constant surveillance, and all the rest of the national curriculum of schooling were designed exactly as if someone had set out to prevent children from learning how to think and act, to coax them into addiction and dependent behaviour."

He decided to change his style of teaching, to give children space, time and respect and to see what happened. What happened is that the children learnt so much he was nominated teacher of the year for the New York State several times.

John Taylor Gatto recognised that what he was really paid to teach was a hidden or unwritten curriculum. He decided it was made up of seven basic ideas:
confusion, class position, indifference, emotional dependency, intellectual dependency, provisional self-esteem, you cannot hide.

The consequence of teaching these seven lessons regularly and incessantly is the kind of youth we have around us:

"Young people are indifferent to the adult world and to the future, indifferent to almost everything except the diversion of toys and violence."

School, Gatto concludes, is a twelve year jail sentence where bad habits are the only curriculum truly learned. School 'schools' very well but it hardly educates at all.

My main reservation with this book is that there is more to it than this. We need a new vision of how schools could be and how John Holt's idea of schools as places people choose to go to when they see the need for help in their studies, can be realised. Charles Handy in *The Age of Unreason* has also indicated the urgent need to re-invent schools suitable for the modern age on the model of Learning Resource Centres rather than custodial institutions - as a management consultant, he reports that schools as currently organised have more in common with concentration camps than places of education..

The families adopting home-based education have pointed the way to how a flexishooling model can work starting with flexi-time programmes. The most developed examples appear to be in California under the guise of the ISP (Independent Study Programmes) system. But then you need imagination to work on such an idea, and schools in UK have successfully eradicated that for most people.....

Roland Meighan

BOOKS BY EDUCATION NOW

Learning All the Time by John Holt £6-50
...quintessential Holt; readable, accessible, kindly, immensely observant... Professor Philip Gammage

Flexishooling by Roland Meighan £6-00
...a great pearl in his writings.... Professor Aleksander Nalaskowski

Never Too Late by John Holt £10-00
I applaud this book heartily.... Sir Yehudi Menuhin

Anatomy of Choice in Education by Roland Meighan and Philip Toogood £10-00
...precisely what is needed to clear up present confusion and set coherent, purposeful, productive patterns for the future...
Dr. James Hemming

Learner-managed Learning edited by Paul Ginnis £5-00
...learners really start to explore and exercise their potential only as they take charge of their lives.

Democratic Learning and Learning Democracy by Clive Harber £5-00
Democracy is the worst system of organisation - except for all the others! Winston Churchill

Learning From Home-based Education edited by Roland Meighan £5-00
...the rich diversity of the home-based phenomenon is demonstrated..

Issues in Green Education by Damian Randle £5-00
..it certainly succeeds in provoking thought... Chris Hartnett

Sharing Power in Schools: Raising Standards by Bernard Trafford £5-00
...our students are becoming more effective, self-confident and imaginative learners and workers. examination results are improving...

"The 1988 Education Act is a very dangerous development for it has politicised schooling in the direction of fascist thinking. It is the worst development in the world at the moment."

Professor Eugenia Poteluska
University of Poznan

Sharing power in schools: raising standards

by Bernard Trafford

In May **Education Now** published its latest Special Report on the theme of learner-managed learning and democracy in schools. *Sharing power in schools* is a case study of one school which is attempting to promote those values - it is written by the head, Bernard Trafford, with contributions by students and teachers. The report describes how a traditional, academically selective independent day school is setting out to create an open and democratic ethos in which the students themselves have ever greater responsibility for, and power over, their own lives and learning. Although the change is only in its infancy, the book already identifies the advantages to a school in taking such a course and the difficulties of pursuing it.

The main thrust of the book is to demonstrate that the decision to share power with students is not simply an ideological one, although the school in question is driven by a clear educational philosophy. It is, rather, a pragmatic development, concerned with the motivation of school students throughout the 11-18 age range. It is based on the conviction that the only dependable way to 'raise standards' is to engage the enthusiasm and commitment of the children themselves by involving them in decisions about what they learn, and how they go about it.

Evidence is produced that students, not to mention their teachers, who have a voice and real power to make decisions do work better individually and together; that the atmosphere of the school becomes more relaxed, friendly and creative; and that - even in these early stages - academic standards, at least as measured by public exam results, do begin to rise. Though the book only charts the beginning of a long process, its message is one of great optimism for the future, furnishing lessons which are relevant not just to a single institution but to education as a whole.

Available at £5 (including post and packing).

Compulsory Schooling Disease

by Chris Shute

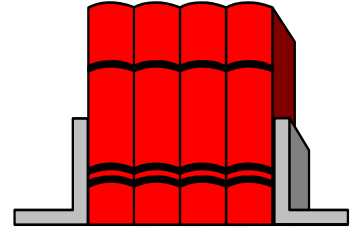
This new book from Educational Heretics Press is an impassioned call for change - the product of Chris Shute's experience of twenty-five years of school teaching.

In *Compulsory Schooling Disease* Chris Shute records how he has come to believe that compulsory schooling is the cause of many social problems which it claims to cure, and why he is no longer prepared to defend it.

Available at £6 (including post and packing) from Educational Heretics Press, c/o 113 Arundel Drive, Bramcote Hills, Nottingham NG9 3FQ.

Choosing Choice: Conference Report

Among the child-sized furniture, some stood, some sat, chatting, browsing and eating. Others were listening to the Speakers in their 'Corner'. It was lunchtime at Ed Now's Annual Conference - now in its third successful year.



Forty people had filled the small parent-owned village school of Dame Catherine's in Ticknall on an April Saturday to hear, talk and even act about

- the challenge of human scale education
- the issues involved in pursuing an equal opportunities policy in a community FE college
- the strategies and structures supporting student-centred learning at Dame Catherine's School
- the three evils of compulsory schooling: the unwritten curriculum; peer group exposure; the adult devised curriculum
- the concept and practicality of home-based education as an effective alternative to schooling
- the benefits of democratic learning at Wolverhampton Grammar School and in an A Level Sociology class
- the excitement and limits of a person-centred approach to learning in a school and a home
- the value of, and opportunities for choice in the education of young children

The conference title was Choice in Education - Escaping from Uniformity. From the readiness of conversation, the recruiting of new contacts, the relishing of debate and the reluctance to go home, it seemed to serve its purpose:

"To provide mutual support and encouragement for all those trying to develop forms of education which
- set people free from external control, which results merely in learning how to be taught
- set people free to view themselves as skilled learners who can manage their own lifelong education. "

Flexicollge for Melbourne

In September Melbourne Village College will open for 30 students (11-16 years). This is a Flexi College initiative along the lines pioneered at the Dame Catherine's School, Ticknall, for the last six years, taking its proven methods into the secondary sector.

For further information please contact: Philip Toogood, Flexi College, c/o Dame Catherine's School, Rose Lane, Ticknall DE73 1JW Telephone 0332-862792/864017

Ed Now's Statement of Purpose

Education Now is a forum in which people with differing, diverse and undogmatic views can develop dialogue about alternatives to existing dominant and compulsory forms of education. It aims to stimulate and inform educational debate through conferences, courses, consultancy, research and publishing.

Education Now thinks that the word *education* has come to be misunderstood. Many people assume that it means 'what teachers do with children in school' and nothing else. Education Now challenges that view.

Its understanding of education is much wider, encompassing the many beneficial experiences which take place outside schools and colleges and which lead to valuable learning. It opposes those elements in the present system which promote uniformity, dependency, and, for many, a lasting sense of failure.

The values of EDUCATION NOW include:

- a focus on the uniqueness of individuals, of their learning experiences and of their many and varied learning styles
- support of education in human scale settings including home-based education, small schools, mini-schools, and schools-within-schools, flexischooling and flexi-colleges
- recognition that learners themselves have the ability to make both rational and intuitive choices about their education
- advocacy of co-operative and democratic organisation of places of learning
- belief in the need to share national resources so that everyone has a real choice in education
- acceptance of Einstein's proposal that *imagination is more important than knowledge* in our modern and constantly changing world
- adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in general and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in particular.

Education Now maintains that people learn best:

- when they are self-motivated
- when they take responsibility for their own lives and learning
- when they feel comfortable in their surroundings
- when teachers and learners value, trust, respect and listen to each other
- when education is seen as a life-long process

Education Now rejects those forms of education which cause learners to feel frightened, bored and frustrated, thus harming them and reducing their capacity for learning. It works to celebrate and develop constructive alternatives to such forms within, alongside and outside them.

Special offer

Education Now is now offering two of its books to newsletter readers at the special price of £7.50 each (inc post and packing) - for a limited period up to 30 September 93:

Never Too Late by John Holt

'I applaud this book heartily' - Sir Yehudi Menuhin

Anatomy of Choice in Education by Roland Meighan and Philip Toogood

'...precisely what is needed to clear up present confusion and set coherent, purposeful, productive patterns for the future...' - James Hemming

Anatomy of Choice has recently attracted interested reviews in two diverse publications - The Times Educational Supplement (April 93) and Options in Learning (Spring 93) - the Newsletter of the Alliance for Parental Involvement in Education (in the United States).

Please quote 'Summer Offer' when ordering.

In the Next issue

'Early Childhood Education' is reviewed

Subscriptions, orders and enquiries

The contact address is:

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Subscription rates:

Newsletter

£6 individuals

£10 organisations (includes 3 copies of each newsletter)

Support group:

£15 per annum; £10 special rate for students

(includes 3 Special Reports per year plus newsletter subscription)

Please make cheques payable to **Education Now**.

These rates are suggested as a minimum, however if you are able to give more this would help to contribute towards the development of the newsletter and other new initiatives.

Education Now is a non-profit making research, writing and publishing company, a co-operative devoted to developing more flexible forms of education and more educational diversity to cope with the wide diversity of learner styles and situations.

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