

New centre for alternatives

This Summer saw an exciting new development in the work of Education Now supporters. For some time individuals have talked about the need for a Centre for Alternatives in Education and we now have premises and a steering group which is currently seeking funding for the development of the Centre.

The Centre will be based at The Burntlands, the home of the Harrison family, and will use rooms that were once barns and cow sheds. Geoff Harrison and the rest of the family have made such a good renovation job on the former farm buildings that it's hard to believe that this is where Iris and her children once milked a small herd of goats.

Many of you will know of Iris and Geoff Harrison and their family. They have been home educators for over 25 years and during that time have experienced both the delights and the difficulties of home-based learning. While they now have a lovely home at the Burntlands and live there with three of their (now grown up) children, in the early Seventies the family moved to a small island in the Hebrides in a successful attempt to escape the consequences of care orders. The two boys were even declared 'uneducated' by the courts, a fact which Iris clearly enjoys mentioning at the same time as she describes how these two 'uneducated' individuals re-designed, re-built and re-equipped the old cow sheds which the Centre for Alternatives in Education will use as offices.

Before the offer from the Harrisons was accepted, there was some debate within the steering group over the location of the Centre. The Harrisons live in rural Worcestershire near Tenbury Wells and while the local countryside is a breathtaking attraction there was some concern that the site is not sufficiently central. However, discussion over the actual intentions for the Centre and a recognition of the possibilities offered by modern telecommunications soon convinced everyone that the premises were ideal.

It is intended that the Centre will act as a source of information for all those concerned to develop a much broader understanding of education than can be found in current Government policy or is discussed in the national media. There are few individuals and groups which are able to offer a full and coherent commentary on educational alternatives and the Centre will seek to respond to a clear need. Key activities will be the development of a range of information materials appropriate for mailing and the establishment and publicising of an education 'Helpline'. It is expected that enquirers taking advantage of these services might include, for example, teachers wishing to develop their own practice, parents and students concerned about rights and possibilities, political groups wishing to inform and develop their policy making and journalists who currently seem quite prepared to ignore and minimise alternative ideas and practices.

Once basic information services are established, other activities might be considered. For example, research facilities could be developed at the Centre while consultancy, workshops and conferences might be offered. The intention will be to inform and to widen the debate about education and to promote a range of human scale contexts for learning.

We still have some way to go before the Centre is up and running - although a building is now available and we have offers of voluntary work, funding still has to be found. A great many people have expressed enthusiasm for this venture, however, and the need for such a Centre is clear. We look forward to the Centre opening during 1994.

Kevin Holloway

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Early Childhood Education: Taking Stock

Edited by Philip Gammage and Janet Meighan

This timely book, just published, is the latest of Education Now's Special Reports and is available from the usual address at £5.00, postage paid.

After the 1944 Education Act, early childhood education in the UK gradually earned itself a high reputation, nationally and internationally. Its philosophy and practice were firmly based on research and experience. Improvements were possible, of course, and many Local Education Authorities showed considerable commitment to extending provision and improving the quality of educational opportunities for the young.

Recent government policies, however, including the introduction of a National Curriculum, are bringing about highly questionable changes and are not building on previous strengths. In addition, current suggestions that the training of teachers for young children should be shorter, less academic and increasingly at a non-graduate level are a down-grading which will create disaster for our children and country.

In this report, the writers take stock of the situation lest the myths about early childhood education adopted by officialdom destroy years of patient work and force us steadily backwards into the dark ages of schooling. Themes include the dubious developments affecting the education of four year-olds in infant schools and the ways in which recent legislation has muted and marginalised early years professionals. Provision in other countries is reviewed, the comparative evidence indicating the gains to be made from high quality teacher training and investment in early years education. The evidence shows that current UK policies are in the wrong direction; a heavy social and economic price will be paid for them in the future. The conflict between a utilitarian, social control model of early years schooling and a developmental model of early childhood education is central to the analysis.

Contributors include:

Professor Philip Gammage, University of Nottingham
Jenefer Joseph, Early Years Consultant
Iram Siraj-Blatchford, University of Warwick
Ros Swann, Cheltenham & Gloucester College of H.E.
Marian Whitehead, Goldsmiths' College,
University of London

'Ave an 'art

Back in July the Associate Directors 'Arts Group' wrote to Sir Ron Dearing, drawing his attention to the crucial points made by David Pascall supporting combined arts in the curriculum, just before he left office as chair of the National Curriculum Council. At the same time, the Group sent a similar letter to the *Times Educational Supplement*; the letter was published in part and drew a number of supportive and encouraging responses.

Meanwhile, Derry Hannam, a member of the 'Arts Group' has contributed a chapter to the recently published book *Wasteland Wonderland: the Arts in the National Curriculum*. The book, edited by Malcolm Ross of Exeter University, surveys the demolition of Arts education at the hands of the National Curriculum and is, on the whole, pessimistic about prospects especially at Key Stage 4. The writers see the Arts as central to personal development and deeply regret the currently dominant justification for 'Arts as cultural inheritance'.

Derry's chapter 'Arts and the adolescent revisited' summarises his experimental work in collaborative combined arts undertaken in five Derbyshire schools. The approach, in which pupils work in self-directed small groups and teachers act as subject advisers, draws on the work of the original Schools Council project 'Arts and the adolescent' (1969-74).

Wasteland Wonderland is available at £4.00 from the University of Exeter, School of Education.

Another helpful resource for those wishing to explore current issues in arts education is *Behind the Debate: the impact of the national curriculum on arts teaching*, available at £29.50 (incl. p&p) from Berkshire County Council, Ref.BD/AE, PO Box 660, Maidenhead SL6 1LF.

From *Teaching the telephone directory*:

To the question, "Why teach the telephone directory?" an official answer was agreed as follows:

"It develops good study habits, trains the child to concentrate and develops a sound memory for facts. These are the qualities they will need as adults, for disciplined adults are what we need."

Question: "Why memorise the directories when they are readily available for reference when you actually need a number or address?"

Official answer: " This could be said about almost anything we teach in schools. If we wanted our people to just look up information when they actually needed it, why teach anything? Furthermore, life is hard and difficult, and the sooner our children learn this thoroughly the better off they will be."

Extract from the newly published **Theory and Practice of Regressive Education** by Roland Meighan, available from Educational Heretics Press, 113 Arundel Drive, Bramcote Hills, Nottingham NG9 3FQ. Price £6.00.

Global alternatives in education

This is a brief introduction to some of the alternative perspectives on education that have had their origins in (for want of a better expression) 'developing' countries. While democratic and more flexible forms of education are not common in such countries (as also in 'developed' countries), there have been some interesting innovations.

One impetus for such innovations has been a rejection of the colonial form of education and a desire to try to avoid the separation between the practical and the academic. The earliest and most influential innovation in this sense has been Education for Self-Reliance (ESR) in Tanzania based on the philosophy of Julius Nyerere and introduced in 1967/8. Under ESR all schools were supposed to become involved in productive activity (e.g. by running a farm on the school premises); lessons were to become far more participatory by merging academic theory with the practicalities of productive activity; political education was to become compulsory and each school was to be organised democratically. This policy has run into several difficulties in practice (Cooksey, 1986; Harber, 1989: Ch.4; Mosha, 1990; Saunders, 1992), not least, and rather ironically, because of the authoritarian way it was introduced. However, it still means that Tanzania is one of the few countries in which it is possible to find some schools which involve pupils in democratic participation with government approval (Harber, 1993).

Another important reason for the failure of ESR was the failure to reform methods of assessment. The introduction of the Secondary Schools Community Extension Project in Papua New Guinea during the 1980s, which was, like ESR, another attempt to integrate theory and practice, learnt from this mistake and introduced a revolutionary form of assessment based solely on skills rather than the retention of 'facts' (Vulliamy, 1981, 1987).

Other innovations have stemmed from the problems that schools in developing countries face of a high level of demand due to population growth coupled with severe financial stringency resulting in very large classes and shortages of trained teachers and teaching materials. In order to cope with these circumstances Project Impact in the Philippines (later also Project Pamong in Indonesia) came up with practices not dissimilar to the concepts explored in Roland Meighan's *Flexischooling*. Schools were re-titled 'community learning centres' and cheap, locally produced self-instruction materials were introduced so that pupils could work independently for much more of the time. Teachers became known as instructional supervisors and acted much more as facilitators of learning and peer tutoring was introduced so that older pupils could help younger ones to progress. This meant that the teacher pupil ratio could be greatly increased with no harmful effects on learning (Bishop, 1986: Ch.7).

A recent book of case studies of 'effective schools' for poor children in developing countries (Levin and Lockheed, 1993) originated in a conference sponsored by that pillar of hard-

headed international capitalism, the World Bank. As such, it contains some interesting reading. For example, the introductory, overview chapter notes several common themes that come out of the strategies for more effective schools. One of these is empowerment and effective participation - teachers, students and parents should all be responsible for making educational decisions and for the consequences of those decisions. Also, there is a clear emphasis on a move away from passive to active learning and problem-solving.

The case studies go on to reflect this. For example, the New School Movement Programme in Columbia was designed and tested over a fourteen year period in 17,000 schools and reached more than 900,000 children. In terms of classrooms, the schools promote active and reflective learning, the ability to think, analyse, investigate, create, apply knowledge and improve children's self-esteem. The Programme seeks to develop children's cooperation, comradeship, solidarity and civic, participatory and democratic attitudes. The school is also organised as an introduction to a democratic way of life. Children are organised in committees and they learn group decision-making and responsibility. Similarly, teacher training for these schools is based on the principle that if teachers are to develop classrooms in which children's learning is active, discovery-orientated, co-operative and creative, then the process of training teachers must also have similar characteristics.

Perhaps the only benefit of Britain's rapid progress towards the economic status of a developing country over the last fourteen years is that we too may eventually be forced to seek more imaginative, less centralised and more democratic ways out of our educational *cul-de-sac*.

Clive Harber

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Can You Get an Education from the National Curriculum?

There are a number of basic problems with the concept of a National Curriculum. Here are four to start with:

- 1. Long experience around the world shows that the idea does not work.**
- 2. Putting the various National Curriculum offerings side by side exposes them as a mish-mash of adult hang-ups, country to country.**
- 3. A National Curriculum prevents children from more important types of learning.**
- 4. The concept of a National Curriculum is immoral.**

There are other objections, such as the celebration of Nationalism rather than internationalism, but I will leave these aside.

The idea of a National Curriculum has been tried many times throughout the world. Hitler was very keen on the idea and it formed the backbone of the Nazi schooling system. Stalin was another enthusiast and adopted it for USSR as well as the occupied countries such as Poland. Tito adopted a National Curriculum for the former Yugoslavia. The UK tried it in the 1800s and abandoned it as a failure.

The reasons for adopting the idea of a National Curriculum are instructive. Stalin thought it would do two things. It would bind the former nation states of the USSR together and create patriotic identity with the new state. Next, it would raise the standards of education and establish economic growth so that USSR would become the super-power. Hitler thought it would do two things. It would raise the standards of education and establish economic growth so that Germany would become the super-power and that it would forge strong patriotic identity with the new German state. Tito saw a National Curriculum as the means of replacing the former nation states of Yugoslavia with a new patriotism and bind the various religious groups together in a national identity. It would also raise standards of education and ensure economic growth. Events could hardly have provided more spectacular evidence that the theory was wrong and the consequences of over thirty years of National Curriculum in some cases, had failed in all respects.

The Government of the UK introduced a National Curriculum into being in 1988 for two main reasons. Firstly it was claimed that it would raise educational standards and promote economic growth; secondly it was claimed that it would ensure a growth in patriotism, which was thought to be on the wane particularly in the former nation states of Scotland and Wales. It would appear that the only thing we learn from history, is that we don't learn from history!

What does the National Curriculum look like country to country? When you put them side by side, they show marked variations. Sweden devotes about 30% of the time to the Social Sciences. The UK version devotes none and is so worried by the social sciences it even leaves economics to feature in a low status 'cross-curricular theme'.

The USSR had no space for religion except as part of historical studies. The UK version has compulsory Christianity. Other countries have compulsory Islam, or whatever religion geographical accident has determined as the local belief system. I have just come back from Poland where over forty years experience of a National Curriculum has convinced most of the people I met that it is a moribund idea. The dictatorship of the Reds requiring Marxism as a compulsory study, is now replaced there by the dictatorship of the Blacks (i.e. the clergy) requiring Catholicism instead.

Each country puts its own national geography and history first and world studies a poor second, if it features at all. Sweden is, perhaps exceptional in giving attention to international studies. In literature, the UK requires the study of several plays, featuring dated ideas in elegant but ancient language. There is no mistaking the nature of these National Curriculum contents. Music, art and science show the same patterns. They contain major elements of a mish-mash of adult hang-ups selected according to various national prejudices.

Thirdly, there is always an opportunity cost. Whilst children are being compelled to learn this material, they lose out on learning other things. As George Bernard Shaw observed:

"My schooling not only failed to teach me what it professed to be teaching, but prevented me from being educated to an extent which infuriates me when I think of all I might have learned at home by myself."

There is more to it than this. John Taylor Gatto in his book *Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling* concludes that schooling in the USA is a twelve year jail sentence where bad habits are the only curriculum truly learned and that school 'schools' very well, but hardly educates at all. Gatto's compatriot, John Holt, concluded that the outcome of schools with an adult-imposed curriculum was that people learned how to be taught, but not how to learn.

Like Gatto, Chris Shute is a teacher of over twenty years' experience, but from the UK. In his book *Compulsory Schooling Disease*, he too writes of the bad habits learned by gradually absorbing fascist tendencies from the unwritten

curriculum of a National Curriculum. Both writers note that children are taught to avoid thought and to become dependent on the authority of other minds than their own. Not surprisingly then, Adolf Hitler observed that it was good fortune for the rulers that the people do not think.

Finally, in what ways can a National Curriculum be said to be immoral? A member of a home-based educating family, Peter Jones, expresses it thus:

"We can no more ordain learning by order, coercion and commandment than we can promote love by rape or threat."

A National Curriculum can thus be seen as mind-rape. The victims are compelled into a place chosen by the adults. They are then subjected to the learning will of the adults and their agents, by being forced to learn what the adults prescribe, whether they want to or not. The methods are dictated by the adults. The adults proclaim that the children need it and like it really. The children become passive and resigned after 15,000 hours of this treatment, though some become angry and resentful.

John Holt put it slightly differently and perhaps a little less starkly:

"School is the Army for kids. Adults make them go there, and when they get there, adults tell them what to do, bribe and threaten them into doing it, and punish when they don't."

Whether it is more like mind-rape, or army, or as George Bernard Shaw maintained, "worse than a prison because at least in prison you do not have to read the boring books written by the prison officers...", or as Charles Handy concluded, like a concentration camp, is a detail. What is moral about this kind of oppression, however you describe it? The more a National Curriculum is adopted, the more severe the oppression. Compelling children to attend school, but then treating them humanely with some participation in decision-making might be defended to a limited extent, though not by me, but add a National Curriculum, and the mind-rape becomes total.

Is it time for us to devise some principles of educational reconstruction?

Roland Meighan

The Polish Connection II

While the Meighans and the Toogoods were on their 'Principles of Educational Reconstruction' lecture tour of Poland in May, Arthur Acton, an Associate Director, was nearing the end of his stay. The connection between Arthur's experiences and those of the Directors reported in the last edition, speaks for itself.

Arthur writes:

"I taught English and Methodology at a Teachers' Training College in Pulawy from February to June this year. My wife and I went there with the organisation 'Teachers for Poland'.

"The students (aged 18-38) are keenly interested in democratic education. Most experienced none. 'Come here Maths slave five!' 'What you think is of no importance!' 'I wanted the right to think for myself, to see the world through my own eyes, not through the eyes of my teachers.' 'My school had an atmosphere of fear.' These are typical student memories.

"Many students and other Polish friends are feeling very insecure, which is not surprising, given Poland's history. I did not meet up with anyone who is not disillusioned by the current political set-up, suspecting both incompetence and the influence of sinister special interest groups. Many Polish people call the Church the 'Black Mafia'. 'If you see a new expensive car, the driver will almost certainly be a priest.' There is also concern about a possible takeover by the West.

"I fell in love with the people of Poland and with the country. Poles are open and real. Ask a Pole how (s)he is and (s)he will tell you."

Education Now's connection with Poland lives on because, happily, Professor Eugenia Potulicka of Poznan University has accepted the invitation to become Education Now's first international Associate Director. We welcome her gladly. What's more, the Polish edition of Roland Meighan's *Flexischooling* has completely sold out, and this autumn the Polish translation of his best-selling *A Sociology of Educating* (Cassell 1981, 2nd edition 1986) appears.

Education Now is keen to carry on supporting Poland's educational freethinkers, of which Eugenia is one, in their struggle to shape the future. We are equally keen to keep learning from their accumulated wisdom, distilled from the hard-taught lessons of their totalitarian past.

National Peace Council Education Network presents

A New Look at Peace Education

A day conference

Saturday 20th November 1993

11am - 4.30pm

Friends House, Euston, London

Speakers:

Tom Leimdorfer *What is peace education?*
Norman Richardson *Northern Ireland experience*
Hilary Stacey *Mediation in schools*
Pat Gaffney *Resources for teaching peace*

Workshops:

Georgann Lamont *Values and visions in primary education*
Steph Koorey *Teaching peace in secondary schools*
Tom Leimdorfer *Conflict resolution*
Bruce Kent *Pax Christi Education Project*

For further details contact:

National Peace Council Education Network, c/o Pax Christi, 9
Henry Road, London N4. Telephone 081-800 4612
(Registration fees are £8 waged, £3 unwaged.)

Change from Within

Education Now has a close working relationship with Human Scale Education, the charity which exists to encourage human scale values in all schools from large comprehensives to small independents.

'Change from Within', a one-day conference looking at ways of bringing about change in comprehensive schools, was presented jointly by Human Scale Education and Stantonbury Campus on 16th October. Richard Pring (Professor of Educational Studies at Oxford University) spoke on 'Beating the Bureaucrats', while Ulrike Eisentrege (Teacher from Helene Lange Schule, Wiesbaden, Germany) described 'Changing a state school from within' and Lesley King (Co-Director of Stantonbury) took the theme of 'Maximising Learning'.

In addition, workshops featured: mini-schooling at Stantonbury; democratic learning; ecological literacy; flexible learning; creating a minischool in a Gloucestershire comprehensive; and tutor-based learning. A full conference report will appear in the next edition of *Human Scale Education*. For those who are unfamiliar with Human Scale Education and would like to know more, the Co-ordinator is Fiona Carnie at 96 Carlingcott, Near Bath, BA2 8AW. Phone: 0761-433733.

Bath Small School

Speaking of human scale education, an exciting new initiative is occurring in Bath. The brand new Bath Small School opened on 20th September in a large Victorian ex-school building with its first class of seven eleven(ish) year old boys. The venture is backed by an advisory panel which includes Don Foster MP (Liberal Democrat Education Spokesman), Philip Waterhouse (Educationalist and former Headteacher), Mary Tasker and lecturers from Bristol, Bath and London Universities.

Rupert Lowe, the Head, and a team of part-time teachers are committed to a full curriculum, GCSE success - and more:

"... academic subjects and exam results are very far from being our whole aim. It is essential for young people to develop confidence and self-esteem. Growing up involves learning to build successful and respectful relationships with other people, learning to value and care for the environment, and above all, learning how to learn."

The over-riding intention is to provide an holistic education.

The school also intends to be non fee-paying. Parents are involved in running the Bath Small School Bread Shop and other fund-raising activities. They are also asked to make a small weekly contribution if they can, while further funds are being sought from sympathetic charitable trusts, and from individuals and organisations who donate through the project's 'Guardian Scheme'. The school phone number is 0225 - 332220.

Global Co-operation Small School in London

Another idea for a small school has arisen in London. Diana Miles of the Holistic Education Network explains:

"A young couple have acquired a large warehouse where they intend to facilitate small businesses and provide workshop space for arts and craft people. They also envisage a recording studio, therapy rooms, restaurant, permaculture garden, play area and much more.

"I suggested we house a small school in the building since there is such potential for a good community atmosphere. It is envisaged that the school will draw on many of the resources within the building, particularly on the skills and expertise of crafts people and musicians. It is my philosophy that children learn best from activities in which a wide range of adults show love and enthusiasm for their particular skills and interests.

"We will also want to support 'home learners'. For example, parents and children may request to participate in particular group activities or in individual class studies and research. We would want to support these wishes and look to each child's need in partnership with their parents."

A business plan has been prepared and Diana is now keen to hear from anyone - parents, students, teachers - who might be interested in helping to establish, or in attending, the proposed school. She can be contacted at The Holistic Education Network, 81 Guinness Court, Mansell Street, Aldgate, London, E1 8AE. Phone: 071 - 480 6506 (between 10.00 am and 7.00 pm only please).

Flexi College

Human scale education has been available in south Derbyshire for 6 years in the form of Dame Catherine's School in Ticknall. In September, as an extension of the same sort of practice, the first Flexi College Tutor Group began operations in nearby Willington (not Melbourne as originally planned). Designed and led by Philip Toogood, head of Dame Catherine's, the Flexi College initiative combines community-based learning with centre-based studies. The dozen or so secondary age students are tutored by Richard Terry.

Book review

No Master High or Low: Libertarian Education and Schooling in Britain, 1890-1990 by John Shotton

Published by Libertarian Education (1993) and available from the publisher at Phoenix House, 170 Wells Road, Bristol BS8 2AG.

During the early decades of the century a 'new' kind of school began to manifest itself beyond the margins of our traditional academo-centric educational structure. There being yet no historian, the headteachers became their schools' own Boswells and in 1934 wrote accounts of their principles and practice. How to entitle their 'newness'? Well, 'modern' they supposed and so their *Handbook*¹ told the world about 21 assorted little schools, now mostly defunct.

By the 1960s, eight of the pioneers had survived. Joined by six others, they defined themselves as 'progressive' in another self-recording book² of the time. When the educational historians came along later that decade, they wrote about the 'progressives'³ and the 'innovators'⁴.

In this latest account of modern, progressive, innovative schools, John Shotton is quite clear about his preferred term, which is libertarian. We learn that he defines this as children determining their own lives and children sharing responsibility with adults for the running of their community.

He orders his history into five parts:

- Libertarian Schools and Sunday Schools, 1890-1930;
- Rural Retreats - the Libertarian Private Adventures in Education, 1890-1990 (including Summerhill, Dartington and Kilquhanity);
- Libertarian Schools for the Unschoolable, 1910-1990 (mostly communities inspired by Homer Lane);
- Libertarian Education and State Schooling, 1918-1990 (from Prestolee to Countersthorpe);
- The Free School Movement, 1960-90.

I have reservations only about the schools in Part One. There was a lot of commendable lecturing about libertarian topics in them, but not much evidence of living freedom.

Now we can play the game of 'Spot the missing school'. If Summerhill and Mackenzie's Braehead are in, where is Duane's Risinghill? And was *Mr. Lyward's Answer* not libertarian enough? The lacuna which most grieves me is the school created by 14-year-old Violet Potter, who inspired those rustic children in that tiny Norfolk village in April 1914 to plot their act of conscientious truancy, to paint slogans about 'justice' and then, at the normal school-going hour, to shamble their collective purposeful way to the village green. There, the 'alternative' Burston school was to be created, the building serving even today as a memorial to loving teachers and genuine child initiative.

The great benefit of *No Master High or Low*, though, for the individual reader and the future historian is the ordering of the material and the comprehensive bibliography of libertarian educational practice. The great strength of the book lies not only in Shotton the historian, but in Shotton the interviewer. During the 1980s he visited existing schools and interviewed

the children. They responded frankly and penetratingly to his discreet yet pointed questioning. In this respect *No Master* is the best thing since *The School that I'd Like*. An enlightened university ought to employ John Shotton on a roving scholarship to interview children in all kinds of schools in our socially-travailed country. Such an educational Mayhew for our time is sorely needed.

Bryn Purdy

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1. Blewitt, Trevor (ed) (1934), *The Modern Schools Handbook*, Gollancz.
2. Child, H.A.T. (ed.) (1962), *The Independent Progressive School*, Hutchinson.
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4. Stewart, W.A.C. (1968), *The Educational Innovators Volume 2*, MacMillan.

The American book, *Dumbing Us Down: the Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling* by John Taylor Gatto, which was reviewed in the previous newsletter, is available at £5.95 postage paid, from Lighthouse Books, Field House, Thrandeston, Diss, Norfolk IP21 4BU. Phone: 0379 - 783678.

Doing things differently

From divorce ceremonies in church to living abroad on dole money, from green networks of lovers to transforming third world begging; a compendium of these and other bright notions is too good just to keep on the shelf. This is the Institute for Social Inventions' latest book, Social Innovations.

In its ten pages devoted to Education and Children, I lost count of the number of times Education Now was mentioned. This was mainly due to Philip Toogood winning one of the 1993 Social Inventions Awards for his submission entitled Flexischool and Flexi College. His entry gives a brief history of the rescue from oblivion of Dame Catherine's School in Ticknall as well as the recently launched 'school without walls' project based on learner-managed and community-based learning in a nearby village.

Yet another reference to Education Now came at the end of my own piece on Teachers' Pets which describes state school-children as pioneering teachers, conducting their own research into different learning styles and their results. Yes, at £9.95 Social Innovations is worth every penny.

Social Innovations is available from The Institute for Social Inventions, 20 Heber Road, London NW2 6AA. An information leaflet and list of the Institute's publications is available from the same address.

Christopher Gilmore

RESEARCH REPORT

Comparison of social skills of home-educated and schooled children

With over one million families involved in home-based education in the USA, this is a big and ever growing phenomenon. This means that there is a whole publication house devoted to the 'home-schoolers' as they are called there, and a research centre that produces the journal *Home School Researcher*. There are also plenty of companies who have developed materials and resources especially for this market.

Home School Researcher Volume 8, number 3, contains two research reports on the issue of social skills. The first finding of the study by Larry Shyers was that home-schooled students received significantly lower problem behaviour scores than schooled children. His next finding was that home-schooled children are socially well adjusted but schooled children are not so well adjusted. Shyers concludes that we are asking the wrong question when we ask about the social development of home-schooled children. The real question is why is the social adjustment of schooled children of such poor quality?

The study by Thomas Smedley used different test instruments but comes to the same conclusion that home-educated children are more mature and better socialised than those attending school. Some possible reasons emerge from this study:

1. The classroom is mostly one-way communication often of a stilted kind and few meaningful interchanges are in evidence. In home-based education the opposite is the case.
2. Schools are products of the factory age with batches of uniform products running on the conveyor belt in lockstep motion towards the standardised diploma. It therefore socialises into this kind of mentality. Home-based education, in contrast, works to more personalised educational outcomes.
3. An unnatural aspect of school is age segregation. Learning to get along with peers alone does not prepare students for varied interactions with older and younger people in life. Home-based education avoids this trap for in the home-school learning programmes, people of various ages are encountered in a way that more accurately mirrors the variety of society.
4. The emphasis of home-based education on self-discipline and self-directed learning and the personal confidence this produces, creates young people who can adapt to new situations and new people.

Earlier research from the USA puts home-schooled children at least two years ahead of their schooled counterparts in intellectual achievement. These two studies show that they are ahead in social maturity too.

Roland Meighan

In the next issue of the Newsletter

Articles already planned include:

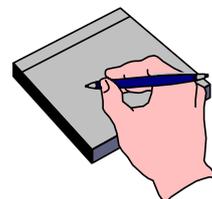
- A day in the life - of a democratic secondary school teacher.
- View from the condemned cell.
- Principles of educational reconstruction.

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Further Reports planned for the new series are:

- *The Skills of Learner-managed Learning* by Mike Roberts.
- *The Community College at Bilston* ed. by Frank Reeves.

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Editor's note: The editors are always keen to consider material for inclusion. For the third edition, please send your articles, news, views and letters to us before 31st December.

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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"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 Potulicka
University of Poznan, Poland

Review : Dumbing us Down

Dumbing us down : the hidden curriculum of compulsory schooling by John Taylor Gatto

Published by New Society Publishers (Philadelphia 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.

However, 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. Likewise Charles Handy in *The Age of Unreason* has 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 the 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 Charnwood Papers edited by Bob O'Hagan £9-00
....essential reading for community education practitioners

All prices include postage and packing.

