

Seal of approval for Dame Catherine's

Seven years ago, in September 1987, Annabel and I were living in a small bedroom in the Assistant Land Agent's house of the Harpur Crewe Estate. It was only a short step away from the shell of what earlier in the year had been the Ticknall Voluntary Controlled Parochial Primary School.

We had agreed to join with a small group of parents who were angry at the closure of their small village school by Derbyshire Local Education Authority. "We never Closed" was going to be our motto and we were going to make a small school together. Annabel and I had made three conditions, that our school should be: non fee paying (and therefore independent but not private); for all ages of children in the compulsory education range; and should develop as a model of use to others in the country who were willing to adapt it.

Seven years later the Primary school is full and the Secondary Section has moved off-site to form an independent secondary school called Willington Village College to be part of a federation of small secondary mini-schools in the community called Flexi Colleges.

Dame Catherine's has been given the seal of approval by Her Majesty's Inspectors at a full inspection last Easter. They used the OFSTED framework and were unequivocal in their support for practically all aspects of the school's operation. The report is due to be published soon and will make interesting and encouraging reading for anyone who has tired of the imposition of an over-prescriptive National Curriculum, a frenzy of testing, cuts and centralisation of power. An oral report was

made to me and a week or two later to the Governors (all of the parents in our case). We await the written publication in due course, supposing that in the central corridors of Sanctuary House the hot sunny summer has delayed things more than usual.

Education Now has been associated with the school from the start. The Co-operative's long list of publications reflect and expound the principles on which the school has been founded and developed. Our friends in Education Now have been a ready and indispensable source of help advice and support, a point duly noted by the Inspectors in their visit. Thank you to so many of you who have helped.

The three day conference held by Human Scale Education at Oxford Polytechnic in September 1987 was the seed bed for much of the early agenda of Education Now as we set about publishing a magazine. It also helped in the foundation of the school. In addition, over the years, we have developed our friendships and exchanges of ideas with the small alternative school movement in Poland.

Initially, several children were on a 'flexi-time' arrangement of attendance at Dame Catherine's, but further development in this direction was unacceptable to the majority. However, we developed flexibility in different and broader senses. For example, the curriculum is created co-operatively in each Tutor Group. A flexi-time arrangement in the secondary section enables 13 and 14 year-old students to take some courses at Burton College of FE.

One of the best things about the Dame Catherine's experience is the sense of real community. This is not just a friendly and chatty association of parents passing the time of day. They have raised about £300,000 in seven years, founded and run a voluntarily staffed shop, do all the cleaning, maintenance, management of the material matters about the school, support the teaching, welcome our visitors from all over the world and take them into their homes, look after each other's children, and in times of difficulty, suffering or celebration they rally round each other in a way I have experienced in no other community.

The addition of a Nursery Section, a 16-19 'City As School' type operation, a Flexible Learning Centre for Adults ... these are dreams for the future which we would like to make realities.

Philip Toogood
Head of Dame Catherine's School
Ticknall, Derbyshire DE73 1JW

Some Principles of Educational Reconstruction:

Final part of a three-part series

Edward Fiske tells us in his book *Smart Schools, Smart Kids*, that the press correspondents of the USA met at the White House on the invitation of President Bush to review the results of five years sustained application of the regressive approach in USA education. They decided that the time and money had been largely wasted on re-inventing a square wheel. As a result, the former New York Times educational editor took a sabbatical to try to find something more positive. Here is his first finding. *"Trying to get more learning out of the current system is like trying to get the Pony Express to compete with the telegraph by breeding faster ponies."* Fiske advocated a complete rethink of the fundamental assumptions of our antiquated, authoritarian and regressive model of schooling.



If all this seems vaguely familiar, consider that Edmond Holmes was the Senior Chief Inspector in charge of the previous British National Curriculum in the mid 1800's backed up by the 'tell them and test them' methodology. When he retired he wrote a book condemning the whole wretched package of his previous thirty years work. He said,

"To be in bondage to a syllabus is a misfortune for a teacher and a misfortune for the school in which he teaches. To be in bondage to a syllabus which is binding on all schools alike is a graver misfortune. To be in bondage to a bad syllabus which is binding on all schools alike is, of all misfortunes, the greatest."

Holmes observed that teaching became debased:

"In nine schools out of ten, on nine days out of ten, in nine lessons out of ten, the teacher is engaged in laying thin films of information on the surface of the child's mind and then after a brief interval he is skimming these off in order to satisfy himself that they have been duly laid."

Let us hope it will not take the newly appointed Chief Inspector of Schools, Chris Woodhead, thirty years to apply his presumed intelligence and discover the same thing.

Principle Nine: With information doubling in quantity about every ten years we need a different kind of learning.

As regards knowledge, we need to avoid approaches that imply that everyone needs to know the same bank of information or that learners of the same age need to know identical things. Subjects, the staple diet of schools, are only a minor part of the tool kit of knowledge and declining in importance, and in any case, learning the tool kit does not constitute an education. We do, however, need another kind of knowledge to be effective in the modern world - to know how to find out, to learn, relearn and unlearn, and how to manage our own learning on the principles of 'plan, do and review'.

Principle Ten: We need to identify humanity's greatest mistakes and admit that Adult Chauvinism is suspect.

In the *Hitch-hiker's Guide to the Universe*, the best selling book in the universe was said to be about God's Greatest Mistakes. I think we need to identify humanity's greatest mistakes. We should start being brave and face up to the fact that adult chauvinism has a poor record. Adults in power in Britain have, amongst other things,

- (i) allowed policies for short-term profit that have resulted in polluted beaches, seas, rivers, water supplies, farm land, and atmosphere, in the name of the gods of competition, the market and greed. This has resulted in the self-indulgence of the few at the expense of the many, and created a society where the rich are at war with the poor,
- (ii) helped develop enough destructive capability to kill us all several times,
- (iii) sold arms to autocratic regimes and then had to go to war with them to limit their activity,
- (iv) often proved incapable of organising their own personal lives to any effective model,
- (v) glorified competition rather than co-operation, and then wondered why this mind-set leads inevitably to wars.

The adults in power are not in a strong position to think they are fit, morally or intellectually, to hijack the learning of the young, by imposing upon them a curriculum based on assorted adult hang-ups.

What the world now needs is not competition, but organisation and co-operation; all belief in the utility of competition has become an anachronism. ... the emotions connected with it are the emotions of hostility and ruthlessness. The conception of society as an organic whole is very difficult for those whose minds have been steeped in competitive ideas. Ethically, therefore, no less than economically, it is undesirable to teach the young to be competitive. (p.104)

Bertrand Russell (1932) in *Education and the Social Order*
(For a recent analysis see *No Contest: The Case Against Competition* by Alfie Kohn (1992) Houghton Mifflin)

Principle Eleven: Schooling and education are not the same thing.

We would need to go back to Winston Churchill's advice to his Minister for Education, Mr. R.A. Butler in 1944 :

"Schools have not necessarily much to do with education ... they are mainly institutions of control where certain basic habits must be inculcated in the young. Education is quite different and has little place in school."

The American writer Mark Twain agreed:

"I never allowed schooling to interfere with my education."

Schools often claim to work **with** children. In truth, they end up working **on** children. Why are we so easily fooled? What deceives us is indicated by Everett Reimer from the USA:

"Some true educational experiences are bound to occur in schools: they occur despite school and not because of it."

This is because lots of teachers try their best to rescue bits from the wreck of the custodial school.

Schooling can become more educational but it needs a new fundamental vision. Until schooling becomes a **voluntary** part of a **flexible** education system for everyone, it is always only a bigot's move away from totalitarianism at the best of times. As John Gatto observed:

"When you take the free will out of education, that turns it into schooling."

It is crucial to note that the type of choice in question here is humanistic choice, not the inhuman market forces type of choice.

Principle Twelve: The Custodial School model needs to be replaced by the Invitational School model.

At the recent Human Scale Education conference in London on education and the environment, Joanna Macy explained that in 1993, California crossed a watershed. For the first time, the state spent more money on locking up young people than on the education budget. In addition, schools were now in the process of 'reform' to become more like day prisons than ever before.

Chris Shute notes in *Compusory Schooling Disease* that whatever their intentions and claims, schools end up training most young people to be habitually subservient. And there are seductive arguments for keeping children under a sole regime of authoritarian control. It makes them easier to handle and it pleases their parents - whilst society in general feels comfortable, for it appears to make the whole task of taking responsibility for children safer and more predictable. (The democratic and autonomous forms of discipline are more demanding to work with and they are often outside the experience of the teachers and other adults, in any case.) The process looks satisfactory in the short term but the long term outcomes are often a disaster as it produces large cohorts of subservient and inflexible young people and smaller groups of alienated, or philistine, or aggressive young people.

The 'reforms' in UK since 1988 have not helped. They have been akin to draining the few oases to achieve a nice, tidy, uniform, standardised desert. Our chief educational problem is to make schools, of the custodial model, less like schools. The 'reforms' have achieved the opposite.

Various critics of the current model of schooling, John Holt, Chris Shute, Seymour Papert, John Gatto and myself hold the view that we can regenerate schools so that they cease to be anti-educational. Our model is not that of the factory or the day prison, but that of the public library or the user-friendly type of museum, or as my partner Janet insists, a good nursery school. Doing away with compulsion, schools, perhaps renamed

Learning Resources Centres, will be used as places where anyone who happened to need help with their learning, at any time in their lives, could go to receive it. The curriculum will be a personal-ised one and not a standardised one. This is the vision of flexi-schooling and flexi-education and, I propose, that the longer we delay in establishing it, the worse for all of us.

Roland Meighan

Day Conference

"Democratic Education and Education for Democracy"

"We have taken democracy for granted; we have thought and acted as if our forefathers had founded it once for all. We have forgotten that it has to be enacted anew in every generation, in every year and day in the living relations of person to person in all social forms and institutions." *John Dewey*

Saturday October 22nd 1994 at Bilston Community College

Morning session

Keynote Speaker: **Dr. Clive Harber** (University of Birmingham)
"Democratic learning and learning democracy"

Workshops on
Democratising learning methods
Democratising primary schools
Democratising secondary schools
Democratising Further Education
Learning democracy through drama
Democratising the special school
Democratising education at home
Democratising Higher Education

Afternoon session

Keynote speaker: **Keith Wymer** (Chief Exec., Bilston College)
"Democratic management in an authoritarian system?"

Workshops on
International case studies
Democracy and equal opportunities
Minischooling as democratic practice
Democratising teacher education
Democratising community arts
Headteachers and the problems of changing school regimes

This joint conference is organised by Education Unlimited, the consultancy and conference division of Education Now, and Bilston Community College. It is for all those searching for more democratic forms of teaching, learning and educational management.

Fee: £10 for one session, morning or afternoon, £15 for the whole day (unwaged at half price) Cost of drinks included, but not lunch, which is available in the college dining hall. Crèche facilities available at a modest charge.

Details from: 113 Arundel Drive, Bramcote Hills, Nottingham
NG9 3FQ or telephone 0602 257261

A day in the life of ... a Flexi College tutor

Willington Village College is a small secondary school, comprising two learning groups of students, one of 11 to 14 year olds and the other of 14 to 16 year olds. Based in South Derbyshire, the College is the first of a planned cluster of small tutor groups operating the Flexi College system of cooperative education. I have been tutoring with Flexi College, at Ticknall and now at Willington, since Easter 1992. We have just finished our first year at the Willington site.

08.15: I meet Philip Toogood, my co-tutor, at Dame Catherine's School in Ticknall. We discuss any matters requiring immediate attention, check the post, and drive the five miles to Willington in the College's 16-seat minibus. We use the time to plan the outline of the day ahead and share ideas about how the day's work should progress.

08.40: Arrive at Willington Village College and engage in a precision parking manoeuvre with the minibus, backing into a small space reserved for us in the tiny car park which we share with an adjoining nursery school. We disembark and haul briefcases, tape recorders and whatever relevant boxes of resources we have brought with us around to the back door of the College. We share the building with other community groups including a youth club and evening classes. We hire our space for four days a week, with an option on Fridays if need be. Our proud boast is that we are a 'school without walls', and indeed we have contrived to shrink almost the entire stock of our physical resources into a space 10 feet square. This is the storeroom cum office/reception area, which at the end of the week receives our full complement of study units, computers, TV and Video, two large bookcases and other miscellaneous objects of value. The room is securely locked, awaiting 'unpacking' on Monday morning.

08.45: This is a Monday morning. After greeting parents Pat and Anne, who act as unpaid caretaker and secretary respectively, gratefully gulping at a mug of coffee and glancing at the minutes of last Thursday's monthly staff-parent meeting, I busy myself with the task of unloading 'Aladdin's Cave' as our super-secure Info. Tech. store has been dubbed. Fortunately, Pat has engaged several of the students, Tom, Chloe, and Stuart, in the task of wheeling out bookcases, TV, resources trolley, and the Dyspell (computerised spelling aid) machine, which they have placed in position in our two classrooms. I glance up from my attempts to free a snarled printer lead and see several students arriving through the main door. Ben, Matt, Richard and Steven offer to help carry I.T. equipment through to the main classroom, where we deploy tables to receive our second-hand IBM PS2's. The students have learned to set up the computers themselves, and within a couple of minutes the screens are blinking busily away as I check the positioning of monitors, cables, and keyboards.

Having satisfied myself with the position of chairs, tables, and white boards in the small classroom, all of which have been unstacked and arranged by four of the 11-14 year olds, I re-

enter the store and labouriously lift down the cumbersome study units from their stacked arrangement. These units were designed and built by the students as a design project; each student slides their individual unit into position in the space they have chosen along the length of the wall of each classroom. The students have become expert in analysing the design faults of these units and are making good progress in devising and building 'new improved' mark 2 units, which will be a good deal lighter!

09.00: Anne has completed the register, and so Philip, the 12 students and I assemble in our small playground, adjacent to the canal, and begin our 15 minute exercise routine. The routine varies from day to day, but follows a basic pattern of warm-ups, stretches, and warm-downs. Today is a warm morning and each student in turn suggests an exercise for us all to do: Henry chooses asymmetrical arm circling which he considers particularly beneficial for his tennis; Jay suggests waist circling; Tom wants to do an old favourite, the 'ride horse stance', a Tai Chi exercise in which a squat is partly relieved by cantilevering with outstretched hands, and the upper body twists alternately to the right and left. These exercises are appreciated and enjoyed by the students, who often comment on the beneficial effects they feel. Because we do them every day, the exercises seem to have a gradual, cumulative effect on the general fitness levels of students and tutors alike!

09.15: Our all-ages news session begins in the small classroom. I have set up the tape recorder in the corner of the room and I replay the recording of this morning's BBC Radio 7 o'clock news. Each student notes their version of the four headlines, and I pause the tape. We then discuss each issue as a group, and agree on a headline together. Today's news on the health service prompts a lively discussion. Stuart relates a relative's experiences in hospital; Matt refers to the contrast between private health insurance and taxation; Steven reviews the outline of current fiscal policy. In this way younger and older members of the group make important and varied contributions to the discussion, which begins to grow into a broader picture than that painted by the radio news item itself, owing to the potency of the student's own interpretations. We listen to more of the tape to find out more about the issues, reviewing and adjusting our original conclusions in the light of this new information. Then, as a group, we construct summaries; I write these on the whiteboard and the students make written copies in their notebooks. We are gradually building up a body of interpreted news information from which we intend to create a data base and use in our magazine articles.

10.15: We meet in a circle to plan the rest of the day. We have a very flexible timetable at Willington, and so this morning, after agreeing on the fixed points in the week such as I.T. and sport, where some of our network of specialists have agreed to help, Philip and I make proposals for some readjustments to the

daily schedule. There follows a considered discussion and it is finally agreed to shorten the morning break, thereby adding fifteen minutes to lunch to enable us to travel to and from the tennis courts. I write the new time frame on the white board whilst the students transfer the information to their notepads.

10.45: Time to make coffee and welcome Simon Hickie, our I.T. consultant tutor. Simon and I discuss the outline plan for this morning's I.T. session, and I ask his advice about some small technical problems I have been experiencing with our 486 pc. Steven joins in the discussion and has a word with us about some DTP software he would like to try out.

11.00: Simon and I meet with the older students to plan the I.T. session. We are concerned that in order to meet the deadline for our magazine production we need to be able to accomplish several tasks competently and concurrently. We talk in detail about the nature of the problem, and the students consider solutions. We agree definitions of tasks, roles, and times and set to work. The meeting has taken 15 minutes; without this planning time spent in detailed analysis at the start of the session we would most likely not have accomplished half our aims by lunchtime.

The students work in pairs whilst I oversee the text editing operation. Simon ensures that the DTP software is doing what it's supposed to, whilst Chloe transfers her article from memory card to floppy disk. By the end of the session we have two articles printed in Desktop Publishing format, and we round the session off with another meeting to review the progress we have made, raise questions and examine new problems that have come to light during the work.

12.30: I quickly brief Simon on what I would like next week's session to achieve and he leaves for Derby University where he teaches I.T. and Business Studies. I reflect on how useful it is to have someone like Simon involved with our project as he sees the day-to-day reality of Higher Education, with its increasing emphasis on independent learning skills, and is able therefore to make significant comments about the progress our students are making in their approach to learning. I grab my packed lunch and tennis racket, lock up the school and join Philip and the students in the minibus. I take the wheel whilst Philip eats his lunch and we drive the five miles to Burton, where we make use of a municipal recreation ground which includes four tennis courts we can use free of charge. The students derive great satisfaction from this lunchtime excursion, which enables them to let off steam in very pleasant surroundings. Through regular coaching the students' tennis skills have come a long way this summer, and we are soon enjoying several good games.

14.00: Arriving back at Willington, the students settle down for a quiet half hour's reading session. Each student has a particular book that they have been reading, perhaps as part of an assignment for GSCE. Books are either brought from home, selected from our book trolleys, or borrowed from Burton Library on one of our weekly visits.

14.45: The rest of the afternoon is taken up with a drama session, during which time we aim to develop the script we have been improvising for our forthcoming performance of 'Oh What Fools These Mortals Be!' (our reinterpretation of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'). We have been fortunate to have had several workshops from Sharon Robinson, who has encouraged the students to use their own creativity to generate an improvised narrative which puts Shakespeare in a modern context. Today, our task is to use that experience to develop individual scenes and to create a script. We spend a good fifteen

minutes reviewing our progress and plotting the rest of the afternoon's work, and then the students, in small groups, set about devising scenes. I work with one group at a time, and try to encourage them to make the leap from thinking about the storyline to actually feeling what it's like to be the particular character, to act as they might act. Progress is slow, but I feel we are making some headway; at the back of my mind is the constant anxiety that there is very little time until we actually have to perform the play in front of an audience. However, with about ten minutes of the afternoon remaining, the students in the group I am working with suddenly begin to build up a powerful scene and are obviously beginning to enjoy themselves. I suggest that they rehearse the scene a few times and then make a tape recording, which they do.

15.50: We finish the session five minutes late; parents have arrived to drive people home, otherwise we may have profited from an extra fifteen minutes or so, but this is often the case with afternoon sessions. Jay offers to make a transcript of the tape of her scene on her notepad computer, ready to be printed out tomorrow. Ben and Richard help me load the I.T. equipment back into Aladdin's Cave, and we stack chairs and arrange tables. Stuart and Tom are staying on to work on the Dyspell machine, so I get them started. I chat with a Carol and Pat, two parents who help clean up after the day is over, and we discuss the coming expedition and the day's work.

16.30: Philip and I review progress on the play and make plans for the coming week in the light of this. Steve Boffey, a community artist, arrives to discuss a series of workshops we have planned with him which include photography and costume making.

17.30: We do any final clearing up, secure the store room, lock up and drive the minibus back to Ticknall.

I have described a 'typical' day at Willington, but in fact, due to the flexibility which allows us to change the arrangement of individual sessions, each day is anything but typical. As a co-operative learning group we are constantly reviewing, criticising, and revising our methods, times, and practice. However, we strive to maintain a core structure which underpins everything we do, based on the assumption that it is desirable that all students learn to take responsibility for their own learning. This does not happen overnight, nor with the greatest of ease; on the contrary, it requires hard, often stressful, work. Also required are: a readiness to accept and adapt to changes; and, above all, the careful nurturing of a set of relationships based on mutual respect and trust.

Richard Terry

Book Reviews

Beyond Authoritarian School Management

by Lynn Davies

Published by Education Now (1994) at £10.00 (incl. p.&p.)

This scholarly and succinct treatise merits close study by a wide readership. The rising concern for transparency in the governance of education is related to international calls for transparency within government, i.e. 'open politics'. Prospects

for both are under threat. Schools need new forms of educational management. The transparent school is possibly the answer, concludes Dr.Davies.

The scenario is arresting. Schools are called on to respond to pressures for greater democracy and human rights, to pursue complex and often conflicting goals, to manage on declining budgets and to be held publically accountable, to cope with widening exposure to market imperatives, and to avoid "the inequitable and socially divisive effects of increased competition within education". The world environment is turbulent and unpredictable, its megawatt power lines are coupled to cyber-space highways. Knowledge is expanding exponentially in all its dimensions. Knowledge for those who possess it is power.

The challenge for the model transparent school is to help students equip themselves for a meaningful life in this global village. Like the old village school, it is local to the small community it serves; it is also very much part of an international frontierless community. The book guides us on a research-illuminating tour from Europe, through Africa and the Pacific basin to the Americas.

Four new developments are examined: the shift from quantitative to qualitative research into the daily life of schools; renewed emphasis on school effectiveness research; attention to the educational aims of equity and democracy; and, stemming from these three, the concept that management is an investigative process.

Teachers must all be researchers and schools must be research parks which undertake empirical studies, both experimental and comparative. They and their schools generate, as well as pass on, knowledge. As teacher-managers they are both inspirational and investigation-based. They seek, and confer on others equitable rewards, especially intrinsic ones. They innovate, experiment, compare, monitor and evaluate. They welcome change and want to adapt appropriately. They are ready to empower their students to participate in decision-making and to share responsibility for actions and outcomes. Incidentally, they find that their own power goes up, not down, as is often feared.

Dr.Davies commends rotating seniority, school councils and other such designs. The reader then awaits, but does not get, a continuum, the poles of which are the authoritarian school and the ultimate model organisation (the participative, democratic, effectively-managed research park). Relevant seminal examples of such a continuum include Tannenbaum-Schmidt, and Burns and Stalker's 'mechanistic-organic' model.

The 'transformative' leadership of Warren, Bennis and Nanus (in *Leaders*, 1985) could also be drawn upon. This dispels the myth that people are either leaders or followers; everyone in real life leads sometimes. The constant re-distribution of power on 'situational', 'expert', 'referent' leadership-followership lines along with informal team relationships durably bonded by shared beliefs in goals and values enlarge and enrich the vision for 21st.Century schooling. Bennis says replace 'manager' with 'leader'. Why not, then, 'investigator-leader'?

Perhaps the least persuasive discussion in the book concerns equity. Henri Fayol (1916), the father of modern management principles, wrote "equity results from the combination of kindness and justice". Dr.Davies can be unintentionally inviting schools to over-formalise entitlements and to enforce them by judicial processes. The key theme of Fayol's work is

that fairness is both felt and thought - a vital norm in an informal, shared culture.

Students have different learning styles and varied backgrounds; they want and need tailor-made schooling, not standard curricula; they are human beings, not 'inputs'. They develop skills by managing their own learning, thereby becoming better equipped for a meaningful life at work, at leisure and in politics.

Advanced with winning humility, this book is a timely, thought-provoking learning opportunity for us all.

Don Varley

School of Business Studies, University of Nottingham

Skills for Self-managed Learning

by Mike Roberts

Published by Education Now (1994) at £6-00

Based on Mike Roberts' own self-managed learning project (his PhD!), this Special Report catalogues the skills needed for effective autonomous learning. Consequently it does many school and home educators a big favour, saving them hours of worry about what will make course-work, GNVQ and other student-centred initiatives successful.

Using participant-observation, interviews and document analysis Mike investigated the experience of fifty two 16-19 year old students, at a Comprehensive and a Sixth Form College, as they carried out eight-month-long General Studies Projects. These projects were self-managed in that the students were expected to make all key decisions at every stage.

As a result of the investigation, the skills needed to undertake and communicate research effectively ("process skills" as Mike calls them) are presented in four categories. In chronological order these are headed 1.Planning, 2.Gathering, 3.Processing, 4.Presenting. In truth, there is little new here as these findings more or less conform to previously devised skill models (e.g. Dewey, Deere, Allen, and Marland's 'nine steps'), as Mike himself acknowledges.

More interestingly, "during the course of the study it became apparent that there were further skills, deeply underlying the investigative process, which were common to more than one process stage." Mike calls these "core skills for self-managed learning". These are listed as: time management; social skills; reflective skills; self-appraisal skill; and the skill of seeking help. What strikes me is the relationship between these skills and students' self-esteem, a theme which remains unexplored.

The work reveals that all of these so-called skills may be performed to varying levels. A helpful commentary on the differences between 'skilful' and 'unskilful' activity runs throughout the book and adds a welcome dimension of rigour. In fact, the very extent of students' 'unskilful' activity paints a gloomy and all too familiar picture. The question 'What on earth have they been doing for years?' screams from every page and presents an indefensible indictment of typical schooling. Mike himself concludes that "autonomous learning was a novel experience for most students which demanded skills they did not possess", because "the scale, breadth, depth and complexity of skills demanded for autonomous project management were neither understood nor appreciated by teachers".

More positively, the book is peppered with helpful hints - what teachers can do to support skill acquisition by posing questions, providing guidance notes, prompting reflection, organising practices and so on. These tutoring strategies are summarised at the end of each section and further insights into the importance of supervision are gathered together in the penultimate chapter. Yet, while it is noted that students need to gain the required skills *through experience*, the implications of this for curriculum and for teaching style in schools (the crux of the matter as far as I am concerned) need further development.

All in all, this painstaking research exposes one of the crimes of the century: that schools do not, on the whole, teach learners how to learn.

Paul Ginnis

News ... News... News...

Home-based education and the Parent's Charter

Families reading the revised charter were astonished to read "You have a duty to make sure that your child goes to school until he or she is 16." Nonsense! The law says something quite different. It is education that is legally required, not schooling, and you still have the right to educate at home. If you are already home-educating, rest easy in your beds. If you are thinking of joining the 100 or so a month now opting out of schooling and swelling the current total of over 10,000 members of Education Otherwise, do not be misled. The charter is wrong, not you. Education Otherwise is taking legal action to try and get the government to put its errors right. A correction slip delivered to all families would seem to be appropriate course of action, backed up by adverts in the national newspapers. An apology is probably too much to expect. (Enquiries on this matter to Jane Lowe, Education Otherwise, 5 Elm Gardens, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire, AL8 6RX)

Home-based education effectiveness conference

Education Now's 'Home-based Education and Flexi-schooling Support Group' is planning a conference at the University of Nottingham in January 1995 aimed at Senior Local Education Officers in particular, to brief them on the startling home-based education effectiveness research now in from USA, Canada, Australia and UK., and the implications for future policy. The research of Dr. Steve Lowden and Professor Roland Meighan will be backed up by reports from practising home-educators.

The cancelled conference lives again!

The Education Now Conference on Creativity planned for 23rd April at Dame Catherine's School had to be cancelled. At short notice Her Majesty's Inspectors informed the school that a full inspection was to be conducted during the week beginning 25th April. Christopher Gilmore, Conference Co-ordinator, has set up a revised version of the conference for Saturday 12th November 1994 beginning at 10-00 a.m. at the Jagonari Womens Educational Resource Centre, 183-5 Whitechapel Road, London E1 1DW (2 minutes from Whitechapel Tube Station). Details are available from the Education Now office.

22nd October 1994!

We hope you have not missed our publicity for the conference at Bilston because this occasion will also see the launch of two sub-divisions of Education Now:

Education Unlimited and

The Institute for Democratic Education UK Office

If you are able to distribute any conference leaflets for this important date on the Education Now calendar, please contact the Education Now office (see details on page three).

New Books

Alice Miller: The Unkind Society, Parenting and Schooling by Chris Shute is now available. It is a joint publication of Education Now and Educational Heretics Press.

Praxis Makes Perfect: Critical Educational Research for Social Justice by Iram Siraj-Blatchford and published by Education Now Books, is available in November.

Centre for Personalised Education

Modest start-up funds have been obtained from various bookings for the use of the Centre and the business plan is almost complete. The Centre Managers, on a voluntary basis at this stage, are Geoff and Iris Harrison.

THE FREETHINKERS' GUIDE TO THE EDUCATIONAL UNIVERSE

A Selection of Quotations on Education compiled by Roland Meighan

Roland's new hardback, double length compilation of quotations on education *The Freethinker's Guide to the Educational Universe* is now available - proceeds are to go to the new Centre for Personalised Education.

Matthew Parris, the Times columnist has been kind enough to say about this book "It's a brilliant collection. ... Good luck with it." This source book has multiple uses. It can be used for discussions and also to provide illustrative material for lectures, lessons and seminars. Students will also find the contents useful in the preparation of their essays on educational and related themes. The book is produced in hardback for use as a library or classroom reference book, or as a coffee-table source book. Most of the quotations from the earlier paperback version have been retained and augmented with additional ones.

The quotations are produced in large bold type to allow direct transfer to overhead projector transparencies or into lecture or seminar handouts. One respondent enthused that since he works with visually handicapped students, he will find this feature of the book very useful.

One copy costs £12-50. Those shopping for Yuletide presents may be interested in the discount rates: 2-5 copies at £10 each, 6-19 copies at £8 each, 20 or more at £6-50 each. Available direct from Educational Heretics Press, 113 Arundel Drive, Bramcote Hills, Nottingham NG9 3FQ

Dyslexia - computers to the rescue?

Having watched Geoff, my husband, write his first ever letter by using DragonDictate, and with such ease, I am now aware that at long last we have the tool to empower those with dyslexia or any similar kind of condition. With voice input software of this kind anyone can become their own word processing expert and maximise their literacy skills at the same time. Here is an opportunity to make a radical move which is to enable individuals to help themselves.

The case of Jessica Bunzi, proprietor of Clandestine Software, illustrates the same point:

"I have disability in my right hand and dyslexia. My main application for speech recognition is writing training courses and installation notes using WordPerfect 5.1 and a Compaq 486C. Speech recognition has opened up the world of written English. I am now able to use words that I cannot spell and can continue working regardless of my physical condition. I am now one hundred per cent productive. I now have extended periods of being able to function normally, mainly due to the relief that the speech recognition has given my hand."

A solution but not a panacea!

Dr. Les Kingham is Systems Development Manager of Aptech Ltd and sounds a note of caution about his company's product:

"Voice recognition allows computers to be controlled by simply speaking into a microphone. The technology has improved greatly in the last few years. ... Now we have systems that adapt and learn to recognise the operator's voice as he or she speaks. These recognisers have vocabularies of up to 30,000 words ... We at Aptech have supplied many of these 'listening word processor' systems to people with physical disabilities, enabling them to write documents even though they cannot type. Many have gone on to gain employment or to further or higher education."

Les goes on to indicate a possible snag. Some spelling is needed to help train the voice recogniser. There are ways to reduce this problem, in particular by having a helper close by to make any necessary corrections during the first few hours with the system. But for perfectionists, 100% accuracy is unlikely to be achieved by everyone, but 80-90% can be expected in most cases. Nevertheless, from nil written competence to writing with 80% accuracy is still a huge leap forward! But it is not the solution for every dyslexic person and a few will be disappointed. The only way to find out is for each individual to try out the system.

At the Centre for Personalised Education ...

A group of us are working to establish The Centre for Personalised Education in Tenbury Wells. It is anticipated that this will offer an advice and information service. The plan is to install an Aptech Keystone facility at the centre and make it available to those who need it in this area. Users will have the support of people like Geoff, who know at first hand the great pain and indignity that society tolerates in those not fully literate.

Iris Harrison

Day School at University of Nottingham

PRINCIPLES OF EDUCATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION

Tuesday 11th October 1994 9.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m.

Presenter: Professor Roland Meighan

The day school will consider alternatives in education and future patterns for an education system, and the extent to which they can be developed out of the present situation.

It is likely to be of interest to all involved in education: those who develop it, those who teach in it, those who experience it, and those who manage it.

Themes:

Educational Reconstruction mapping the territory of education; the rival visions of education; choice and pseudo-choice; limitations of the current authoritarian schooling model.

Lessons to be learnt (a) from the rapidly growing phenomenon of home-based education (b) from small schooling (c) from community education (d) from 'work as an educational resource' (e) from the communications revolution.

Democratic learning and democratic schooling (a) mini-schooling as democratic practice; (b) learner-managed learning in groups; (c) democratic school management; (d) solo learner managed learning as complementary activity.

Personalising education through a more flexible system flexi-schooling, flexi colleges and flexi-education.

Fee: £47.50 (includes coffee, tea and buffet lunch)

Details from Doreen Herrod, Professional Development Services, The University of Nottingham, School of Education, University Park, Nottingham NG7 2RD.

Ask not what Education Now can do for you, but what you can do for Education Now....

- * **Subscribe to the Newsletter: four issues per year**
£10 organisations (three copies supplied)
£6 individuals
- * **Join the Education Now Support Group:**
you will receive the Newsletter,
plus three Special Reports per year
£15 minimum
£10 students and unwaged
- * **Send a donation: every little bit helps**
- * **Buy some books: send for Books in Print/Order Form**

© Education Now Publishing Co-operative Limited 1994.
113 Arundel Drive, Bramcote Hills, Nottingham NG9 3FQ.

No part of this newsletter may be reproduced without prior permission from the publishers. While all reasonable care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of this publication the publishers cannot accept responsibility for any errors or omissions

Printed by Mastaprint on recycled paper.

