

Democracy in education - it's official!

As they said in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, 'We are not alone'! Education Now is not the only organisation promoting education for and in democracy, although it has in the past occasionally felt like it. Pursuing similar aims, the Institute for Democracy in Education was formed in South-eastern Ohio, USA in 1985.

IDE is a partnership of different participants in the educational process who believe that restructuring for democratic education must be at the heart of education. IDE acts as a forum for sharing ideas and as a network for people holding similar values - particularly teachers, parents, students and educational administrators. The network includes 24 offices in the USA and Canada. The journal *Democracy and Education*, published four times a year, is the main editorial outlet of IDE which also sponsors conferences and workshops and publishes curricular materials. Anybody wishing to subscribe to the journal should write to IDE, 313 McCracken Hall, College of Education, Ohio University, Athens, Ohio 45701-2979, USA. IDE's annual conference will be held in Ohio from June 22-25 1995.

An office of the Institute for Democracy in Education has now been established in Britain, located in the International Unit of the School of Education, University of Birmingham. Staff of the International Unit have a long-standing interest in education for democracy both in Britain and internationally. This involves both supervising and carrying out research on education for democracy and has led to numerous publications on the theme.

IDE's UK Office will hold its inaugural meeting on Saturday February 18th in the School of Education, comprising a talk by Derry Hannam entitled 'Democratic education - where are we now?' followed by an open discussion on how this branch of the Institute might develop.

Some ideas for the Office's activities have already been put forward:

- Meetings - informal, 'round table' meetings on a termly basis in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect;
- Conferences - as and when appropriate;
- Writing - books and articles. A new edited book on democratic education published by Education Now will be appearing sometime around May 1995 following the successful Bilston conference;
- Database - a store of information on democratic schooling held in the International Unit; a new database and library at the Centre for Personalised Education, Tenbury Wells.

Correspondence regarding the UK Office should be addressed to Clive Harber, International Unit, School of Education, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 2TT.

Happy Old Year

1994 saw members of Education Now vigorously pursuing the cause of democratic education. Apart from our own conference 'Democratic Education and Education for Democracy' held at Bilston College (reported on page 2), other involvements included:

- * Conference of Democratic Schools at Sands School, *Devon*
- * International Conference on Democracy in Schools, Citizenship and Global Concern, *Copenhagen*
- * National Seminar on Co-operative Learning at the International Co-operative College, *Loughborough*
- * British Council seminar 'Education for Good Government', *London*
- * Democracy event in *Nottingham* organised by the Labour Campaign for Electoral Reform
- * Discussions with Ricardo Semler who runs his factory in San Paulo, *Brazil*, democratically (recorded in his book 'Maverick' and in the BBC2 documentary 'The Business') and who plans to establish a school based on the same practices.

Finally, congratulations to a group of A level students who experienced a democratic learning co-operative and achieved grades 2.75 points above the national average. More importantly, they acquired a range of skills which will enable them to participate fully in a democratic society.

Democratic Education Conference report

or ... it's a long way to Bilston College but my heart lies there!

Brian Redhead, being a Mancunian who commuted to London, knew the M6 well and I can remember how on Radio 4's 'Today' programme he would break the news of delays and roadworks on that motorway with a cheery "...and now, for friends of the M6 ..." Well, if friendship is, to misquote George Eliot, "*The inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a motorway*", I shan't be joining up. Our Friday evening journey from Yorkshire to the West Midlands for the Bilston conference should have taken 3 hours at the most, instead it took 5. The M6 throughout seemed like a war zone with wrecked cars and emergency vehicles at regular intervals and the traffic never more than slow. When I heard how other people on the Saturday morning had been delayed by Motor Show traffic I realised the extent that the establishment was prepared to go to in order to deny Education Now and the cause of Democracy a voice!

The conference we were all trying to reach was, of course, 'Democratic Education and Education for Democracy', the first joint venture between Bilston Community College and Education Unlimited, the consultancy division of Education Now. After a hard week at work I'd questioned whether a weekend away with driving was really what I wanted. If the M6 nearly confirmed my doubts, the conference itself dispelled them completely. I'm glad I was there; I came away with some restored faith, renewed energy and enthusiasm, and with a lot of valuable material which I've already put to good use.

The conference began with Clive Harber's keynote address. He himself recognised that a formal lecture at a conference on democratic approaches to learning might seem out of place. I was interested to see how he tackled this as I had been wondering for some time how useful the lecture is as an approach to teaching. I must say the hour or so flew past and I realised that one of the advantages of the lecture is that it enables a skilled and informed researcher to present an overall picture which it would have taken me an enormous amount of time to pull together myself.

Clive structured his lecture around three questions:

1. What evidence is there that education for democracy is high on the international education agenda?
2. Why are schools typically authoritarian?
3. What is a democratic school?

His answers to these questions gave us a lot of valuable and intriguing information on the educational scene in the UK and world-wide. And it was this aspect of Clive's talk which reminded me of another characteristic of a good lecture, it should leave its listeners wanting to find out more. As Stephen Rowlands puts it, "*a lecture ... may be the stimulus for exploratory learning*".

A second talk was given after lunch by Keith Wymer, the Bilston College Principal, who spoke on the possibilities and difficulties of democratic organisation at Bilston. Among his comments were two which lingered in my mind:

"Democratic management is, in reality, delegated authority."

In place of schools: a novel plan for the 21st Century

by John Adcock

just published by New Education Press at £5.95

In Place of Schools is a story which opens in late December 2029 when schools as we know them have largely disappeared. Aided by a parent, children of 4 to 13 are taught in their own homes, tutors' homes, community resource centres and many other venues. Professional personal tutors prepare individual study programmes - based principally on the humanising qualities of literature - for their twenty pupils; they select also from the infinite variety of educational material produced at many levels of comprehension, by the National Media Library, any of which can be transmitted at any time to any television receiver.

With this immense support, panels of six tutors help parents with the education of their children. The removal of child from home to school, a process begun in the 19th Century, is no longer favoured and childhood education is family-based and professionally assisted. The book also looks back to the Autumn of 1999 when, with the school system nearing collapse in many localities, an anxious coalition government established a most select committee to devise, in haste, a viable alternative to schools. This story describes the decisions the committee made, the means by which it reached them and the system that had resulted by 2029.

Copies available from NEP or Education Now office

and: "*The problem with attempting to develop democratic management is that people are willing to take authority but not responsibility.*"

Discuss!

A wide choice of workshops was offered during the day in two sessions. I enjoyed the ones I selected; in 'Democracy in the Primary School' we considered prejudice and I was challenged to describe the kind of person I would take an immediate and unreasoned dislike to. I did this and then realised I was describing some of my own characteristics! In another on international issues I was intrigued by a discussion on the 'Democracy Indicators' which might be used to assess a school. At lunch some of us decided that those who'd designed a city in the drama workshop might be usefully employed by those planning and digging up the West Midlands roads.

As a whole, the conference seemed well organised and appeared, from the point of view of a delegate, to run smoothly. I must give a particular vote of thanks to the crèche; my 9 year old and 10 year old happily spent all morning there and were keen to go back for the afternoon. As I reflect on how contented and gently engaged Matthew and Laura were each time I arrived at the crèche to take them away, I suspected that what had been happening there was very much in the spirit of the whole conference. There was a sense of support and safety, but the children had been given responsibility for deciding for themselves how they should be involved.

This reminds me of a comment Matthew made recently in the daily journal which he's been keeping. He is writing about his school Open Evening and I quote with his permission:

"At my sister's evening she told Mr Johnson (her class teacher) she didn't like Food Technology because she was making toast and Mrs Harris was doing it for her. I think it's a bit unfair that some teachers do everything for children"

'A bit unfair' may seem too polite when we consider the long-term effects of such teacher control. As Clive pointed out in his talk, an environment controlled by authority figures for others who have no power, is one of the features which Charles Handy noticed is common to both schools and prisons. By way of contrast, Clive described several initiatives world-wide, including the New School Programme in Columbia with its emphasis on reflective learning, on participative approaches and the active engagement of children in democratic processes. It seems that even the pragmatic realists of the World Bank are supporting projects such as this.

The conference was clearly a success. I'm looking forward to next time and to the publication of the whole day's proceedings in due course. Finally, for any doubters, I can prove the conference 'achieved' because I have the perfect 'performance indicator'. During the afternoon break I saw Frank Reeves walking down the corridor - and he was smiling!

Kevin Holloway

Day School at University of Nottingham

PRINCIPLES OF EDUCATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION

Tuesday 16th May 1995 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.

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.

Home-based education learning methods

Alan Thomas, a visiting Australian scholar, came to see me because of our mutual interest in autonomous education. He took up my suggestion that a home-based education situation was one where he could study individualised learning at length, and he stayed with a home-educating family in Norfolk with this in mind. He found this so fruitful that he extended his research both in UK and Australia. He interviewed 23 families around London, observing 10 closely.

Parents were asked if they would share in the joint venture of exploring how their children learned. Observations were mainly undertaken in the kitchen, where so much home-based education in the form of conversations, takes place, and were recorded on paper. The qualitative data was subjected to content analysis to identify emergent themes.

Thomas found that families starting out on home-based education who at first adopted formal methods of learning found themselves drawn more and more into less formal learning. Families who started out with informal learning at the outset found themselves drawn into even more informal learning. The methods that both groups grew into had much more in common with the learning methods of younger children: pre-sequencing the material became unnecessary.

Learning to read was a central concern:

"However informal their approach, parents are obviously concerned that their children learn to read and take steps to ensure that they do. Even so, a few did not insist when their children showed no inclination to learn. Curiously, these children who learned to read relatively late still went on very quickly to read material suitable for their age."

Other findings are that children learning at home generally: (a) learn to read in innumerable ways, without difficulty, (b) go on to read voraciously, (c) often learn in a 'higgledy-piggledy' fashion without an apparent need for sequencing, (d) in some cases just seem to 'pick up' knowledge, e.g. maths, (e) may pursue a topic for days if the interest holds, (f) can be wrong without losing face, (g) have the confidence and familiarity to challenge if they do not understand or disagree, (h) are socially skilled and enjoy high self esteem.

Thomas stresses that his work is in the early stages. Nevertheless, he is already aware that his research challenges some fundamental assumptions of schooling:

"This study challenges the almost universally held view that children of school age need to be taught formally if they are to learn ... they can learn just by living ... If you want to fulfil the aims that most educators aspire to, it may be best not to send your child to school. The education of these children seems to embody all that teachers strive for but rarely achieve. The quality of learning appears to be markedly improved if children are taught individually."

Alan Thomas presented his paper **The quality of learning experienced by children who are educated at home** at the Annual Conference of British Psychologists, Brighton 1994.

Roland Meighan

Who's educating who, anyway?

"Why is it when you ask about anything supernatural, they always change the subject?" wailed one aware teenager. 'They' of course, were his teachers. In holistic education each individual would be allowed to explore her own answer to that question. In state education, like as not, like it or not, there would probably be only ONE answer. The right one, of course, given from on high.

Here's another quote. *"Just because I don't think like you do, doesn't mean that I'm stupid, or not good enough, or to be excluded or silenced."* And who expressed this explosion of dark destructive energy ...? No, not a child but a teacher.

"Facts can only take you from A to B," suggested that school dunce Albert Einstein, *"but IMAGINATION can take you round the whole globe."* Like Tesla before him, Einstein got his best insights into the invisible energies when entranced. To sense the whole universe within, many mystics suggest, is easier with our physical eyes closed than in peering through a laboratory microscope.

But with which eye? Your dominant one, of course. And which eye is that? You don't know? Perhaps you're too busy listening to your mind instead of your Higher Self. Now tune into that part of yourself which enjoys celebrating solutions. In life we get what we expect. If you EXPECT to receive answers to your questions, before turning your questions into a problem that only 'experts' can solve, you become your own expert. Whatever we believe we become. So, BELIEVE you can structure an experiment which, without a professional optician, can show which is your dominant eye. As a teacher trying to refine an holistic approach to educating others, I can't tell you how to do anything when YOUR way, undreamt of by me, might be far better for both of us than mine?

First, let all of us initiate, honour and own our ideas, intuitions and practices. If free choice is a vital part of democracy, then what has the National Curriculum to teach us? Those who still creep unwillingly to school, teachers and students alike, don't want to be told, they want find out for themselves. When in doubt, ask unexpected questions. Questions networked through open-ended discourse was the Socratean approach to learning in Golden Greece.

The Quakers, who sit in silence to receive their own God-sent answers, coined the phrase, *"Be brave enough always to ask the uncomfortable question"*. Teachers and taught today, as already suggested, are acutely uncomfortable. Their DIS-EASE is now spreading through parents. Though we may acknowledge a secret longing for the unexpected question, it's when we receive the expected answer that we are most clearly tested. For education trains us, traditionally, not to admit that we might be in charge of our choices. Wasn't it Lucretius who said, *"The last thing a man will give up is his own suffering"*?

"But is ignorance suffering?" Alice asks the old owl, perching on the oak, the tree top-heavy with the bird's load of useless learning. *Being a university don the owl's feathers get ruffled when he's not respectfully heard by those beneath him. "If education doesn't hurt it can't be doing you any good", croons the old bird with a complacency which ensures that the pecking-order stays suitably in place, "Like medicine. Like work. Like punishment," adds the owl, his emphatic, staccato sentences jabbing at Alice's tender curious heart, making her tremble.*

Will Alice join that bureaucratic high-flyer at the top of his tree? Or will she wander the wilderness of yesterday's Welfare land, originating her own adventures, winning her own civil-war between knowledge and wisdom, and educating herself in her own soul-centred universe?

Actually in Ghana the owl is seen as a bird of wisdom because it is able to turn its head around gaining 360 degree vision. And without physical movement that is precisely what the Third Eye, after training on the Inner Planes of energy, can do for students of the Universe. Through meditation and visualisation the pineal gland can, like an omni-present spy satellite at the centre of our brow, scan whatever part of creation it selects. It's a matter of training inner attention.

360 mini-sagas is what I write in DOVETALES, my series of Radical Alternatives to Traditional Textbooks (RATTS!). Receiving generous attention abroad (being translated into Chinese, for example) most conservative regimes will find DOVETALES too different, too student-centred and personally liberating perhaps.

For Alice and other educational adventurers, DOVETALES provides a 'new' Aquarian approach to Socratean education. *Education Otherwise* endorsed DOVETALES MATHEMATICS with warm enthusiasm. The prestigious journal *Resurgence*, in reviewing BRIGHT EYES AND BUBBLES, my latest *Talking Book*, also applauded DOVETALES. These textbooks emphasise, said *Resurgence*, *"experience, creativity and participation rather than data, productivity and specialisation"*. Meanwhile, the journal *Caduceus* called DOVETALES INTEGRATED SCIENCE *"an exciting and rare find"*.

While my post-morphic resonance science facilitates awareness before intellect, there are of course those who prefer their esoteric sciences to be more rigorously tested (e.g. that an electron can be in two places at once). However, in the 1920s Heisenberg, the Nobel Prize winner, demonstrated that there was no such thing as an objective experiment. Even at the sub-atomic level there is a hidden causal inter-connectedness between the observed experiment and its human observer. If this is so, then the notion that truth is objective, is profoundly false. Such a self-liberating fact is illustrated by the well-known Buddhist fable: watch five blind men all describing the same elephant in terms of what each can reach and feel, denying the equally subjective experience of the other four men. Specialisation starts here. So does the separation that underpins all suffering, separation from the wholesomeness of Total Consciousness that some Souls call God.

Even for the atheist who loves wisdom before knowledge, let alone for the humanist, or agnostic, the implications are cosmic. It makes the Soul of human consciousness a microcosm of the macrocosm. A chip, one might say, off the original monoblock. This is the fundamental belief that invigorates holistic

education. In the dual eyes of democracy, people may all seem equal; but in the Single Eye of God Consciousness we are not all equal, not in experience. In the East, such differences are called karma. This law of physics - that for every action there is an equal and opposite re-action - is surely a more loving scenario for mankind's self-imposed sufferings than the notion of eternal punishment in hell-fire. After all, it places each immortal Soul at the centre of his own learning opportunities!

For those who are dyslexic, hyper-active, under- and over-achieving, Educational Kinesiology (working with hidden energies) can illuminate and ameliorate much bewilderment. To start with, it postulates that every system, like the human body, knows its own answers. Answers are, after all, only the flip-side of their own questions. All solutions were there before all problems. Further, if God is the biggest Open Question, then each of us, in a state of loving free will, can structure our own lifestyles when almost miraculously we no longer believe in difficulties. Responding to this responsibility with joy generates the childlike optimism that leads through a lexicon of lives, to DIY Divinity, above the snares of dogma, duality and death. Death is just a transition from visible substance into mostly invisible energies, as when we dream

Dowsing the body through chains of binary questions, spoken or silently asked, can lead the practitioner of kinesiology back to the blocks which, in present circumstances, impede deeper study of the true self, Soul. For instance, with one overweight teacher, for whom no system of slimming worked, a kinesiologist used a muscle-testing technique and discovered that the client, apart from being hooked on the poisons of sugar, had refuted her femininity. That is to say, because of babyhood abuses of a gross nature, she had rejected her own female nature. The relief in all of us when such psychic blocks are diagnosed is immense. Old patterns that inhibited us can be reformulated, freeing our spirit into further creativity.

Educationally, discovering which is our dominating eye, ear, hand, foot and lobe of brain, can indicate how differently students discover the true nature of life and learning through their own inner channels. Here, according to the original Latin meaning of 'educare', is where education begins. Really, until any earthly system decides what LIFE is for, it will never determine what education is for. Since education is no longer exclusively for the world of work, why not increasingly for the inner worlds of individual self-development ...?

As telepathy supersedes the telephone; virtual reality replaces passive TV; as fractals challenge the formal logic of left-brain laws, print-based learning may not linger much longer in those (perhaps starting with dyslexics) who can tune into the higher universality within themselves. This is *gnosis*, or direct knowing. And isn't it that *knowing* child, the one over-energetically asking those bothersome questions, who so irritates the ignorant adult in all of us? Do we really want to be disturbed by such wide-eyed God-botherers? Do we really want to answer questions like 'Do angels have hairy legs?'. It's such intriguing open-ended questions that I use as cosmic fodder in my *Talking Books of Family Fables* like BRIGHT EYES AND BUBBLES and SNOW GHOSTS.

While the new paradigms are emerging, children, more of the future belonging to them than to their tutors, are ahead of many adults. But they need us adults too. They need us to become 'gardeners of Souls' instead of materialistic sergeant-majors twitching with tick-box salutes. Kids don't want to learn from us. They want to know; to rediscover through active re-search,

to be in charge and to learn through negotiated personal choices.

"Sir, how many dimensions has imagination?" This question was asked by one of my young customers, after hearing one of my *Telling Tales* on tape. Answering his own question, with myself as witness, was an amazing experience. This boy's insight into the nature of creation was truly Soul-centred. Three weeks later the lad was statemented. In three years' time will he be just like everybody else?

At present, I'm Head of Drama in 'the worst school in Britain' as one daily newspaper gleefully, but inaccurately described it. In truth, all schools are already Detention Centres without corporal punishment. Pity the poor teacher who fears physically interfering with fighting students in case the cheering young rioters decide to declare that adult abuse has occurred. School walls are swirling with graffiti, carpets pitted with grey chewing-gum, countless windows smashed, worksheets clogging the toilets and litter spiralling round drains in smokers corners.

Yet dreams of a better vision still rise through the chalk dust. **EDUCATION NOW** surely means today's dream made manifest, not yesterday's nightmare patched up, like using a band-aid to stop the spread of cancer. May EDUCATION IN THE HERE AND NOW, with the help of us all, change the present materialistic, militaristic regime into one of love and liberation, for the transcendent health of us all.

Christopher Gilmore

Those interested in Christopher's work and publications can write to DOVETALES EDUCATIONAL SERVICES,
46 St. John's Avenue, Harlesdon, London NW10 4EE
(Evening tel. 081 838 0702).

Book Reviews

Alice Miller: The Unkind Society, Parenting and Schooling

by Chris Shute, published by Education Now in association with Educational Heretics Press (1994) at £6-00

Yesterday I read an article in The Guardian *When therapy goes willingly to school* by Susie Orbach in which she argued for schools to become more responsive to children's inner needs rather than being "a rehearsal stage for the practice of bullying, violence and attacks on peers and social institutions". Last

night I watched a television documentary which examined in chilling detail, through interviews with victims and witnesses, the Jewish Holocaust. With these in my mind I review Alice Miller: *The Unkind Society, Parenting and Schooling* which, in six fascinating chapters, links the roots of the Holocaust to our society, to the way children are treated, to our institutions and most disturbingly to our own inner worlds.

This is primarily a book in which Alice Miller's ideas meet Chris Shute's. Unlike some books which refer to other authors, it is Chris Shute and his illuminating, persuasive views that I sense through the pages. He begins by explaining Alice Miller's ideas which, at the risk of being over-simplistic, may be summarised as follows.

"The individual psychological stages in people's lives are:

- 1. to be hurt as a small child without anyone recognising the situation as such;*
- 2. to fail to react to the resulting suffering with anger;*
- 3. to show gratitude for what are supposed to be good intentions;*
- 4. to forget everything;*
- 5. to discharge the stored-up anger onto others in adulthood, or to direct it against oneself."*

(For Your Own Good, page 106)

Natural childhood, a practical guide to the first seven years by John B. Thomson, Tim Kahn, Mildred Masheder, Lynne Oldfield, Michaela Glockler and Roland Meighan
Published by Gaia Books Limited (1995) at £18.99

Anyone raising a family amidst the pressures of today can turn to this practical child care guide. It presents a new way of looking at the emerging personality of 0 to 7 year olds, acknowledging them as fully creative beings. It gives parents the skills to establish a close relationship with their child, and sets a pattern for productive co-operation. This creates a sound base from which children develop at their optimum pace, emotionally and intellectually, learning from both play and the natural world. Parents learn to listen to themselves in order to find from within the answers to the question 'What does my child need?' and to realise that children, too, have their own insights.

The ideas of enlightened thinkers such as **Rudolf Steiner, John Holt** and **Carl Rogers** provide new insights into the internal development of the child. By weaving together the work of leading psychologists, educators, counsellors and doctors, *Natural Childhood* explores a wealth of new ideas as well as the more traditional aspects of relationships, education, health, creativity and play.

The author then proceeds to explore in chapters entitled 'The Unkind Society' and 'Poisoned Relationships', Alice Miller's study of the childhoods and adulthoods of Adolf Hitler and Adolf Eichmann and the tangible links between their brutal, unloving pasts and the appalling crimes they committed as adults. He asserts that, *"Every ruler, and every person whose position allows him to behave like a ruler, tends to treat his subjects as he was himself treated when he was a child"*.

At this stage of the book it is comforting to distance oneself from such 'monsters' and to *"pronounce upon it as if we had nothing in common with it"*. But *"without the active collaboration of police, local government officials, army officers, teachers and administrators, Hitler could never have*

enslaved the German people". And Chris Shute brings the issue right onto our doorstep and into our homes when he writes,

"I want to suggest that all the ways of thought from which the Holocaust came are present now in our supposedly settled, civilised world I suspect that the institutions by which we mould citizens when they are young and corral them when they become inconvenient are only different from the concentration camps in that the destructive forces latent in them have not found an outlet through which they can amplify themselves into mass murder."

Chris Shute then candidly recalls, in a chapter entitled 'Unkind Education Makes Unkind Institutions', his own experience of teaching in a grammar school where he unquestioningly accepted the philosophy and procedures of the institution. *"I punished pupils without much compunction and I was delighted to hear on the grape-vine that among the boys I passed for a 'strict' teacher"*. He then goes on to explain how all institutions - families, factories, churches, prisons - are places in which the drama of an unhappy childhood may be played out.

In the chapter entitled 'Unrecognised Abuse' the author explains how by *"isolating the sexual component of child abuse and making it the archetypal crime against the young, those who mould public opinion have prevented us from perceiving how often children suffer from abuse which is not even remotely sexual"*. He then proceeds to challenge our unquestioned assumptions about our treatment of children and closely examines the practices and values of schools. As a parent and a teacher I find that it is at this point in the book that the arguments put forward in earlier chapters become disturbingly relevant. Applying his earlier insights about Hitler and Eichmann, Chris Shute writes, *"Because every adult begins life as a defenceless child ... his earliest, and inevitably strongest, impressions of what it is to be human are framed by that sense of helplessness. It is that sense which he projects upon children."*

And he goes on to explain and give examples of how this behaviour leads to unrecognised abuse because it is unconscious. This behaviour is mirrored in his examination of schools which in their concentration on uniformity, discipline and efficiency largely ignore the emotional and physical needs of young people. Indeed, schools are seen as positively harmful.

In the penultimate chapter 'Knowledge, Honesty and a Healthy Society' the author explores the problems and opportunities we face in attempting to transform society and discusses his work as a foster-carer. At no point is he prescriptive.

In the final chapter, 'Changing Things', Chris Shute suggests some practical ways forward, including the frightening but vital task of exploring our own inner world through which we may have a new relationship with ourselves, our children and our environment.

"Alice Miller has shown that the key which unlocks those new relationships is the adults' fearless determination to look into their own childhood and honestly confront what they find there."

This is a courageous, important book. It took courage to write it, it takes courage to read it and it will take courage to act upon it. In a society where the education system is run by people who think that our well-being can be measured by the 'feel-good factor' - our relative material wealth - Chris Shute's book will contribute immeasurably towards a redefinition of well-being in its personal, educational and societal contexts. As a drama

educator I have often wondered "What am I really doing here? What dramas am I playing out with these children?" I feel this book will help us explore and learn from the dramas of our lives and act upon the insights gained.

Josh Gifford

Praxis Makes Perfect: Critical Educational Research for Social Justice by Iram Siraj-Blatchford, published by Education Now (1994) at £6.00

This is a very valuable contribution to contemporary debates on educational research. In its exploration of researching race and gender, the book asserts that it is *"one person's struggle to define her epistemology"*. Yet it is also of necessity a wide-ranging analysis of many current researchers and theorists as Iram Siraj-Blatchford works through the tensions of being a Black feminist researcher.

The introductory chapter has a clear run-through of theoretical shifts in analysing racism and sexism in education, and in the salience given to different 'voices'. It is good to find thorough critiques of Hammersley and of Troyna; it is especially good to find someone willing to have a go at Foucault and his abstracted convolutions. I always thought Foucault was an emperor with no clothes; Iram Siraj-Blatchford is in contrast lucid and concise in her analyses.

The tensions between positivism and interpretism are well-rehearsed, and feminist research, or research around the disempowered, is not let off lightly. She engages with the problems of a relativist or post-modern approach and of varying claims to 'truth' - particularly from an insider/outsider point of view. There is an interesting comment that 'hearing from' black women *"places them again in a service position, meeting the needs of whites"*. Yet instead of the often-heard accusation that white people cannot engage in anti-racist research, or men with feminist research, she proposes that it is the standpoint that is crucial i.e. the commitment to change and to social justice via research and the way it is presented. Her own approach therefore comes closest to Gramsci's 'organic intellectual', defined as one who is committed to the interests of an oppressed group, who is not 'dispassionate'.

It is significant that a recurrent theme is the need to tackle the self-interests of the dominant group. The 'empowerment' debate relates to research on/with the oppressed; yet the author recognises the need to raise the consciousness of the oppressors. The implication is that organic research would not be confined to understandings of the oppressed, but to action research with the oppressors if necessary. I would have appreciated some examples at this point, to know how exactly you *"engage more closely with the dominant world views in order to contribute towards their transformation"* (p43). Sadly, the book is too short to provide many digressions into actual research projects.

It is interesting that Iram Siraj-Blatchford is cautious about the idea of 'teacher-as-researcher' and *"other essentially regulative managerial models"*. There is indeed a tension between action research which, of necessity, stems from the researcher's values around, say, 'improvement' or 'democracy' and the need for a certain degree of relativism in order to extract different versions of 'truth'.

One value of the book is in providing some very useful responses to the criticisms of 'commitment research', as well as generating more questions at a profound level, plus the need to

consider one's own location within such research. I found much to delight me in this volume. It will be valuable both to those formally studying 'research methods' as well as those long in the field who suffer crises of confidence.

Lynn Davies

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

Home-based Effectiveness Conference

The Home-based Education and Flexi-schooling Development group staged a successful conference in pleasant and relaxed conditions at the University of Nottingham on January 10th. All places were taken to hear about the research of both Steve Lowden and Roland Meighan. This was then linked to the personal experience of Iris Harrison, Katherine Trafford and Kate Oliver, as well as to that of the LEA representatives. Delegates reported considerable satisfaction with the quality of the briefings, the honest but sympathetic nature of the dialogue, and the forward-looking constructive tone of the whole day.

Our First Conference in London

In November the 'Creativity' conference finally took place and the members were able to take advantage of a variety of workshops, some stimulating and some intriguing. We hope this first event will pave the way for others in the future.

At the Fabian Society Annual Conference ...

This 'Back to the Basics' conference seemed to reflect the mood of the times in wanting to solve problems by 'getting back to the tried and failed'. Education Now's ideas for educational reconstruction presented by Roland Meighan on the Sunday morning of January 8th were too radical for many people around. The conference ended on a low note with two newspaper journalists giving us simplistic answers to complicated problems. Education Now sees the need for at least twelve principles for starters in contrast to these One Right Way nostrums. It convinced us that our forthcoming campaign is **desperately** needed.

A State of change?

I was asked to lead another training day on teaching and learning styles, this time at a comprehensive school in Birmingham. Not a difficult job particularly, but this was the first time that such a request had come to me as a result of an OFSTED inspection. Many of the teachers were nervous, resentful and defensive, not surprisingly as the profession is still poor at distinguishing between potentially helpful debate and personal criticism. The inspection process exploits and exacerbates this, especially when crudely conducted, and is playing its own sinister part in perpetuating the kind of negative conditions in which teachers and schools are least likely to move forward.

However, the first part of the day began with a review of the educational reasons for employing a wide range of teaching styles. As teachers use non-didactic methods which increase learners' responsibility for learning, we said, the more:

1. *pupils learn how to learn - vital for GCSE, GNVQ, A Level, Further and Higher Education and for a positive attitude to life-long learning;*
2. *pupils are prepared for life - they acquire crucial personal,*

- social and political skills;*
 3. *differentiation is achieved;*
 4. *motivation and self-discipline improve;*
 5. *the needs of the economy are served by the creation of a flexible, creative and aware workforce.*

Using Anthony Gregorc's Analysis of Learning Styles we then established that any random sample of the population (any class of kids for example) is bound to contain a wide variety of preferred learning styles. Again, the need for a diversity of teaching approaches to match these varied styles was self-evident. A reminder of the school's legal responsibility to meet each child's individual needs (the Special Educational Needs 'Code of Practice') brought the matter into even sharper focus. The rest of the day was spent exploring, practically, different teaching strategies - some mild variations on the didactic theme and others more daringly student-centred.

Despite the compelling logic, despite the evidence and the practical demonstrations, even despite OFSTED the underlying response was one of resistance to change. And this was not a 'bad' school, in many it was about average among the hundred or so that I have worked in as a trainer over the past ten years. It is depressing to speculate on the reasons for such a reluctance, in schools generally, to do what is evidently best for pupils. Perhaps it's due to weak leadership, a restrictive timetable, size, poor training, exhaustion, an inappropriate building, under-resourcing, authoritarian management, a paranoia about parents, cynical colleagues, a feeling of compulsion about the National Curriculum and testing, years of brow-beating, fear of OFSTED ... Perhaps, even more depressingly, the Government has won an ideological battle and teachers now believe that official policy is right.

I am not immune to these pressures myself. Much of my freelance work is through long-term placements in State secondary, primary and special schools. The longer I stay, working in classrooms, in the playground and in meetings, the more I too feel a creeping disillusionment about the prospect of real change. I may take the first few obstacles with optimistic ease, but as time goes on the persistent attitudes and routines which block change take their toll. If I were in the shoes of those teachers on the training day, would I not be feeling and saying the same as they?

Of course, it need not be this way. Recently, I found it uplifting to read another OFSTED report, that of the independent, parent-owned, non-fee paying Dame Catherine's School in South Derbyshire where learners' responsibility for learning is a reality. Her Majesty's Inspectors noted the many significant educational benefits of working in this apparently radical way with children. So, if it *can* be done in a school, why aren't most schools doing it? Who any longer has the will, who feels the responsibility, to campaign for all children to have equal access to the best possible education?

The Old Testament author of Proverbs 29 verse 18 said "*Where there is no vision, the people perish*" or, to put it in the vernacular, "*If you don't stand for summat, you'll fall for owt!*" The first condition for serious change in schools is, I believe, vision. The second is a supportive and positive environment for creative teachers. All the grass-roots or bottom-up innovations I've been involved in with teachers over the years have been exciting ... and limited. They only go as far as those in power will allow. In any case, these days it is much more difficult to generate enthusiasm for such developments than it once was. If we are to hope for serious change within State schools, rather than feel resigned to looking for the best educational practices

beyond them, then the agents of such change must be national and local politicians, local officers and school senior managers.

At present there seems little hope. State schooling is more deeply flawed than OFSTED will ever reveal. The OFSTED process itself is deeply flawed as some of its own inspectors readily admit. Tied to unquestioned assumptions, committed to a regressive curriculum framework and practising a brutish approach to school improvement the OFSTED process pompously insists that schools paper over the cracks. Meanwhile, the educational thinking of politicians in opposition is at sixes and sevens. This is no reason for inertia on our part, though. As with the prophets of old, it is important to articulate the vision even in the most unsympathetic conditions.

I conclude with the most haunting question I've heard recently, which was asked by a friend of mine at a meeting with Local Education Authority inspectors about OFSTED: "*Where, in your view, does the buck of responsibility stop for perpetuating this ineffective system?*". "*I think we need to move on to the next item*" was the even more haunting reply.

Paul Ginnis

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