

Let's open the campaign

There is an old Chinese saying: "If you want to stand, stand. If you want to sit, sit. But don't wobble!" Heeding this sound advice, Education Now has decided that it is time to take a new stance - to present its positive agenda for change in a more active and public way. It is therefore about to launch the first stage of a carefully planned Publicity Campaign.

Beginning in April this year, the Campaign is timed to gather momentum as the next General Election approaches. The aim: ultimately, to effect a significant change in education policy. The process: to raise the level of public and political discussion by asking the tough questions and by presenting the positive answers that will otherwise remain under the carpet.

The strategy is developmental. The first stage is to send an initial letter to selected figures in education, in political life, in the arts and the media. This letter asks for support in specific ways: permission to use the person's name as a supporter of Education Now's main messages; financial support; feedback and advice on the Campaign plans.

The second stage is to take advertising space in journals and papers to bring key ideas to wider audiences. The scale of this operation will depend directly on funds generated at Stage One.

A Campaign Steering Group formed some months ago and has met on several occasions to draw up plans and to draft the Stage One letter. The letter has already been 'road tested' on twenty or so 'critical friends' and their feedback has been extremely helpful. A Campaign Co-ordinator has been appointed: Katherine Trafford who will operate with husband Bernard's active support. A dedicated phonenumber is about to be installed.

Another significant preparatory step will be taken on 29th and 30th April when Education Now's 41-strong group of Directors and Associate Directors will meet at a Midlands hotel. This residential conference will give the group the opportunity to clarify and articulate its position on a range of issues. Informal and formal presentation skills will also be practised. The Potential Trust has generously agreed to fund this event and once again Education Now is enormously grateful to the Trustees for their support.

There is an old story of a traveller who asked a local man the way to a certain town. 'If I were you I wouldn't start from here' was the helpful reply! In approaching the Campaign, Education Now has no choice but to start from where it is: with 6 Directors; 35 Associate Directors; over 100 Support Group members; 12 editions of its original magazine; 21 books published to date; 7 issues of News and Review. It has strong links with other education groups, with the Universities of Birmingham and Nottingham and with a number of innovative educational institutions including Dame Catherine's School and Flexi College. Education Now has two sub-divisions: the Centre for Personalised Education at Tenbury Wells and Education Unlimited, the conference and consultancy arm. It has recently instigated the UK Branch of the Institute for Democracy in Education. Its sister publishing company is Educational Heretics Press with 7 books. Links exist with groups in USA, Australia, Poland, Denmark and India.

Those involved in Education Now include parents, children, headteachers, primary and secondary school teachers, home-based educators, inspectors, professors, lecturers in higher and further education, freelance consultants and publishers. It stands for ideas which are rooted in day-to-day practice and are deeply researched.

Not a bad starting point. Indeed, one to celebrate. So, let's open the campaign!

Democratic Education: where are we now?

I am going to focus on current trends in educational democracy in the UK. There are growth points and green shoots to be found, despite the overall centralised, oppressive and underfunded context within which most of us work.

Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, agreed to by Margaret Thatcher, states that *"State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child."*

However, the true face of the Thatcher and Major governments' attitude was revealed by the ministerial response to the damning document *The UK Agenda for Children* presented by the Children's Rights Development Unit to the UN Committee on Children's Rights. Gerison Lansdowne of the CRDU, together with an articulate 14 year-old and a broadly sympathetic Jeremy Paxman appeared on Newsnight on 20th January this year. When they discussed the need for Schools Councils that discussed real educational issues, the junior minister responded with an arrogant and patronising put-down - that he had "... no time for nonsense about the pupils taking over schools". This unfeeling, unimaginative contempt for the attempt to share power in a reasoned and educative way was seen again a few days later in the government's response to European Union proposals for Works Councils in large multi-national British companies. Under the headline *Anger at Works Council Deals* the *Guardian* on 13th February reported *"To the annoyance of ministers, up to 25 of Britain's top companies, including ICI and Pilkington, are pushing ahead with agreements to establish European works councils, involving staff in more decision-making and consultation"*.

Yet hopefully the days of the hard-right market-obsessed inhumane agenda are numbered. Even in the Conservative Party there are other voices. Bernard Weatherill with his Speaker's Commission on Citizenship was instrumental in getting this topic into the national curriculum. Also, Andrew Rowe, Conservative MP for mid-Kent wrote in a contribution to the pre 1988 Education Act discussion:

"I am struck by how little is said about consulting children."

I wish I could be confident that such thinking could be found in the education policy making of the opposition parties. Even those 'dangerous revolutionaries', the HMI survivors who wrote the Ofsted Handbook for the Inspection of Schools say on page 85 of Section 4 para 5.1A, under what should be expected in the area of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development:

"They (pupils) are able to discuss their own and other people's beliefs and to understand how these contribute to individual and group identity. In response to opportunities afforded to them pupils take on and exercise responsibility with maturity, show initiative and seek to extend their social and cultural experiences".

However, we must agree with Clive Harber (in the forthcoming book *Developing Democratic Education*) and Michael Fullan that most pupils in most schools in most countries, including avowed democracies, are subjected to experiences that are

profoundly undemocratic. Fullan is on the whole correct in thinking that schools "... rarely think of students as participants in a process of change and organisational life ..." and that benefits would flow "... if we treated the student as someone whose opinion mattered ...". So, where are the green shoots and growth points, or am I hallucinating?

(i) Schools Councils

First, witness the spread of schools councils not just in secondary schools but increasingly in junior and even infant schools. Fogelman, in his 1991 survey of secondary school citizenship programme (in *Citizenship in Schools*), found that a significant proportion of respondent schools had councils, though he was cautious as to what this meant for genuine pupil participation in significant decisions. Of the eight comprehensives I have been involved with in the last six months, three had functioning school councils, although the level of interest amongst most pupils in the constituency tutor groups varied from partial to non-existent depending on the commitment of the form tutor.

Although it should in theory be easier to democratise a secondary than a primary school as the pupils are older and hopefully more mature, nonetheless their organisational complexity makes the task in many ways more difficult. In the last two years I have seen or heard about some outstandingly successful examples of pupil participative primary schools on Merseyside, in the East and West Midlands and London. Smallness, the continuity of the teacher-pupil relationship, and the opportunity for the direct involvement of the headteachers seem to be significant factors, together with the adoption of 'circle time' in many classes.

Sadly, the capacities of younger children are routinely underestimated by secondary schools. Also in secondaries it is rare for any one group of students to have enough time together with any one teacher, or small team of teachers, for direct democracy to function. That is unless the school is small enough to meet as a whole community. Examples such as Sands School (in the private sector) spring to mind. An alternative might be autonomous mini-schools within large secondaries as advocated by Philip Toogood, though hard to find in reality.

(ii) Political/Citizenship Education

This has been set back in England and Wales by Dearing after initial encouragement as a Cross Curricular Theme and the setting up of the Young Citizen's Award Scheme. In the 'moral-malaise', post-Bilger environment in the UK even junior education ministers argued that "... pupils themselves should help to draw up school rules ..." (Eric Forth, *Guardian*,

9.12.93). New flickers are to be seen and perhaps under pressure from an Ofsted inspection many secondary schools have now conducted curriculum audits and appointed a member of staff to be responsible for the Cross Curricular Themes of which citizenship is still one. The Centre for Citizenship Studies in Education is still alive at Leicester University.

(iii) Environmental and Community Education

There are interesting examples of pupil participative projects such as those sponsored by Learning Through Landscapes. Linked to this are developments in Community Education projects such as the Community Action by Schools Award in the UK and the work of Tony Gibson's UK Neighbourhood Initiative Foundation. These have involved primary and secondary school pupils in influencing and making key decisions. Communitarianism and its guru Amitai Etzioni, supposedly an active influence on Tony Blair and the 'modernisers' of the Labour Party, strongly advocates the restructuring of schools in the USA to place emphasis on self-discipline, self-motivation and responsibility. His influence is at work in the UK in the involvement of schools in Bristol in communitarian action projects and in the work of Dick Atkinson in Birmingham (see *Radical Urban Solutions*).

(iv) Moral Education

The work of Kohlberg in particular has generated democratic experimentation in the USA, Germany, Switzerland and Israel in the belief that moral learning takes place most effectively in the context of practical decision-making in the administration of a 'Just Community'. In the last year I have begun to find Ofsted RE inspectors and secondary school RE specialists with some knowledge of Kohlberg's work and some insight into how participative democratic structures such as house or school councils can help to create 'just communities' in schools. There are a significant number of cases in the UK, some very impressive and highly valued by pupils, where schools are including pupils in their processes for dealing with bullying through courts, counselling or conciliation.

(v) School Effectiveness/School Improvement

Some of the UK studies in these interconnected fields link, but do not causally connect, pupil involvement in responsibility sharing and school effectiveness or school improvement as measured by conventional examination/test, truancy and drop-out indicators. As a consequence advocacy for the fuller participation of pupils in decision-making is to be found in some School Improvement work such as the School Development Planning proposals of Hargreaves and Hopkins, Westminster City Council, or the Cambridge University based 'Improving the Quality of Education for All Project'.

(vi) Human/Children's Rights

These are neglected or even regarded with hostility by the Department for Education and the teacher unions. The main impact of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in schools is in the area of stated special needs or disability (Education Act, 1993). By contrast, in Danish Folkeskole: "... the choice of content and method is statutorily to be made jointly by teacher and pupils" (Undervisnings Ministeriet, 1994). I sense a very recent but growing sensitivity to the importance of this area.

(vii) Education for a Democratic Workplace

There are signs that the emphasis on improved communication, flattened hierarchies and shared power to be found in much modern management theory (and some practice) is beginning to acquire a school dimension. Management gurus such as Tom Peters (USA), Ricardo Semler (Brazil) and John Harvey-Jones (UK) are beginning to talk about the need to restructure secondary schools. Developments, even in UK industries (e.g. Works Councils) have implications for the creation of participative approaches in secondary schools. As yet there is little evidence of this connection being made by education policy makers or school managers and there is, to my knowledge, no research literature on school preparation for workplace democracy.

(viii) Education for a Multi-Cultural/Multi-Ethnic Society

The exclusion of black pupils in some cities is now four times higher than their proportion of the school population. The figure represents unhappiness and alienation and strongly suggests racism. The recent work of Verma, Zec and Skinner (1994) shows how relationships in multi-ethnic schools tend to be intra-ethnic. The work of Conway, Damico and Damico (1993) in the US demonstrates that schools placing an emphasis on participative structures and learning methods increase inter-ethnic friendships, enhance understanding between different groups and reduce racial stereotyping.

In conclusion, I hope the Institute for Democratic Education can become a force for the stimulation of quality research, dissemination of good practice and general encouragement to the many teachers who do want to further democratic education - an agency of change for those who do not.

Derry Hannam

References: Conway, M.M., Damico, A.J. & Damico, S.B. (1993) "Facing up to Multi-Culturalism: Means as Ends in Democratic Education" Paper presented to the International Conference on Education for Democracy in a Multi-Cultural Society, Jerusalem, Israel, June 1993
Verma, G., Zec, P. & Skinner, G. (1994) *The Ethnic Crucible: Harmony and Hostility in Multi-Ethnic Schools* London, Falmer Press

The inaugural meeting of *The Institute for Democracy in Education: UK Office*

The Institute for Democracy in Education was formed in South-eastern Ohio, USA in 1985. IDE acts as a forum for sharing ideas and as a network of people who hold similar values, particularly students, parents, teachers and educational administrators. Members of the International Unit of the School of Education at Birmingham University, in conjunction with Education Now, have recently established the IDE, UK Office.

The inaugural meeting took place on 18th February. A group of 27 strong attended and discussed how the Institute might develop in the future. It was particularly pleasing to see such a variety of people ranging from teachers to teacher educators; state, private and non-fee paying independent schools; the Campaign for the Advancement of State Education; the Council for Education in World Citizenship; the Centre for Citizenship Studies in Education; Birmingham Development Education Centre and the World Studies Project to name but a few.

The morning began with an introductory talk by Derry Hannam: 'Democratic Education - where are we now?', an abridged version of which appears on pages 2 and 3. The presentation focussed on student participation in decision making in the UK. It highlighted a number of examples of good or developing practice and provided a springboard for the rest of the day.

The organiser of the meeting, Clive Harber, had the difficult job of chairing the next session, not least due to the overwhelming enthusiasm of the participants. Everyone was keen to share ideas and experiences and to learn from each other. A number of positive suggestions were put forward concerning future developments.

Many participants were keen to involve students at the earliest opportunity. As a result, a sub-group was established to organise a student-led conference at Birmingham University in June or July 1995. This will involve students who have participated in democratic learning environments such as schools councils and democratic classrooms. The conference will provide a platform for them to express their views.

Another exciting development is the setting up of a journal under the editorship of Derry Hannam (*c/o The International Unit, School of Education, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 2TT*). It is hoped that this journal will provide an avenue for anyone interested in developing democratic practice. Contributions are particularly welcome from students, teachers, lecturers, educational organisations, parents and teacher educators as well as established academics.

The next meeting of the Institute will be held on **20th May 1995 at the School of Education, University of Birmingham, from 10.00 am to 2.00 pm**, when the main business will be:

- (a) to hear from the group organising a student-led conference;
- (b) in small groups to formulate a statement of purpose.

All interested individuals and organisations are welcome and should contact Lynn Davies at the International Unit (Phone 0121 414 4823) if they wish to attend.

Finally I would like to say how refreshing it was to attend a meeting such as this. I went away feeling quite excited about the formal developments outlined above and I was buzzing with new ideas and enthusiasm. Added to this was the opportunity to get to know others. These informal discussions actually had practical spin-offs for me. For example, Scott Sinclair of the Development Education Centre discussed the idea of a local teacher support network in Birmingham; he and I plan to meet

to put this into action. Richard Terry told me of the discussions he and Philip Toogood are having about the possibility of a democratic learning environment at Flexi College. They intend to offer students a democratic learning co-operative for Social Science and Environmental Studies A Levels. I will be interested to get these students together with the Sociology and Politics students from the school where I teach who have already set up a number of democratic learning environments.

These are just a few examples of the informal outcomes of the meeting that I am aware of. Opportunities to share ideas with others interested in democratising the education process on a national level are few and far between. I went home highly motivated and feeling quite positive about the plans for the Institute.

Lesley Browne

Congratulations Professor Harber

Clive Harber, an Associate Director of Education Now, has recently been appointed **Professor of Education, University of Natal**, a post which he takes up in July. For several years Clive has been Deputy Director of The International Unit, where he has had to manage with a stool or the floor. Now he has his own Chair. The post is for three years, on secondment from University of Birmingham - plenty of time to establish the Education Now South Africa Branch, Clive. Our best wishes go with you.

And congratulations Baby Browne

Our best wishes also to Lesley and Michael Browne (Associate Directors) and to their newly arrived, safely delivered **Natasha**: born on 8th March 1995.

While we're on the subject ...

... of newcomers, we are delighted to announce five new Associate Directors:

Donna Brandes, Director of Freemantle Education Centre, Western Australia

Ian Pickles, Inspector, Humberside Education Authority

John Adcock, Director, New Education Press

Susan Jones, Researcher, Writer and Lecturer in Education

Neil Lane, Lecturer in Education, Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education

Book Review

In Place Of Schools: A novel plan for the 21st Century by John Adcock

published by New Education Press (1994) at £5-95

"Fair enough," my brother said to me once, "schooling is a pretty crude way of educating children. But if you do away with it, what will you put in its place? Tell me that, why don't you?"

I suppose most critics of the present system have in their minds at least an outline of an answer to that kind of question, but there are remarkably few books on the market which address themselves seriously to it. That is understandable: any system, however ill-adapted to its purpose, which has had more than a century to dig itself in won't be winkled out by reasoned argument alone, more's the pity. Serious proponents of a new approach to education need to have a working picture of the period of transition between what we have now and the better system they envisage. They also need an outline of the processes which would be at work during that time of radical change. This is what John Adcock offers us in his book *'In Place of Schools'*.

He foresees, as perhaps many of us do, a crisis of confidence in the existing school system. The turn of the century is a convenient metaphor for the organic upheaval he expects in education, and it is not surprising that he situates the beginning of the end of schooling in late 1999. In his possible future a Government which might be Labour-ish emerges from a flurry of hung Parliaments and sets about reform.

It recasts the teaching profession as a corps of tutors who each take responsibility for a number of pupils who live and study at home, with the help and support of their parents. They spend a variable amount of time each week with their assigned tutor, who feeds their curiosity and leads them into a richer appreciation of their own potential.

The fundamental motive for this change, John Adcock suggests, is new determination to place the State's needs after those of the children. He suggests, cogently in my opinion, that in the 19th Century the State needed a semi-literate and semi-numerate workforce, and a conforming, well-drilled population. Later, the Industrial Revolution had to be carried further Britain had to prosper and maintain her world lead. So the schools, bleak as they were, gave us 'the 3 R's' and rigid discipline supported by imposed authority. Thus the schools had the buildings and regimes of the factories, mills and offices which their pupils were later to enter. Clearly, John Adcock argues, if the present education system embodies presuppositions about adult life which have lost all trace of validity we have no choice but to change it, so that it corresponds closely with the pattern we can see developing as we move towards the next millenium.

The value of this book is not so much that it is realistic or that it charts a specific path to reform. Its strength is in the basic question which it asks on almost every page, and seeks to answer in broad outline at least: how can we, who value flexibility, creativeness and an unfettered imagination, put an end to the last century's grim campaign against those very virtues. This book may start an irresistible train of thought.

Chris Shute

Differentiation: a student-centred school

Fifty-odd participants - a sell-out - attended a one day conference in Chorley on March 10th organised by the Centre for the Study of Comprehensive Schools. From all over the

north of England these teachers, student-teachers, headteachers, deputies, heads of departments and special needs co-ordinators came *"to think creatively about the desirability, nature and possibility of a student-centred school"*.

Many of them were concerned about differentiated learning, a theme which Paul Ginnis the course presenter tackled head-on. Rejecting crude notions of 'ability' Paul presented the case for differentiation by learning style, centred on student choice. Drawing on various strands of research, on his own experiences of teaching and training in 100 schools over the last 10 years, and on ideas rooted in humanistic psychology, Paul linked effective differentiated learning to student responsibility, to student self-esteem and to the quality of the learning community. These, he suggested, are the three inter-locking features of the student-centred approach.

Having discussed these foundation ideas, the course went on to consider the ways in which ordinary secondary schools will need to change to accommodate the student-centred approach. Apart from organisational matters, the breadth and depth of professional development was mapped out. The ultimately supportive step of senior managers exemplifying the approach by adopting person-centred management structures and styles themselves was outlined in concrete terms.

The feedback was positive. Consequently the Centre for the Study of Comprehensive Schools intends to re-run the course at two further venues: **Market Harborough on Friday June 16th and East Sussex on Friday June 23rd**. Details from CSCS, Queens Building, University of Leicester, Barrack Road, Northampton NN2 6AF - phone 0604 29735

Children's writes

At the last Associate Directors meeting Clare (aged 13), Steven (10) and Helen (8) presented a proposal that an Education Now booklet be written by children expressing their views on education and schooling. The idea was warmly received and consequently Clare is calling a meeting of children aged between 5 and 14 associated with Education Now at the Centre for Personalised Education, Tenbury Wells on 8th - 9th April.

The meeting will decide the scope of the booklet, the editorial arrangements and will get down to some initial writing ... and, lest Jack become a dull boy, some play-time is planned too!

Clare can be contacted on 0121 441 3045. The booklet will be published as part of a series connected with the Education Now Campaign (see p.1).

Book Review

The Human Factor by Susan Jones
published by Kogan Page at £16.95

The full title of this substantial book (320 pages) is *The Human Factor - maximising team efficiency through collaborative leadership*. In the author's words "The central theme of this book is: the success of an organisation, whether in industry or education, rests ultimately on the way people are treated".

Susan Jones places herself firmly in the 'human relations' school of management thinkers; she gives "special acknowledgement to the philosophy and writings of W. Edwards Deming and Douglas McGregor. Also to John Adair, Rosabeth Moss Kanter, Matthew Lipman and Tom Peters".

Just another 'Instant Manager' potboiler then? Or a rehash of *In search of excellence*? By no means. The scope of the book goes well beyond both the motorway services bookstall 'management recipe book' and the conventional academic text. This is an important contribution to the literature, deeply researched, well structured and lucidly written.

The book is divided into three main sections.

Part I: Collaborative leadership and organisational success.

Here the author harnesses what she calls 'hard' evidence in support of her key theses that for organisations "success depends on quality and innovation - quality and innovation depend on people" and "the more people participate in dialogue and the decision-making process, the more they are motivated to work and learn". She is critical of much present UK management practice which, she argues, is both ineffective and unethical, even leading to practices which are illegal (cf. the BCCI affair). Instead she argues that the UK would benefit from a greater application of the successful models in some Western European economies and (particularly) Japan.

Part II: The core collaborative skills and business, educational and national cultures.

This is the largest and most ambitious section. Susan Jones ranges widely, starting with an examination of 'micro' aspects, such as the interpersonal skills and attitudes needed by managers. Gradually she elaborates her theme into a discussion of 'macro' issues such as the "national culture of UK Incorporated", as she calls it. She does not shirk from examining critically the attitudes and actions of the Conservative Government and the City.

The author develops her earlier criticisms of the culture of UK management: treating the workforce as a cost (to be cut wherever possible) rather than a resource; deliberately creating an atmosphere of fear and insecurity amongst workers; exacerbating 'us and them' attitudes; hostility to trades unions; increasing hierarchies and widening differentials; introducing performance-related pay schemes (which emphasise the individual rather than the team); the focus on short term profit-taking rather than long-term investment in plant, research, development and training. She urges the need to create instead an organisational culture which cares not just for proprietors, directors, managers and shareholders but also for employees,

preceding 272 pages to want to try to put collaborative methods into action in their own organisations.

Although first published in 1992, the issues Susan Jones deals with are still painfully relevant. The pernicious trends that she describes continue. British Gas gave a huge salary increase to its Chief Executive at the same time as 'downsizing': in other words sacking a large number of its employees and worsening the salaries and working conditions of the remainder.

Two minor criticisms: a) the book is rather uncritical in its advocacy of Japanese management methods; b) although the book claims to deal with education as well as business, overall there are comparatively few direct references to education.

If the book has any more serious fault it is perhaps this. Although it ranges far more widely than most management texts, it still does not go far enough in placing the discussion within the framework of the world economy and power structure. It operates within a perspective that assumes at base a shared interest among management and workers in what Susan Jones calls 'UK Incorporated', competing as a team against other national economies.

Unfortunately, we are now in a world dominated not so much by national economies as by international finance and by unelected de facto world executive bodies such as the IMF, G7 and the World Bank. This is a world in which huge international companies, powerful banks and currency speculators (such as George Soros), with turnovers greater than many national economies, wield more real power over the lives of ordinary people than many elected national governments. It is a world in which the sort of management of which Susan Jones provides such a devastating critique is not simply 'bad practice' caused by ignorance or prejudice. Such management is part of the latest efforts to maximise profitability by creating open markets and thus drive down wages, conditions and social benefits of workers in developed countries closer to Third World levels in the name of 'international competitiveness'.

The Financial Times reported that General Motors wanted to close down some 24 factories in the USA and transfer the work to the newly opened labour market of East Germany, an area of high skill but huge unemployment where GM can get away with paying 40% of the wages of Western Europe and none of the benefits. The NAFTA Agreement and the latest rounds of GATT will further exacerbate this trend. Even as I write, the radio announces that Peugeot has just threatened to close down car production in the UK unless workers 'moderate' their wage expectations and make even further additions to their already improved productivity. Meanwhile the UK Government squeezes benefits, abolishes all but one of the wages councils and resists the Social Chapter. This is the current against which enlightened thinkers such as Susan Jones have to struggle. Unless and until the human relations school of management takes account of this wider context, I fear that its successes, sadly, are likely to be other than partial and temporary.

New Series: **The Trailblazers ... John Taylor Gatto**

customers, suppliers and the environment.

Part III: A practical guide to self/team development of the core collaborative skills of leadership and teamwork.

This is a final short section in which the focus shifts back to 'micro' issues, endeavouring to provide some practical recipes for managers who, it is hoped, have been convinced enough by the

Phil Adams

As a teacher with over twenty years experience in USA high schools, 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. The million or more families adopting a home-based education in the USA are the only ones getting anything like an education, Gatto observes, and our need to learn from them is urgent.

"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 New York State several times.

John Taylor Gatto recognised that what he was really paid to teach was an unwritten curriculum made up of seven ideas. The first was **confusion**. He was required to teach disconnected facts not meaning, infinite fragmentation not cohesion. The second basic idea was **class position**. Children were to be taught to know their place by being forced into the rigged competition of schooling. A third lesson was that of **indifference**. He saw he was paid to teach children not to care too much about anything. The lesson of bells is that no work is worth finishing: students never have a complete experience for it is all on the instalment plan.

The fourth lesson was that of **emotional dependency** for, by marks and grades, ticks and stars, smiles and frowns, he was required to teach children to surrender their wills to authority. The next idea to be passed on was that of **intellectual dependency**. They must learn that good people wait for an expert to tell them what to do and believe. The sixth idea is that of **provisional self-esteem**. Self-respect is determined by what others say about you in reports and grades; you are *told* what you are worth and self-evaluation is ignored. The final, seventh lesson is that **you cannot hide**. You are watched constantly and privacy is frowned upon.

Responses to this analysis are predictable, Gatto says, and it is the assertion that 'there is no other way':

"It is the great triumph of compulsory government monopoly mass-schooling that ... only a small number can imagine a different way to do things."

The consequence of teaching the seven lessons is a growing indifference to the adult world, to the future, to most things except the diversion of toys, computer games 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. But this is good preparation for being gullible to the other controlling institution, television, a theme developed in his book *Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling*.

You can't get an education from school books

One good way to see the difference between school books and real books is to examine the different customs that separate librarians from school teachers ... somewhere in the differences we're going to find a key to unlock the secret of the war between *education* and *schooling*.

To begin with, the libraries I've visited have always been comfortable and quiet, places where you can read instead of just pretending to read. People of all ages work side by side in a library; not just a pack of age-segregated kids. For some reason libraries are not age-segregated; nor do they presume to segregate readers by questionable tests of ability ...

The librarian doesn't tell me what to read, doesn't tell me what sequence of reading I have to follow, and doesn't grade my reading. The librarian appears to trust me. The librarian lets me ask my own questions and helps me when I want help, not when it's decided that I need help. If I feel like reading all day long that's OK with the librarian. I'm not told to stop reading at regular intervals by ringing a bell in my ear. The library keeps its nose out of my home too. It doesn't send letters to my mother reporting on my library behaviour ... or issue orders about how I should use my time at home.

There are no records at all detailing a readers past victories or defeats. If the books I want are available, I get them - even if that deprives a reader more gifted and talented than I am of the book ... the library doesn't play favourites for any reason. It's very class blind. It's very talent blind. And that seems proper in a country that calls itself a democracy. The library never humiliates me by posting ranked lists of good readers for all to see. It presumes good reading is its own reward ...

One of the strangest differences between library and school is that you almost never see a kid behaving badly in a real library, although bad kids have exactly the same access to libraries as good kids do. I've taken literally thousands of bad kids into real libraries ... not once in 29 years did I have a complaint. The library never makes predictions about my future based on my past reading habits; nor does it imply that my days will be carefree if I read Shakespeare and troubled if I read Barbara Cartland. It tolerates eccentric reading because it realises that free men and women are always eccentric.

Finally the library has real books, not school books. Its books are not written by collective pens, nor selected by screening committees. Its real books conform only to the private curriculum of each author, and not to the invisible curriculum of a government bureaucracy. Real books are a vehicle to transport us into an inner realm of absolute solitude where nobody else can come. Real books generate unmonitored ... mental growth. School books are tools made of paper. They are vehicles of training; they reinforce the school routines of close order drill, public thinking, endless surveillance, endless ranking, and endless intimidation. Real books educate. Schools book school. When you take the free will out of education, that turns it into schooling. You cannot have it both ways.

(from John Taylor Gatto's keynote speech at the US Options in Learning conference 1992.)

The Joy of Learning

Amidst the gloom of cuts in education spending, threats of larger classes, teacher redundancies, and the current fashion for repeating the discredited dogmas of the 1870s that children "learn less by doing and more by telling", I was invited to contribute to an in-service day in a nursery/infant school. A day that was to be devoted to considering ways of enhancing the learning of the children.

It was the children who, although an invisible presence on this occasion, had drawn us all together. Parminder, Ruth, Tony, Winston ... real people, all different. I heard about those who were lively, quiet, happy, tired, thoughtful, kind, slow ... We were here for them.

I found myself with a group of people bound by a common purpose; committed to sharing their observations, insights and understanding to further their thinking. Their minds were open, not closed. They were prepared to reflect, question, analyse and evaluate. No-one on the defensive, no-one threatened. They were real people too; young, not so young, serious, teasing, enthusiastic ... They were a team!

This was our starting point. Together we shared a vision of the nature of education appropriate for the particular young people in the school. An education in which self esteem and motivation are acknowledged as essentials for successful learning, yet which recognises the importance of developing a range of learning behaviours to ensure that children are able to work with all three forms of discipline - autonomous, co-operative/democratic, authoritarian - and adopt the one appropriate to a particular situation.

We teased out a wide range of skills necessary for learning, but remembering Iram, John, Esther, Sau Ling ... we reflected on their **differing** learning styles and degrees of understanding and the need to take this into account in our teaching. When to stand back and enable children develop responsibility and self-reliance? How best to encourage and support them in their quest for knowledge? What type of teacher intervention - when invited by the child, and when guided by our observation and understanding? The place for didactic teaching? So many questions and so many different answers only highlighted the complexity of the learning/teaching situation.

No, we were not planning for the inculcation of knowledge. The theme for the day was the Status, Context and Nature of **Play** in School. Not a topic that would have appealed to those who see learning as a simple phenomena easily dealt with by the 'tell them and test them approach' and memorisation of adult-selected facts. If the current Chief Inspector of Schools could have had a presence that day - perhaps as a fly on the wall - he would have viewed a group of committed teachers examining ideas in depth and detail in the process of planning

stimulating, challenging educational experiences for their children.

At lunch time I had the luxury of looking round the classrooms. Without the children they were quiet, but nonetheless alive; full of children's work reflecting their interest and understanding of the world around them. Here I saw the aircraft that had been constructed, the Travel Agents and the Opticians, all created by children and adults planning and working together. Here was a wealth of opportunities for imagining, discussing, co-operating, accepting responsibility, sharing and developing ideas, solving problems. There were experiences appropriate for children of differing ages and at different stages - charts for eyesight to be tested, lenses to be explored, appointment books to be completed, journeys to be planned, maps to be investigated, tickets to be bought, books to be read - opportunities for children to apply skills they had acquired in other contexts, and also experiences that would enable them to gain further understanding. And this was only a snapshot!

I left the teachers that day to continue their thinking and planning; plans which celebrated the principles of plan-do-review and the enjoyment of learning, both for themselves and for the children.

This was a wet day in February. It was a treat!

Janet Meighan

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