

## Teaching Tomorrow

There is no single, formulaic answer to the perennial question which is directed to pioneers of a new, and better education system - *"If you do away with schools, or at least the more or less universal compulsion to go to them, how do you intend to teach the children what they need to know?"* Some envisage schools which are free, democratic and so attractive to children that getting them to attend will no longer be the problem it often is now.

Others, like John Adcock, want to see the end of schooling as the main mode of education, and a new system which would confer on the traditional teacher, for the first time, the responsibility, not to impart knowledge and whip-in unwilling learners, but to animate and facilitate the whole process by which children discover for themselves how their minds work, and what they, as individuals, need to know. I suspect that education in the 21st century, when the logic of its present failure finally forces us to change it, will combine elements of all these visions.

John Adcock began his contribution to the *Learning Exchange* that followed the celebration of 15 years of *Education Now*, (see photo of some of those attending), by asking the question which so many of us have asked as we try to make good educational sense of the school system: why do so many people, even if their own experience of it was bad, insist that schooling works, and only needs a bit more rigour, or tighter control, to make it perfect?

Certainly, there are many schools which maintain a measure of quiet and apparent goodwill among their pupils. Sometimes this comes from a genuine effort by adults to create good relationships, but as often as not it can reflect a patriarchal leadership which, when it becomes self-assured, no-one even thinks of challenging it, even when it deserved to be challenged.

Adcock had introduced the teaching of English through literature in his school, because he maintained that literature contained the curriculum, in that nothing was excluded from it, and anything could become its subject. This vision of education has little in common with the intentions of the people who drew up the National Curriculum. For them, the important thing was discrete subjects, and learning approved facts about them. The individual pupil was responsible only for assenting to the process, rather as he or she had to assent to prophylactic injections and fixed bed-times, because they were 'good for them'. Adcock saw this as a serious failing of the education system. Indeed, it was the single factor which most comprehensively invalidated compulsory schooling.

How, then, should we change the dinosaur of compulsory schooling into something which can survive in the new age? The obstacles which stand in the way of change are formidable. John presented us with a list of some of them to show what a difficult task lies ahead.

Many schools are doing good work with many pupils, and meet what parents believe to be their reasonable needs, including the provision of child-care and a way to discharge their responsibility to their children. Schools have come to be seen as synonymous with education, so much so that most adults assume that every day a child spends out of school during term time deals a mortal blow to his or her 'education'. Home-based education has shown that this is probably the opposite of the truth, but it persists in the public mind, as when newspapers condemn striking teachers for 'harming' their pupils. Also, many parents who would, perhaps, like to try and educate their children at home, doubt their ability to do so, assuming that teachers alone possess the combination of subject knowledge and teaching skills which they need to educate children. This may be true about the business of instructing large numbers of more or less unwilling children, but it has little to do with bringing up one or two youngsters, who, we should reflect, have already taught themselves to speak whatever languages are spoken around them, before they set foot in a school. These difficulties need to be overcome before change can take hold.

The new system which Adcock sets out in his books depends for its success on a group of people who already exists - teachers. They would have to reconstitute themselves as tutors, responsible for about the same number of children as now, but the same ones all the time. At present levels of capitation a tutor could be given about £50,000 a year to spend on his or her group of children, in addition to all the local facilities, libraries, youth centres, sports halls and vocational courses which are already available to anyone who wants to use them. The tutor would consult with the student to devise an individual curriculum, using all these resources, and would monitor its use and development, adapting it to the changing outlook and attitudes of the student. The tutor's approach would be respectful of the child's vulnerability. He or she would be a resource and a helper, not a director. We are not at present happy with self-direction as a path for children to follow. We like to think that in some way schools 'prepare' children to learn, as if they could not possibly do so without teachers. Progressive educators have long known that this is the reverse of the truth - that, if anything, schooling limits, and even blocks, the learning process. In the end, the quality of tutor-based education will depend on the quality of the relationship between the tutor and the child, because dialogue lies at the heart of learning. Good learning happens when a learner interrogates his or her surroundings, including human surroundings, and takes in their reality.

We often devalue childhood because we observe it from the lofty heights of our adult maturity. Children do not, habitually, finish things, or prolong activities until an arbitrary end-point, as adults do. Often what they choose to do is playful, and trivial-seeming. Good educators, which tutors will have to be, will need to be able to value such activities, and defend them, even, perhaps, against the child's parents, who may have acquired false attitudes on play, from their own childhood.

Individual tutoring may provide something of an antidote to the corporatism which is creeping into schools, whereby the successful Head is seen as the one who can best install in his school a capitalist set of motivations, which include the aim to raise as much money for the school by letting well-known brand-names into it and encouraging the pupils to get involved in promotions with a supposedly 'educational' edge to them. There is already a serious danger of children running the domestic economy of their homes with a view to making it yield ever more designer clothes and labelled trainers. Good education will focus on the real needs of children, not what their classmates tell them they need.

The old battle, between structure and non-structure still needs to be fought out. Governments classically prefer to pay for predictable and describable outcomes, and good education does not always allow this. But it is true to say that many famous, and significantly well-off people found school a wearying and depressing experience. Perhaps they will emerge when the time comes to argue for a new, and better way.

*Report on the Education Now Learning Exchange on 13th April 2003  
by Chris Shute*

**Reading:** *In Place of Schools: a novel plan for the 21st Century*, John Adcock, 1994, New Education Press  
*Teaching Tomorrow: Personal tuition as an alternative to school*, John Adcock, 2000, Education Now Books

## *A date for your diary*

### **Annual General Meeting and Learning Exchange of Education Now**

The AGM is scheduled for 11-30a.m. on Sunday September 21st at Burleigh Community College, followed by the usual *Learning Exchange*.

***"When they learn in their own way and for their own reasons, children learn so much more rapidly and effectively than we could possibly teach them, that we can afford to throw away our curricula and our timetables, and set them free, at least most of the time, to learn on their own."***

**John Holt in *How Children Learn***

### **Another fine mess you've got me into, Stanley!**

***"What's the point of the government setting targets? To get elected, of course. Then, when the policy fails to meet the target, they dump the target. Sometimes they even dump the policy as they did (on Tuesday) ... What are parents to make of it all? Education, education, education is in a mess, mess, mess."***

Editorial in the SUN Newspaper, May 21, 2003 on the government's changes to primary school testing

## **Lesley Browne's Ph.D**

Congratulations to long-term member Lesley Browne on being awarded a Ph.D. by the University of Birmingham. Lesley, in her thesis studied a number of cases of democratic learning within particular settings. She persevered with her Ph.D alongside raising a young family, some setbacks due to illness and the demands of being democratic and innovative herself in her own work in a secondary school in Birmingham, (as far as the system allows, that is). Her efforts have now paid off.

She wrote, ***"Through the democratic learning co-operative individuals can learn to share power in the classroom situation. Traditionally, however, schools have tried to increase motivation to learn by letting pupils compete against each other. The main drawback for competition in schools is that for every winner there is a loser ... schools have traditionally managed to leave most people with a memory of failure."***

***Therefore one of the main arguments in favour of the democratic co-operative model of learning was that there was no need for competition with each other. Learning does not need to be at the expense of others and, furthermore, perhaps one of the most valuable aspects of learning is learning to help others ... it is possible for everyone to win."***

This is not a popular view in a society obsessed with competition ...

## The Celebration of 15 years of *Education Now*

The meeting reflected on the progress which had been made during that time. Philip Toogood spoke about his work at *Dame Catherine's School* in Ticknall, for which *Education Now* had originally been conceived as the voice. His ideas, formed through his own experience as the Head of a comprehensive school, and through his work as the initial co-ordinator of *Human Scale Education*, were taken up by Roland and Janet. They quickly found their way into newly liberated Poland, where he, Roland and Janet were asked to run workshops for would-be flexi- and home-based educators. As a result, more than 600 Polish schools now use many of the ideas which have been pioneered by *Education Now*. A Polish teacher, Hannah, who trained at *Dame Catherine's School* went on to be Head of a parent-run school in Gdansk.

Philip's contribution left the members feeling that so much more could have been achieved if officialdom had possessed a tithe of his vision, and the ability to identify good practice even when it departed radically from traditional formulae. Time and again, really successful, radical initiatives foundered on the failure of promised funds to be paid, and on the refusal of officials to accept that new ways of working could be better than existing ones.

Others contributed their thoughts on memorable times in *Education Now*. For example, Chris Shute spoke about his visit to Philip Toogood's project at Friar's Walk in Burton, which had struck him as an encouraging, unstressful environment for children, where they were respected and allowed to develop at their own pace. Josh Gifford mentioned the way in which *Education Now* had supported him in his relationship with State schooling. Lesley Browne felt invigorated by her contacts with *Education Now*. They had affected her work in State Schools. Colin Millen felt that ideas which had seemed extremely radical in 1988 now provided a good basis for the educational reform which was surely waiting in the wings. Schools needed to be reconfigured as learning clubs rather than schools. Melian Mansfield mentioned the support she had received when she came out of teaching. She had been encouraged to find that there were others 'out there' who shared her growing concerns about the unhelpful aspects of compulsory schooling.

Leslie Barson had also found *Education Now* immensely supportive in her home-based education, and in setting up and running the *Otherwise Club*. Peter Humphries greatly appreciated that *Education Now* consisted not only of theorists, but also of people who carried their ideas into practice. *Education Now* had inspired him in his work as a Head Teacher. Hazel Clawley also thanked the group for its support and inspiration in her home-based education.

Chris Shute

## Home-based Educators Seaside Festival (HES FES) in Dorset, May 10th–17th, 2003

For the fifth year running, the village of Charmouth on the Dorset coast was the setting for this week-long festival. 1300 people of all ages gathered together to share and explore ideas, listen and respond to presentations and music, plus having fun together. Some were in tents, others in caravans, whilst some sought the comfort of 'stone tents' – bed and breakfast places and rented cottages.

In the conference sessions, themes such as '*Taking Children Seriously*' (presented by Jan Fortune-Wood), '*Assessment: How am I doing?: Assessment, inspection, monitoring, review, celebration and all that.*' (led by Roland Meighan), and '*Informal Learning*' (led by Alan Thomas) were well received and well attended. Also, throughout the week there was a range of workshops devoted to issues such as special needs and legal matters.

The theme of '*Autonomous Learning*' was examined in detail in an open forum by the European home-based educators in the *Learning Unlimited* association, on a day devoted to home education in Europe. Representatives from Portugal, Finland, France, The Netherlands, Ireland, Spain, Germany, Italy and UK.

The task was to achieve some generally agreed statement about what autonomous learning meant beyond the slogan, 'I did it my way'. Subject to further debate, review and possible revision, the definition was:

*"In autonomous education, the decisions about learning are made by the individual learners. Each one manages and takes responsibility for his or her learning programmes. Individuals may seek advice or look for ideas about what to learn and how to learn it by research or by consulting others."*

The meeting agreed statements about the implications of autonomous learning for a series of variables. These included how autonomous learning defined the aims of education, its approach to assessment, the role of teaching given the mainstay of self-teaching, the role of parents as learning supports, the view of significant knowledge, the appropriate locations for learning, what kind of power and responsibility are implied, and how resources for learning are defined and accessed. Discipline was defined, of course, as that form of discipline known as self-discipline.

## Flotsam and Jetsam

### How to waste three years of earning power

*"Although a study by Professor Ian Walker of Warwick University says that law, medicine and economics or business are the most lucrative degrees, arts graduates will earn no more than if they had left school at 18. Teachers with a degree will only earn 5% more than if they had opted out of university."*

The Observer Cash Supplement, 9th March 2003

### School-damaged minds

*"The world has too many people whose knowledge remains as compartmentalised as the courses were that parked it there. They live their whole lives with disconnected contradictions that they store in a memory but never work out. As a result they live on borrowed opinion and have to ask authorities the critical questions they ought to be asking and answering themselves about how to live their lives. Individuals who integrate their learning in an ongoing and sustained effort to better understand the world, work out their own solutions. They live beyond the reach of gurus."* Charles D. Hayes in *Life Learning* March/April 2003

(see [www.autodidactic.com](http://www.autodidactic.com))

### Shock News! OFSTED catches up with John Holt

The Times Educational Supplement headline of 7th March 2003, proclaims, *"Teaching, not learning, improves"*. *"The national strategy for teaching 11 to 14 year-olds has improved teachers' skills but failed to raise pupils' results, according to inspectors."* (John Holt wrote: *"I can sum up in five to seven words what I eventually learned as a teacher. The seven word version is: Learning is not the product of teaching. The five word version is: Teaching does not make learning".*)

### Dedicated headteacher ends up in jail

*"A former primary school headteacher was jailed for three months after admitting forging answers to national tests ... For over 20 years he was a dedicated, gifted and very well-respected teacher ... he never intended to cause any suffering. In fact it was quite the opposite. It was to the benefit of those children who did not perform well."*

The Guardian 8th March 2002

(There is no known move to jail the designers of the obscene league tables idea who caused the problem in the first place.)

### Examination boards watch

*"The happy-go-lucky team from Edexcel, Britain's most entertaining exam board, have done it again. First they brought you a maths problem that could not be solved, and now a business paper that asked candidates to answer 'all nine' questions in an eleven questions paper."*

Times Educational Supplement, 28th Feb 2003

### Teaching in turmoil?

*"So yet another survey has shown that one third of teachers would like to quit the profession ... half of new recruits quit during training or within the first three years ... an inspector told me that a number of schools lauded as 'improving' had not improved at all. They had simply rid themselves of a few lower achievers ... 'modernisation' means reintroducing the educational ideas of the 19th century."*

Ted Wragg in the Guardian, Feb 4th 2003

### Your sentence is twelve years

*"The California and Sacramento public schools, partially created to ensure democracy, are now ironically among the most undemocratic institutions in America. Their major rivals, the prison and the Marines, can be avoided by behaving or not*

*enlisting. There is no escape from 'schooling' as everyone receives a twelve-year sentence."*

(Unless you are able to opt for home-schooling, of course.)

Don Glines of Educational Futures Projects.

### Ofsted 'makes results worse'

*"Inspections worsen pupils' exam grades at mixed comprehensives, research by Newcastle-upon-Tyne University suggests. Its findings are based on an examination of the results of more than 3000 schools ... Researchers found inspection had a 'consistent, negative effect' on achievement ... The effect persisted. The research is not the first to suggest that routine Ofsted secondary inspections fail to improve results. Researchers from Huddersfield University made similar findings in 1998"*

Times Educational Supplement 21st March 2003

### League Tables watch

*"These soundbite statistical monstrosities are the very embodiment of the spin-driven cynicism and contempt for the truth that now dominate modern politics ... They perpetrate the pernicious ideology that only the quantifiable matters ... Their existence is solely for the reasons of political expediency ... Just when will our media take the principled lead of which our political leaders seem quite incapable ... If league performance tables are so useful and beneficial then why not introduce them for politicians and government ministers?"*

Richard House in Eastern Daily Express Nov 29th 2002

### Socialisation at school watch

*"Six out of ten American teenagers witness bullying in school once a day or even more frequently", reports John A. Calhoun, President and CEO of the National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC) ...*

*"Young people are far less concerned about external terrorist attacks on their schools and communities than they are about the bullying terrorising them and their classmates in the hallways and classrooms of their schools ...*

*"Calhooun says, 'While the nation concentrates on defending ourselves from possible external terrorist attacks, we must not forget the threats our children face every day in their school hallways'. ...*

*"The impact of bullying on a school climate can be toxic", says former school administrator and current Vice President of Public Policy for NCPC, James E. Coppie. 'Bullies and victims suffer well-documented damage, sometimes long-lasting. We've been overlooking the fact that bystanders experience fear, discomfort, guilt and helplessness that poison the learning atmosphere even more extensively. The level of bystander exposure is far beyond what many of us expected, especially in the upper grade levels and its growth is nothing short of terrifying'."*

In Life Learning March/April 2003

### Just tied up at present ...

*"A teacher who allegedly tied a disruptive pupil to his chair with a skipping rope has been suspended it emerged yesterday. Sandy Boa, a supply teacher was suspended by the Scottish Borders council after being accused of strapping an eight-year-old to his seat in an attempt to stop him wandering around the classroom ... Mrs Boa - who has been dubbed the Boa restrictor by local people - will learn if she is to be disciplined next week."*

The Guardian, 21st March 2003

Educational Beachcomber

### **Whatever you do to it, it's still a school**

A boy who had just left school was asked by his former headmaster what he thought of the splendid new buildings. *"It could be all marble",* he replied, *"but it would still be a bloody school".*

*Newsom Report 1963*

### **The odds are all on the house's side ...**

"School is like roulette or something. You can't just ask: Well, what's the point of it? The point of it is to do it, to get through and into college. But you have to figure out the system or you can't win, because the odds are all on the house's side. I guess it a little like the real world in that way."

Student in *The Experience of Schooling*, ed. M. Silberman, p.324

**Richmal Crompton's books based on the William character have amused children and adults alike for many years ... " But it is William as educational critic that concerns us here.**

### **William and teachers**

William's attitude to his school masters was one of pitying forbearance, but he was, on the whole, quite kindly disposed towards them. He indulged their whims, he smiled at their jokes, he endured their sarcasm; but he refused to concentrate his mental powers on x's and y's and dates like 1815 in the few precious hours that were at his disposal in the evening. Instead of doing homework, he preferred to play at Red Indians or Pirates, or to hunt for rats and rabbits with Jumble, his mongrel dog.

*William demolishes the rationale for the National Curriculum in one simple observation*

:

### **William on the curriculum**

"William: When I ask my father anythin' about lessons he always says he's forgotten 'cause it's so long since he was at school, and then he says I gotter work hard at school so's I'll know a lot when I'm grown up. Doesn't seem sense to me. Learnin' a lot of stuff ... jus' to forget it, ..."

### **William and motivation**

"William glared furiously at the logs. Had chopping the logs been forbidden, William's soul would have yearned to chop them. Had the chopping been an act of wanton destruction, it would have appealed immeasurably to William's barbarian spirit. But the chopping was a task enjoined on him by Authority. So William loathed it."

### **William on the aims of education**

"My father says that education is a glorious thing, and that it fills our minds with noble thoughts and gives us noble occupations to fill our leisure hours with in later life, but I cannot help noticing that when HE has any leisure hours, he does not sit down to solve a Geometry problem or translate a chapter from Caesar. No - he plays billiards or reads the newspaper ..."

### **William on the effectiveness of school learning**

"Do you know any Latin, William?"

"Jus" a bit," said William guardedly. "I've *leant* a lot, but I don't know much."

*But William was not opposed to the idea of education. He just did not see much evidence of it in the adult world:*

### **William on education**

Education is one of the things that I feel strongly about because I think that at present it is all wrong. I don't mean that I don't want people to be educated, because everyone ought to want to be educated so as to become a fine noble character when he grows up, but education as done at present does not do that.

You only have to look at the grown-ups around you to see that it does not do that ...

**Don Glines, you have said that no one needs to learn Algebra. Why do you believe that? Are there other required subjects you think not all of us need to learn?**

**No one needs a separate course in Algebra. Innovative educators tossed it out in the 60s. Algebra is just one of those political hangovers like Latin. For decades people felt that Latin was essential for college and life success; therefore it was promoted or required until the Latin teachers retired. Algebra is also obsolete. Maths should not be taught as maths, but as part of a larger systems approach. For engineer-type students, concepts from the old algebra, geometry, trig, calculus that may be needed by them should be taught at the appropriate moment, not one year at a time as separate courses just to be ready for the next class. No one else needs engineering topics.**

It is only being required/pushed now for political reasons. In the past, college prep students took algebra; non-college took business or general math. When the push came to give minorities equal opportunity, what could be better than to say, if all students take algebra, they have equal opportunity to enter college. If we must teach algebra, we know gifted maths students can learn it in six weeks; however, many college prep sociology majors need 50 weeks. Yet for uniformity, we insist on 36-week classes for everyone, even though only 3 of the 30 students fit that pattern. The others need more or less time.

Who needs to know integers? Who needs to figure out  $x^2 - (6) + 3 = Z$ ? Engineers don't need more algebra; they need courses in Common Sense. Look at the on/off ramp freeway snarls they created in major cities. People have forgotten the Guilford Studies (professor at USC) on IQs, in which he indicated there were probably 120 individual IQs - not just one composite - for each person. He had documented over 50 of them as early as the 1960s. In math alone, there were at least 5 IQs. A student could have "120" score in Numerical Computation, but could have only a "90" in Abstract Reasoning or Spatial Relations~thus creating havoc with algebra and geometry requirements. ...

It is lucky schools do not teach the complicated skills of walking and talking (some in 2 or 3 languages) as they do reading, for if they did, look at all the remedial talking classes we would have to schedule. Algebra falls in the same category. No amount of remedial algebra will overcome the Guilford findings.

Beyond algebra, there are no classes that need to be

required. The only crucial items are related to health and safety (don't put your finger in the fire, or drink poison). Reading is not even essential (the blind person who cannot use braille can be the most intelligent through talking books). Group-paced separate departments, courses, classes are wrong - teaching can and must be personalized and individualized. But if classes are required, home economics is the most important-not cooking/sewing, but child growth and development, interpersonal relations, parenting.

The *Eight Year Study* proved conclusively that it makes no difference at all what classes are taken in high school related to success in college, success in *life*, success at work.

In fact, the students from the schools deviating the most from traditional requirements had the best success. The 'gooney birds' came out better than those who followed the traditional structure.

The famous Wilson Campus School at Minnesota State University Mankato, a state funded K-12 research and development center, re-affirmed these findings for all grade levels during the 60s and 70s. Wilson had no required classes, no separate courses, no grade levels, no report cards, no required tests, and no homework. An interdependent curriculum was featured; everything was personalized and individualized. Yet as part of a state department evaluation, Wilson had the highest test scores, best attendance rates, and fewest discipline problems of any school in Mankato - all achieved with a cross-section of Minnesota students

We can divide the "need to know" into 5 categories. (1) There are only a few things one **must know** (safety factors); (2) many things **nice to know** (reading); (3) others that some need to **know** (building a bridge); (4) items **only a few need to know** (repair a refrigerator); and (5) very few items **only needed by specialists** (stars in the Milky Way).

**The traditional required curriculum for most schools and states fits no one, yet we pretend to be concerned for the welfare of each and every student.**

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**This is an extract from an interview with Don in *Paths of Learning Journal*, Summer 2003**

# The Kaleidoscope Project

*Configuring digital resources to support diverse community needs*

Anyone with teenage children and access to the Internet will be familiar with the near-addictive attraction of "chat" and the subversive craft of music file sharing. Is this merely a combination of youthful seclusionism and straight-forward piracy? Or have our youngsters discovered a powerful new model for the mediation of digital resources which we could all, quite literally, learn from?

Young people have always been early and ingenious adopters of new technology, particularly when it can be used to reduce dependence on their parents, strengthen communication with peers or gain access to the latest form of (preferably rebellious) media.

In the past, adolescents would sit on the family phone chatting with friends while their parents anxiously tapped their watches. If they weren't hogging the hallway phone, the youth of yesteryear would be upstairs playing "dubious" albums on improbable assemblies of turntables, wires, woofers and tweeters.

Things have moved on...even if parents haven't. Today's youngsters are quite likely to own their own phones. Some may even pay for their calls themselves! But they now prefer to monopolise the family Internet connection and run multiple on-line conversations to find out where the next party is happening, decide which movie to go to or find the cheapest tickets available for the next gig at Milton Keynes.

The way they access music is also changing. The more enterprising youngsters (Shawn Fanning was only 18 when he devised the ground-breaking music file-sharing programme called Napster) have found ways of breaking away from the dependence on the big labels which commission, promote and disseminate most of today's commercial music. They have built software that links communities of music lovers around the world and enables them to share every conceivable form of composition with a few clicks of the mouse. Armed with a mere phone line and a bit of freeware, devotees can now tap into vast libraries of low-cost or even free digital music. They can home in on their favourite songs or branch out to find new and esoteric work which would never find its way into the ratings-driven charts. Sequencing tracks into personal play-lists tailored to particular preferences or passions is as easy as American Pie.

The implications are profound. Control and mediation of digital music has suddenly shifted a lot closer to its users. Why buy a whole album when you can select the precise track you like and discard the rest? Why rely on what the media tell you is "hot" when you can compare notes on the most obscure bands with like-minded peers either locally or across the globe? These are painful realities for a music industry which is accustomed to harnessing technology to shore up its copyright-led position in the market. A protracted legal fight-back is already underway. But the genie is out of the bottle. A whole army of copyright lawyers is unlikely to make it go back in. The music industry will simply have to change its business models based on lower prices and greater flexibility for consumers. As is so often the case, the independently-minded teenagers look set to get their own way.

What are the broader lessons from this experience? And how might communities in other areas, such as learning, draw on the same underlying principles of sharing and peer review in order to find the right resources for them? Could communities and shared interest groups strengthen their capacity to support their learners by linking, in the same way, to libraries of easily re-configurable digital learning resources?

Most of today's digital materials take the form of extensive courseware aimed at the mass market which, almost by definition, cannot fully meet the wide variety of learning needs which exist in our diverse communities. Different proprietary formats prevent teachers and learners from cherry picking the best components from different providers' courseware and from mixing and matching materials (including their own) into meaningful combinations to suit their needs.

This model can be improved. It is perfectly possible to devise and build a system within which all learning resources, existing and new, are available in smaller, compatible components. Like individual music tracks, these components, sometimes known as learning objects, can be easily found, assembled into personalised combinations and played on a variety of platforms.

The *Kaleidoscope* project has been established specifically to achieve this. Over the last two years *Kaleidoscope* has worked with communities to review, catalogue and manage learning materials more flexibly. The project enables community members to collaborate, to assemble materials from multiple sources and to integrate these resources into local teaching and learning strategies. An initial library of materials from a variety of sources including practitioners' own materials has been created. The project has also developed the capacity to draw from and share resources with other such libraries and communities.

But whilst the *Kaleidoscope* tools and resources are important and have won many admirers in and outside education, the project's most important aim is to support the discovery of resources in ways that are influenced by and therefore sensitive to the particular needs of the different communities we work with. The *Kaleidoscope* metaphor has been chosen in recognition of this. Project participants can spin metaphorically on the kaleidoscope and create their own patterns and meaning from digital content rather than being forced to view a pre-set "one-size-fits-all" configuration determined by an external provider.

It is a metaphor which we think on-line music lovers will recognise. In due course we believe it is one which learners from all kinds of communities will come to recognise and value too.

*Rod Paley*

*Kaleidoscope operates with a range of schools, FE colleges and On-line community centres. We are currently helping teachers and mentors to develop contextualised resources and support for basic and key skills.*

*If you would like to know more about the project, to suggest other areas in which we might become involved, such as home-based educating families and groups, or find out how your community could participate, please contact Rod Paley or Robin Skelcey either at [rodpaley@ithaca.org](mailto:rodpaley@ithaca.org) or [robin@xtensis.co.uk](mailto:robin@xtensis.co.uk) or via Education Now. One of the unlooked for benefits of the project has been that as we widen the number of communities involved, users are able to locate and find ways of collaborating with others who share similar*

*interests. In that spirit we hope to hear from you.*

## Book review

### When Learning Becomes Your Enemy:

the relationship between education, spiritual dissent and economics  
by Clive Erricker

Educational Heretics Press, 2002, ISBN 1-900219-25-5, £7-50.

Clive Erricker and I have much in common. We are both fathers of three fairly old children, both religious education teachers by trade ... and both people who are deeply distressed by 'economics driven education'.

His short, bold book is excellent. Erricker is prepared to stand a long way off and look at education from a distance. He sees, and paints clearly for us, the big picture of education's subservience to the needs of free-market capitalism and worse: the deceitful idea that democracy, prosperity, happiness and even justice itself are dependent on the capitalist way of life and that education for such a way of life is therefore an inherently good thing. "*The logic of the argument is seamless*" he says, which makes questioning the present system appear thoroughly subversive. Erricker of course, possessing the courage and conviction of a true educational heretic, is not daunted!

By contrast, the other day during a course for experienced teachers, someone aggressively asked why I had such an 'ideological commitment' to students managing their own learning. He argued that promoting learners' independence was completely impractical given that teachers have so much to get through. Other participants wanted to know exactly how learners exercising responsibility for their learning fitted with the national literacy, numeracy and Key Stage 3 strategies, and how it would actually work in a Year 8 Maths lesson. These teachers, like most colleagues with their noses pressed to the grindstone, just wanted to know how to do the job that is right in front of them. They were not interested in the big issues of responsibility, mutuality, social values and democracy. This short-sighted and narrow-minded functionalism, pervasive in the current teaching profession, contrasts sharply with the once-rife 'dissenting tradition', the loss of which Erricker bitterly laments.

It is therefore sad but true that *When Learning Becomes Your Enemy* is unlikely to become a best-seller. In a typically insightful paragraph, Erricker explains why:

*"We are not meant to be aware of the over-arching political conceptualisation of the system within which we are working. We are meant to believe in its efficacy and attend to those problems that arise within it, not by reflecting critically on whether it is an appropriate conception of education, but by regarding such problems as ones that simply require more time to solve."*

While most of his educationalist colleagues are defining and answering in-the-box questions, Erricker is well outside, providing an unfashionable sociological and political analysis. He raises the most fundamental issues about "*the relationship between education, spiritual dissent and*

*economics*" (the book's sub-title) and consequently he deserves not only the widest, but also the highest readership.

After a reflective **Introduction**, **Chapter 1** offers a well-sourced explanation of how the current situation has arisen. Erricker shows how "*the education system in this country was defined by the industrial revolution*", a revolution that swept away the "*older moral economy*" and de-legitimised dissent. **Chapter 2** (The present state of affairs) describes in frank and depressing terms the complete alignment of UK education with the crass 'corporatist' agenda and the creation of central regulatory controls to ensure that disagreement is managed and marginalised. **Chapter 3** asks how things can be put right. The answer? Urgently restore the tradition of "*spiritual dissent*" to "*overcome the oppressive and impoverishing spiritual vacuum in which we find ourselves politically and educationally*". But be clear: 'spiritual' does not have a vague ethereal quality; for Erricker it refers to the "*political will*" to assert social justice, which may or may not be driven by religious conviction. For me, this is a welcome reconnection of spirituality with political action. **Chapter 4**, the final chapter, deals with the sinister role of the school within this set-up: "*My argument is that through regulation, our schooling system is designed to produce consumers who have sufficient skills to earn the wealth for their desired consumption*". Though disguised, the school system creates a set of guarantees to ensure that the economic status quo, nationally and globally, will be perpetuated. In the impassioned **Conclusion** Erricker presses home the argument and bluntly presents the lessons learned:

*"First, politicians lie, the poor steal, the rich both lie and steal and children in schools are admonished to do neither. Second, that government and institutionalised education ... are both detrimental to human potential. Third, that globalisation, as it is being pursued, will result in little progress and more barbarism, the majority of which will be legitimised in order to castigate the needy and protect economic interests."* Strong stuff.

Clearly, Erricker holds a set of values at odds with the present system. Many parents and some teachers feel a similar incongruence, yet most do little about it. They suffer from 'overstrained moderation'. They are themselves the products of a system that is rather good at creating compliance. Erricker, knowing that the root issue concerns the legitimisation of values, calls on us to action, not just feel, our dissent.

If there were to be criticisms at all (and I suspect that I am scraping the barrel) they might be two-fold. First, the book does seem to depend, in parts, heavily on Foucault. Second, there feels to me to be something missing from the definition of 'spiritual'. Neither of these points however, detracts from a work written in a succinct, precise style, delivering an urgent message with the clarity, conviction and timeliness of an Old Testament prophecy. Given its subversive (by its own definition) content, *When Learning Becomes Your Enemy* will be appreciated most by those with eyes to see and ears to hear. This is tragic; it is a tract for the restoration of a moral and just approach education

and as such needs to be on every teacher's and every politician's desk.

entrepreneurial in outlook, and think positively about their previous home education experiences.

## The Whistleblowers: Brian D. Ray

*Paul Ginnis*

**Brian Ray is President of the National Home Education Research Institute, Salem, Oregon, USA. This non-profit research organisation conducts research on home-based education, and has developed a significant network of researchers. Ray's own researches have been sustained and extensive. He is editor of the *Home School Researcher*, the leading journal in this field and now into its 15th year.**

In his book, *Strengths of Their Own: home schoolers across America* (1997), he took a USA nation-wide sample of 1657 families and their 5402 children and all 50 states were represented. The results support earlier findings that suggest that home-based education is now often the best option, and that schooling, whether private or state, is now often second best. In his preface to the book, he writes,

*"Homeschooling has clearly caught the imagination of the American public ... Whether it is called home schooling, homeschooling, home education, home-based education or home-centred learning, this age-old practice has experienced a rebirth and taken hold in every state of the Union."*

He quotes Michael Farris, of the Home School Legal Defence Association, who observes that: "... parents who take personal responsibility for the education and socialisation of their children reap a harvest of exceptional children who are well prepared to lead this country into the next century."

Two main reasons for home-based education are identified: to enhance learning, and to provide an orderly and moral social environment for their children that is consistent with the parents' values. The large majority of the sample identify their value set as Christian, but other value systems are found too.

A third reason, is that parents are increasingly seeking physical safety for their children via home-education. Home-based education typically provides an emotionally warm, physically safe, academically challenging, and philosophically consistent place in which to learn.

Ray shows that the growth of home-based education in the USA seems unstoppable. At first, it was estimated that the numbers would flatten out at one percent of the school-age population. Now that it has forced its way past five percent in various States, some think it may peak at 10%. But good news is infectious, and others now predict that 50% of all children within a generation, will be learning in home-based education, for a significant portion, probably 50%, of their school-age time.

His research identifies the positive outcomes of home-based education on topics as varied as students' academic achievement, social and psychological development, and the performance of the home-educated when they become adults. Adults who were home-educated are, typically, in employment rather than unemployed, independent-minded and

In his studies he exposes various myths starting with the ubiquitous 'lack of socialisation' myth. Ray found that children were engaged in a wide variety of social activities spending, on average, 10 hours a week in such things as music classes, play activities outside the home, sporting activities, Sunday School and church organised groups, Scouts and Guides.

In an earlier study, it was shown that 58 percent of families have computers in the home. Ray's latest study finds that this has risen to 86 percent. The children use computers for educational purposes, but the only subject to which there was a significant positive difference, was reading. Those using computers scored higher in reading tests.

A personalised, self-designed curriculum rather than a set, purchased package was used for 71 per cent of the students. The programme selected a variety of elements from the information-rich society in which we now live, including some pre-packaged items.

One reason offered for the success of home-based education, is the increased interaction time that children have with adults, compared to time spent with peers. This contributes to their academic prowess, greater range of social skills, and psychological health. Parents adopting home-based education have accepted the primary responsibility for the education, training and provision for the offspring, but not in isolation. The study shows that these parents do value social contact and participate with a variety of people, organisations, and institutions throughout their communities, their States, and across the nation. They have a strong dedication to their families, but also socially engaged and socially responsible.

Ray explores the methods of learning and identifies purposive conversation, 'tutoring', as a key reason for the success of home-based education. He quotes the research of Bloom which identified tutoring as a high-quality form of learning. In the home education setting, the research shows that there is ongoing feedback, formative evaluation, and friendly interaction during academic learning. Individualised tutoring is an expensive method compared to crowd-instruction, but home-based educators use family members and friends in this role.

Another factor is the avoidance of unnecessary distraction. The home educated do not have to deal with school distractions that reduce their efficient use of time and that also draw students into behaviours that are neither beneficial nor virtuous. One such distraction is violence. The USA national crime survey indicated that about three million violent crimes and thefts occur on school campuses every year.

Ray suggests that home-based education may eliminate, or at least reduce, the potential negative effects of certain background factors. He shows that low family incomes, low parental educational achievement, parents not having formal training as teachers, race or ethnicity of the student, gender of the student, not having a computer in the home, starting formal education late in life, or being in a large family, all seem to

have little influence on the success of the home educated. He explodes another myth - that home-based education is for the well-off. The average family earnings for home-educating families was below the national average.

Finally, there is the intriguing indication that 'the family that learns together, stays together'; home-educating families show signs of being more stable, with their members more fulfilled and happy as a result.

It was a delight to have an e-mail from Brian Ray last summer saying he was in UK. We spent a fascinating afternoon sitting in the sun along with his wife Betsy and his mother-in-law talking about contemporary education.

*Roland Meighan*

## Book review

### **Bertrand Russell:**

**'education as the power of independent thought'**

**by Chris Shute**

Educational Heretics Press 2002, ISBN 1-900219-21-2, £8-50.

In an education system dominated by National Curriculum concerns that seek to mass produce our children as products with so called 'value added', Chris Shute has much to present from Russell's thinking on education that is refreshing and provocative.

In the opening chapter, Shute sets out the background to Russell's involvement with education. A gifted philosopher, Russell took a largely optimistic view of children as people capable of reason, who should be co-creators of their own educational agendas and allowed happiness. It is a view of education, which despite the setbacks of an experimental school which failed, Shute believes holds valuable lessons for modern education.

Russell looked towards a balanced education, free from the element of compulsion that he considered only served to destroy what it set out to achieve, in which personal growth, individual intellectual capacities and good citizenship could co-exist equally. There is a sense in which Russell was very much on the side of the child, wanting to provide stimulating environments in which children were valued. He trusted that children need much less in the way of formal tuition than they do of simple exposure to 'interesting new knowledge'. He sets store by ample time for play and argued that fear should have no place in educational theory.

Yet, in other ways, Russell's thinking about children remained laden with theories not quite shaken off from his own Victorian childhood; he insisted on the value of routine in the lives of children and saw early routine as an opportunity for parents to instil good habits into children.

For Russell, the ideal form of education was to be found in boarding schools, free from the constraints of urban poverty and strained working class family life; hardly a sentiment to appeal to modern home educators. However,

he was also acutely aware of how peer pressure could operate to stifle individuality or exert enormous pressures on young people and had no illusions about the 'bully environment' of schooling.

Russell was eager to avoid patronising or sentimentalising children and had a liberal approach to the curriculum, considering that children would easily learn anything that has intrinsic intellectual value. Whilst he advocated learning great literature by heart and set great store by modern language learning, he recognised that such learning had to be intrinsic and meaningful to the child.

Famously, Russell stood out against the influence of religion in education, an influence which he saw as essentially conservative. He also had no time for education as a tool to fit people for inflexible class defined roles. He stood out against blind conformity, urging that children should be taught to think their own thoughts and warning that education was too often the tool of power for religion, the State or class divides, rather than being centred on children.

With ideas that sat uneasily with the education of his day, and young children of his own, plus an urgent need to make a living, Russell, founded Beacon Hill School. It failed: the finances never added up, the teachers had a tendency to revert to the abrasive schooling methods of the time and Russell's liberal methods tended to attract a disproportionate amount of 'problem children' who bullied others. Russell admitted failure and also recognised that 'freedom' in the school was in reality still hedged about with many things that the children **had to do**.

Shute gives us an unromanticised and accessible picture of someone who was struggling towards, *"humanistic, respectful. education, offered in a rich environment."* (p.64)

Russell's success was ultimately limited to gems that remain relevant, not least his recognition that children really do not need to spend so much time in 'herds' of other children as school generally supposes. He did not achieve freedom in education and some of his notions would contrast starkly with the most radical thinking on children's autonomy to be found in home education circles in the 21st century. There are undoubtedly points at which I would want to take issue with Russell, but for all this, he certainly stands in a tradition of thought that remains as vital as ever; a tradition that sets out to enable children to think for themselves and a tradition that continues to need every ally it can get.

*Jan Fortune-Wood, March 2003*

Dr. Jan Fortune-Wood is a home educator and author who supports 'Taking Children Seriously' and children's autonomy. You can find out more at:

[www.autonomouschild.co.uk](http://www.autonomouschild.co.uk)

## Surviving the British school system: a toolbox for change

### Background

This article builds on the findings of the author's own recent investigation into perspectives on school exclusion, published by Education Now Books as *Understanding School Exclusion: challenging processes of docility* (Cooper, 2002), and feedback on these findings from teachers. It argues that the current education system is causing profound harm to both pupils and teachers, and suggests the need for change built upon a free and open debate involving pupils, teachers and parents/carers. To assist pupils in particular to engage effectively in this debate, this article recommends reviving *The Little Red Schoolbook* (LRSB), originally published in Denmark in 1969 as a guide aimed at showing young people 'ways in which you can influence your own lives' (Hansen and Jensen 1971). A revised LRSB would serve as a key text in Citizenship education, providing young people with invaluable support for their own personal and political development, as well as a toolbox resource for challenging oppression. However, because 'potentially explosive questions about the nature of British society are sidelined in schools' (Bamber and Murphy 1999: 233), this recommendation will not receive widespread support.

### The Little Red Schoolbook

The LRSB was written by Søren Hansen and Jesper Jensen, both schoolteachers in Denmark, as a reference manual for children covering a range of educational issues, including how to challenge the school system. The English translation was published in 1971 and in Britain it became the subject of a 'moral panic'. Secret Home Office papers published in 1999 revealed how the police had singled out the LRSB for prosecution. Detective Chief Inspector George Fenwick, then in charge of the 'dirty squad', justified this by claiming the LRSB was indecent (Travis 1999). 26 pages on sex education in the original edition was declared obscene by a London magistrate on the grounds that it would 'deprave and corrupt' young people (Hansen and Jensen 1971: 10). 1971 also saw the start of the 'School Kids' Oz case, the longest obscenity trial in British history. The case concerned issue 28 of the magazine, published in May 1970.

This edition devoted a significant amount of space to the work of school pupils, including extracts on sexuality, drugs and the school system (e.g. 'examinations are a primitive method of recording a tiny, often irrelevant, section of the behaviour of an individual under bizarre conditions'), themes also covered in the LRSB. Of particular concern to the moral guardians of the period was the inclusion of a cartoon of Rupert the Bear, symbol of childhood innocence, seemingly having sex with the American comic character Gipsy Granny. Charges were brought under the 1959 Obscene Publications Act. As the LRSB stated at the time, "In 1885 a law made it illegal to have sexual intercourse with a girl under 16. Although boys and

girls become sexually mature much earlier these days, the 'age of consent' for girls is still 16. Our laws assume that boys under 14 simply aren't capable of it" (Hansen and Jensen, 1971: 95).

In Australia, Doug Anthony, deputy PM, described the LRSB as a handbook for "juvenile revolution and anarchy", and that its "subversive nature endangered society" (Stephens, 2003: 1). In reality, the LRSB is a manual offering children and young people strategies for actively

influencing their own life experiences. It is based on the premise that children's and young people's experiences and opinions matter, and are as equally valid as those of adults. It offers children and young people a toolbox for developing the knowledge, skills, attributes and values needed to make informed choices in respect of their education, sexuality and drug use. It promotes the principle that children and young people should have the opportunity to genuinely participate in those decision-making processes which substantively affect their lives. Far from being 'subversive', the LRSB advocates that those wanting change should campaign politely within democratic boundaries.

### Understanding School Exclusion

On 27 January 2003, I disseminated the findings of my research on school exclusions to teachers at a hotel in a major city. One significant finding of this research was that many pupils and teachers held a similar concern that an inclusive education system was not possible under its present structure, largely because it had become too narrowly focused on meaningless managerialist targets - testing, inspections, league tables and so forth. As one teacher argued: "The growing emphasis on statistics and exam performance seems to be making it ever more difficult to deal with children in ways that are honestly relevant to them. An inclusive system implies to me that every child's needs can be included in so far as every child is placed in his/her best and most appropriate learning environment. This aspect seems to be of increasingly low priority".

Another teacher added that 'individualism' could not be catered for in the mainstream system. "If someone is having a 'problem', schools don't reach out to understand or help them. They'd rather ignore them or, worse still, banish/exclude them". He went on: "This impacts upon all pupils in respect of social/moral values. It does not teach or foster tolerance, caring, kindness or respect for others. It only emphasises that 'normal', 'averages' and 'sameness' are good. Anything 'other' - different behaviours - should not be tolerated, understood or respected". He felt that education continued to be "elitist, serving to perpetuate existing structures of power". He went on: "Genuine 'inclusion' would bring about such changes in education. We'd produce an environment within which all kinds of things were possible. Time for anger and time for learning. Teachers are not trained for this - not measured for it!".

Of serious concern is the notion that the managerialist agenda governing our education system may be fostering a 'docile' teaching profession, fearful of offering opinions. As one teacher stated: "League tables and performance targets, deeply controlled by the political system, have created a fear to speak out amongst the teaching profession. Even if supported by the union, voicing opinions or criticising can lead to teachers being ostracised. Life is made a misery if you

challenge! Because of this, and because of personal and financial commitments, many teachers comply with the system". This teacher was adamant that the education system itself has to change. In particular, he felt, as many teachers do, that the existing performance targets schools are expected to work to should be scrapped: *"The current 'New Labour system' does not make it possible properly to develop children's learning and sense of personal significance, values and responsibilities and your book presents this situation lucidly and makes clear the argument for shifting priorities in education"*.

Teachers and pupils have both become victims of a brutally uniform and authoritarian education system. In response, and as Hansen and Jensen argued over thirty years ago: *"Teachers and pupils ought to work together for change. There doesn't have to be conflict between them. In fact teachers have as little real power as pupils. They don't decide the content of their own education. They don't decide what to teach. And they decide very little about their own bad conditions of work ... Real changes to the advantage of both teacher and pupils should come from those personally involved"* (Hansen and Jensen 1971: 206). One teacher thought the idea of a booklet informing parents/carers and pupils on how to survive the school system would be a good idea – *"informed people equals more capable people"*. Building on this idea, the next section advocates reviving the LRSB and considers how it might look in 2003.

### The Little Red Schoolbook 2003

A 2003 edition of the LRSB could be framed within the context of the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 12 in particular sets out the rights of children in respect of participation:

*"1. States 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.*

*2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law."*

(Article 12, 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child)

My own research found that such rights are flagrantly ignored within the school system. None of the schools involved in the research allowed pupils the right to express their views on the way the school system operated, never mind giving these views serious consideration. Few schools appear to recognise the potential of children's participation to enrich decision making, or to contribute towards genuine notions of citizenship.

Similar concerns were raised by a group of sixth formers doing Sociology A-level at a private school in Lincolnshire. On April 4, 2003, I facilitated a workshop on school exclusion with this group and they expressed similar feelings about their school experience to those expressed by excluded pupils I had met – particularly the feeling of being 'disrespected' by teachers. Moreover, in my school exclusion research, pupils (and parents/carers) felt that they were given inadequate opportunity to be heard when the decision to exclude was made. This raises serious questions about the consistency of such processes in terms of legal and social justice.

A key principle behind Article 12 is that teachers are no longer expected to be mere providers of education, but to facilitate learning through more dialogical processes designed to empower children to have an influence over both their own learning, and their personal and social development. This is spelt out more in Article 29:

*"1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:*

*(a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;*

*(b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;*

*(c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;*

*(d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;*

*(e) The development of respect for the natural environment."*  
(Article 29, 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child)

As described by teachers above, schools do not offer all children the opportunity to develop their talents and abilities to their fullest potential, or foster tolerance and respect. Education's narrow focus on testing is suffocating potential and innovation. As Hansen and Jensen argued back in 1969:

*"Schools often use exams and tests to frighten you into working ... By far the greatest number of exams don't show what you know ... They may show what you've learnt parrot-fashion or had knocked into you. They rarely show whether you think for yourself and find things out for yourself ... In schools which have a lot of school exams and tests, education suffers. You don't learn about the subjects themselves: you learn how to cope with tests and exams. **This can be changed**"* (Hansen and Jensen 1971: 162-163, original emphasis).

As one teacher in my own study argues (see above), by fostering uniformity and conformity schools fail to nurture understanding, tolerance and respect for 'difference'. This clearly causes greater harm than good, a situation that needs to be challenged.

The original LRSB contains a wealth of information on challenging oppression – how to have an influence; how to make a complaint; how to demand one's rights; coping with the British school system; forms of representation; understanding the role of education for society. Much of this material is still pertinent today; perhaps more so in view of education's narrow focus on labour-market needs and social conformity. At the same time, new material drawing on more recent discussions on the possibilities for critical practice could be included in an updated LRSB. Drawing on the ideas of Bamber and Murphy, I recently ran a workshop with a group of youth workers at the University of Hull on the possibilities for critical practice in education (with a particular focus on school exclusions).

Bamber and Murphy stress education's potential for creating a fairer and more cohesive society. In particular, they see a role for education in raising awareness about key concepts of power and forms of social action connecting the personal to the political. They argue the need to uncover and question the basic assumptions upon which power holders exert their control and allow deep social injustices to remain. For Bamber and Murphy: "*Critical practice is not an event, a final or ultimate moment of radical work, but a process of working towards a preferred anti-oppressive future*" (Bamber and Murphy 1999: 227). Basically, this process involves working with groups through three stages:

- Stage One - developing a group's understanding of the nature of 'the problem' (based on experience or one's reading) and how they personally feel about it.
- Stage Two - negotiating with the group to find a consensus position on the nature of the problem, and that something ought to be done about it.
- Stage Three - negotiating with the group to find a consensus on what exactly should be done and agreeing how to go about this.

Working with groups of young people in this way, they become "*sites of democratic activity in which young people attempt to address issues of social justice in a rational manner*" (Bamber and Murphy 1999: 241). Working through the three stages myself with the youth-work students at Hull, the following issues emerged:

#### *Stage One - the nature of school exclusions*

- Lack of parental support / responsibility / role models?
- Teachers pressurised/frustrated (lack of resources / freedoms / rigid system)?
- Excluded pupils abandoned / difficult to reintegrate?
- Stigmatization/labelling of children?
- Lack of flexibility within the curriculum (to tailor it to individual pupils / focus on the academic)?
- Underlying causes of challenging behaviour ignored (being in care / family problems)?
- Culture of education system (inflexible / uniform / hierarchical / managerialist/ unaccountable / competition between schools)?
- Learning difficulties (dyslexia / dyspraxia) ?

Most students felt that exclusion was not an answer, although some were ambivalent (what about the bullies?). The majority thought more could be done to help young people, and blamed the politicians for not doing enough.

#### *Stage Two - consensus on the key issues*

- Structural problems (social, political, economic - e.g. poverty, unequal power relationships, 'race', class and gender, etc.)
- The managerialist school system (e.g. competition, PRP, league tables, performance targets, national curriculum, OFSTED inspections, lack of time/resources)
- Individual factors (e.g. family breakdown, no discipline, no positive role models, learning difficulties).

There was a consensus that these issues should be dealt with.

#### *Stage Three - what should be done?*

- Multi-dimensional approach
- Flexible curriculum and assessment
- Ask young people what they want
- Devolve more power and resources to teachers
- Informal education - a flexible, negotiated curriculum.

Due to lack of time, the students did not develop ideas on how exactly they would effect change. Despite this, the majority did find that this three-stage process offered a valuable tool for developing ideas on anti-oppressive practice. Consequently, such a model could prove a valuable reference source in an updated LRSB.

### **Conclusion**

The current education system is a cause of harm to pupils and teachers. To assist pupils in particular to resist education's oppressive practices, this article calls for the revival of the LRSB to serve Citizenship education, and provide young people with support for their own personal and political development. The 2003 edition of the LRSB would also act, as it did back in the 1970s, as a toolbox resource for challenging oppressive practices. However, because of its radical potential, it is unlikely that such a suggestion would receive widespread support from within the British education system.

*Charlie Cooper,*

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### **Whatever you do to it, it's still a school**

A boy who had just left school was asked by his former headmaster what he thought of the splendid new buildings. "*It could be all marble*", he replied, "*but it would still be a bloody school*".

*Newsom Report 1963*

### **The odds are all on the house's side ...**

*"School is like roulette or something. You can't just ask: Well, what's the point of it? The point of it is to do it, to get through and into college. But you have to figure out the system or you can't win, because the odds are all on the house's side."*

Student in *The Experience of Schooling*, ed. M. Silberman, p.324

