

A postcard from Devon Sands

For me the experience of attending the recent Conference of Democratic Schools at Sands School in Devon was like a very emotive Homecoming. All those hours as a student teacher spent in a dusty and unused section of the college library reading A. S. Neill, Homer Lane, David Wills and 'JB' Butterworth when I should have been at supposedly compulsory games or in Skinnerian 'rats in boxes' psychology lectures came flooding back. These visionaries, completely ignored by my official B.Ed. course, kept me energised for the next 22 years in attempting to create ever larger opportunities for young people to be involved in decision-making in state comprehensive schools.

Here I was at last, sitting in the meeting room at Sands School, the small Ashburton day school that has kept the spirit of Dartington School alive, listening to students from Hadera School in Israel, the Freie Gesamtschule of Vienna, Summerhill, Willington Flexi College and Sands talk about their democratic non-coercive ways of working. Significantly, the meeting was chaired by a Sands student and adults waited their turn to speak along with the students.

It was especially exciting for someone who has felt a kind of

regions of the country. The Hadera students at the conference were formidably sharp and perceptive in the working sessions, often willing to challenge the assumptions of their own and other teachers present.

Although having only 12 secondary age students at present, the Viennese free school is part of a rapidly growing network of Austrian alternative schools which are the subject of a major official research project seeking to compare their achievements with the mainstream.

The Sands students and staff were wonderful hosts. The week offered a fascinating mix of conference sessions and extended normal learning activities at the school. Conference themes included 'Rules and punishments - are they necessary?', 'Are School Meetings dominated by adults and older students?', 'Why is the idea of Democratic Education so much more widely accepted in Israel than any other country?' 'Do gurus and visionaries interfere with the democratic process in education (and why are most of them men)?' together with other questions relating to gender issues, music and clothes, smoking, home education and distance learning. Debates were spiced with contributions from visiting academics, researchers, parents and journalists though the key chairing roles were played by host and visiting students, which gave the week its memorable flavour.

Next year's conference will be in Vienna for the core group of schools, which also includes Sudbury Valley School and the Barabara Taylor School from the USA, along with the Kinokuni

Some Principles of Educational Reconstruction: Final part of a three-part series

moral obligation to the state sector to hear of the outstanding success of the experiment at Hadera. It has always struck me as ironic that the experience of thorough-going democratic education should only be available to those in Britain who can afford to pay for it. This Israeli state school for 300 4-18 year-olds is uncompromising in the degree to which students, teachers and parents jointly make all the significant decisions through a school parliament and a series of elected committees, and the students have real choice as to the style of learning that suits each individual. Yet far from being regarded as a 'freak' institution it has 2500 families on its waiting list for 30 annual vacancies, large numbers of applicants for rarely available teaching posts, and the full support of the Minister of Education in seeking the best means to replicate the school in other

Children's Village in Japan, while a larger event is projected for a later date possibly in Israel.

(Further details of the Democratic Schools' Conferences can be obtained from David Gribble, West Aish, Morchard Bishop, Crediton, Devon EX17 6RX.)

Derry Hannam

Edward Fiske tells us in his book *Smart Schools, Smart Kids*, that the press correspondents of the USA met at the White House on the invitation of President Bush to

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



If all this seems vaguely familiar, consider that Edmond Holmes was the Senior Chief Inspector in charge of the previous British National Curriculum in the mid 1800's backed up by the 'tell them and test them' methodology. When he retired he wrote a book condemning the whole wretched and regressive package of his previous thirty years work. He said, *"To be in bondage to a syllabus is a misfortune for a teacher and a misfortune for the school in which he teaches. To be in bondage to a syllabus which is binding on all schools alike is a graver misfortune. To be in bondage to a bad syllabus which is binding on all schools alike is of all misfortunes the greatest."* Let us hope it will not take the newly appointed Chief Inspector of Schools, Chris Woodhead, thirty years to apply his presumed intelligence and discover precisely the same thing.

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

As regards knowledge, we need to avoid approaches that imply that everyone needs to know the same bank of information or that learners of the same age need to know identical things. Subjects, the staple diet of schools, are only a minor part of the tool kit of knowledge and declining in importance, and in any case, learning the tool kit does not constitute an education. We do, however, need another kind of knowledge to be

effective in the modern world - to know how to find out, to learn, relearn and unlearn, and how to manage our own learning on the principles of 'plan, do and review'.

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

We should start being brave and face up to the fact that adult chauvinism has a poor record. Adults in power in Britain have, amongst other things,

- (i) allowed policies for short-term profit that have resulted in polluted beaches, seas, rivers, water supplies, farm land, and atmosphere, in the name of the gods of competition, the market and greed, and resulting in the self-indulgence of the few at the expense of the many, and creating a society where the rich are at war with the poor,
 - (ii) helped develop enough destructive capability to kill us all several times,
 - (iii) sold arms to autocratic regimes and then had to go to war with them to limit their activity,
 - (iv) often proved incapable of organising their own personal lives to any effective model,
 - (v) glorified competition rather than co-operation, and then wondered why this mind-set leads inevitably to wars,
- They are not in a strong position to think they are fit, morally or intellectually, to hijack the learning of the young. by imposing upon them a curriculum based on assorted adult hang-ups.

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

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

In the *Hitch-hiker's Guide to the Universe*, the best selling book in the universe was said to be about God's Greatest Mistakes. I think we need to identify humanity's greatest mistakes. My first list of candidates is Nationalism, Communism, Capitalism, Fascism, and Religion. Amongst more hopeful ideas are Democracy, the various Co-operative Movements, Humanism and the efforts in the field of adult moral activity that have resulted in the various Human Rights Declarations. The last four sets of ideas do not yet underpin the education system in Britain. What a difference it would make if they did.

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

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

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

The American writer Mark Twain agreed:
"I never allowed schooling to interfere with my education."

Schools often claim to work with children. In truth, they end up working **on** children. Why are we so easily fooled? What deceives us is indicated by Everett Reimer from the USA:
"Some true educational experiences are bound to occur in schools: they occur despite school and not because of it."

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

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

"That children do not come to school by choice is another terrible indictment of our whole educational system."

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

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

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

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

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

Various critics of the current model of schooling, John Holt, Chris Shute, Seyour Papert, John Taylor Gatto and myself hold the view that we can regenerate schools so that they cease to be anti-educational. Our model is not that of the factory or the day prison, but that of the public library or the user-friendly type of museum, or as Janet insists, a good nursery school. Doing away with compulsion, schools, perhaps renamed Learning Resources Centres, will be used a places where anyone who happened to need help with their learning at any time in their lives could go to receive it. The curriculum will be a personalised one and not a standardised one. This is the vision of flexischooling and flexi-education and I propose that the longer we delay in establishing it, the worse for all of us.

Roland Meighan

Roland's new hardback, double length compilation of quotations on education *The Freethinker's Guide to the Educational Universe* is now available. Proceeds are to go to the new Centre for Personalised Education. Discounts are available for bulk orders: 1-5 copies at £10 each, 6-19 copies at

£8 each, 20 or more at £6-50 each. Available direct from Educational Heretics Press, 113 Arundel Drive, Bramcote Hills, Nottingham NG9 3FQ

Day Conference

"Democratic Education and Education for Democracy"

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

Saturday October 22nd 1994 at Bilston Community College

Morning session

Keynote Speaker: **Dr. Clive Harber** (University of Birmingham)

"Democratic learning and learning democracy"

Workshops on

Democratising learning methods (Lesley Browne)

Democratising primary schools (Arthur Acton)

Democratising secondary schools (Derry Hannam)

Democratising Further Education (Bilston College Staff)

Learning democracy through drama (Sharon Robinson & Josh Gifford)

Democratising the special school (Bryn Purdey)

Democratising education at home (Iris Harrison & Steve Lowden)

Afternoon session

Keynote speaker: **Keith Wymer** (Chief Exec., Bilston College)

"Democratic management in an authoritarian system?"

Workshops on

International case studies (Lynn Davies)

Democracy and equal opportunities (Bilston Community College Staff)

Minischooling as democratic practice (Philip Toogood)

Democratising teacher education (Janet & Roland Meighan)

Democratising community arts (Walsall Community Arts Team)

Headteachers and the problems of changing school regimes

(Paul Ginnis & Bernard Trafford)

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

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

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

Beyond Authoritarian School Management: the challenge for transparency

by Lynn Davies

Significant new trends are emerging in educational management internationally which threaten a return to authoritarianism but simultaneously offer possibilities for the more open and democratic governance of schools.

Beyond Authoritarian School Management looks critically at four recent developments in the field: comparative research on the realities of organisational life; the school effectiveness movement; equity and democracy initiatives; and school self-appraisal. In examining the various contemporary languages of

management - from markets to militarism - the book exposes the power of managers to shape meanings and hence organisational outcomes.

Beyond Authoritarian School Management argues for an institutional structure geared to the maximisation of rewards for all participants, arrived at through open investigation and experimentation. While challenging the idea that there can be international principles of 'effective' management, Lynn Davies concludes that the common thread is that the good manager is also a good researcher. The proposed model for school organisation is, therefore, that of a 'research park'.

The book develops implications for educational management training based on establishing performance indicators for transparency and democratic practice.

This book is designed for current and potential managers in schools and colleges and all those concerned with the good governance of education. **It is vital reading for anyone keen to move beyond the limitations of authoritarian management theory and practice into more contemporary frames of reference.**

Dr. Lynn Davies is Director of the International Unit of the School of Education at the University of Birmingham, UK.

8.30: Go downstairs and take part in rapid fire exchange as to whose turn it is to feed cats. I loose.

8.30-9.00: Breakfast. Listen to Radio 4. Attempt crossword and am at once amazed and slightly cross when Sam completes clues I cannot. Even though Sam and I do most of our studying together he still manages to acquire vast amounts of information the source of which I cannot account for.

9.00-9.20: Sam and I read our newspapers together and cut out anything that interests us to use. Cannot recommend the daily reading of broadsheet newspapers to home educators highly enough - they are readily available and contain vast amounts of interesting information which can be used endlessly as a source of straightforward facts and - before you wince - to help children learn to distinguish fact, opinion and bias.

9.20: Spend ten minutes negotiating roughly what we are going to do with the day. Find this works much better than timetables as it is open to re-negotiation if we become very absorbed or the unexpected intervenes.

9.30: Practise drawing triangles from instructions in *Greer Maths* text book. Fail. Experiment with many methods and sharper pencils until so expert we draw stacks and stacks so accurately we are really pleased with ourselves. Learn Pythagoras' Theorem. Sam questions use of this in future life.

A day in the life of ... a home-educating family

Price: £10 ISBN 1-871526-16-7 from **Education Now office**

When we first offered our younger son, Sam, the chance to be educated at home, we did not do so out of any particularly strong anti-school feeling or because we wanted to put into practice any specific educational theories. Sam wasn't even unhappy at school. However, we had noticed that he increasingly described his lessons as boring and frustrating and he was often indignant about the behaviour of the grown-ups in the school towards the children. It was sad because he seemed to be losing his previously insatiable desire for new facts, new people and new experiences. We were becoming nervous that the next stage might be that Sam would start to entertain himself (and others) in lessons in a desperate attempt to alleviate the boredom and thus be labelled disruptive and be punished. The only solution it seemed, after much soul searching and discussion, was to take back the responsibility for Sam's education and to educate him in the way that we felt was most appropriate to his particular needs at the time. His needs were to learn at his own speed, in an interesting and entertaining way, as much as possible about everything. Our job would be to help him to do this.

At first Sam thought the idea of being educated at home was hilarious. Eventually, however, he came out of school one day and announced that he had told his teacher that he had decided to be educated at home. Slightly taken aback by this firm and decisive action I enquired as to the teacher's response. "Nonsense", said Sam.

This nonsense is now in its fourth year and this is a typical day of it:

8.00 a.m.: Sam enters room fully dressed and gives weather forecast and news gleaned from Breakfast Television.

I

say go into the hall and think about it. After long wait and several getting warmer hints Sam comes back and announces tessellated tiled hall floor must have been laid by Pythagoras himself. We are disturbed by a flurry of shrieking birds. Rush outside to find two magpies terrorising thrush's nest in laurel tree. Magpies repeatedly dive-bomb tree and soar again while thrushes and blackbirds squawk and flutter wings dementedly. Sam finds baby bird on ground and shoos off approaching cats. Sam stands guard over bird while I try to frighten magpies away. Baby bird hops in to undergrowth before we can try to get it back to the nest. Sam and I badly shaken by sudden violent episode and sit down to sad reflections on fragility of life. These are soon overtaken by discussions of food chain and whether we did wrong to interfere. Do not reach conclusion.

About 10.30: Had enough of the realities of life. Load dishwasher. Sam starts to read more about the Plantagenets. He says it makes no sense to him to study history except chronologically. Therefore we started with theory of Big Bang several years ago and have just reached the Plantagenets. I go on to explain to him about Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and read Sam some of the *Knight's Tale* from the original Middle English so he can hear what we think it sounded like. Then together we read the whole tale from Coghill's translation.

About 11.10: Empty washing machine and listen to *Woman's Hour* - Sam disappears upstairs. Put out milk bottles, see friends going off to fill the day before the children come home from school and feel momentarily bone-crushingly lonely. Then remember I am a dissident member of society for educating my child at home and it is my proper business to feel isolated. Nevertheless telephone other home-educating friends to reassure myself that I am not the last person on the planet ... conclude they've "Gone Fishing".

About 11.40: Sam reappears with rather nasty English text book and hefty wedge of papers and retunes radio to Classic F.M.. We then sit and parse complex sentences under headings written out on a grid of Sam's design. I think it is the logic that appeals to him. I daydream, look out of the window a lot and am slightly bored. Grandma (who lives with us) comes in and says that the dustbin men have got "Heil Hitler" written on the rubbish lorry and that it is disgusting and she's going to tell them about it. Sam and I respectfully admire this stance but still rush to back door to eavesdrop harangue. Dustbin men very polite and say that with all the contracting out they have no authority over vandals. Particularly enjoy, "Well, it's a good job Montgomery did". Explain to Sam who Montgomery was and that Vandals were more centrally European than Huns but that he must geographically locate Alamein for himself. Am slightly resentful that I have to make tea for the dustmen (now good friends of my mother) as I am person engaged in serious business of home-education and as such should not be interrupted. However, take this thought back when Sam and I are richly rewarded by dustmen's patter. Go back to parsing sentences.

12.15 p.m.: Sam says he is tired of writing and wants to read the book about Parliament. Have very lively time reading about how it is necessary to pay M.P.s enough so that people without private incomes can afford to enter Parliament but not such a huge salary as to attract "the wrong type in it for the money". Our conversation is very serious and animated until we read line that says "M.P.s are usually more intelligent and better educated than other people...". Total collapse of lesson in helpless laughter. Lunchtime anyway.

1.00: Sam goes outside and practises cricket shots against the wall. I put packets of frozen food in micro-wave and call it cooking lunch. Neighbour calls and says he has just removed remains of dead baby birds from our front lawn. Cats sit licking themselves and ignore my suspicious, questioning stare. Sam looks depressed and asks if animals have souls. Long discussion over lunch about what a soul might be until Sam insists on watching *Neighbours*. After *Neighbours*, Sam wishes to resume discussion on subject of reincarnation at end of which we reach no firm conclusions.

What we do in the afternoons varies every day. One afternoon a week Sam visits his other Grandmother and Grandfather and learns to cook, knit and sew or to use woodworking tools and how to grow vegetables. He also makes large number of objects more usually seen on *Blue Peter* or praised on *The Late Show*. Other afternoons we might go out to visit places of varying degrees of interest and expense or people might visit -

especially nice when it is other home-educating families; we might spend time working in the garden; we might watch an interesting video or if it is a lovely sunny day we might just spend the afternoon outside pottering and talking. If the weather is unpleasant this is typical of our afternoons:

About 2.15: Sam and I learn about air pollution and in particular exhaust gases. Copy very interesting diagram of catalytic converter in order to understand it better. Wonder where we can get hold of one to look at.

3.00: Sam decides to write essay about Henry II and Thomas Becket. Takes a long time, looks in all sorts of books and when he has finished I find it so well-written and presented that I cannot bring myself to comment on one or two odd bits of spelling. Plenty of time for that another day. Sam is pleased. I am pleased. I give him a big cuddle.

Until 4.00: To finish the day I read to Sam from *The Moonstone*. He hates it and says its the worst book I've ever read to him. We have an argument about this which starts off on a literary basis but sadly strays into the field of the care of pet animals, dirty cups not being brought downstairs countered by

allegations concerning the irregular payment of pocket money. Now he says he proposes to draw up a map of South America and becomes deeply engrossed.

Edward - BEST FRIEND OFFICIAL - arrives after a day at school and slumps speechless in a chair. Sam makes mistake on map, scrumples it up, throws it away and quietly starts all over again. Edward eventually says he wouldn't be allowed to do that at school. Sam asks why not. Edward intimates that this is a waste of paper.

4.00 - dark: Sam and Edward and the other local children play football until fifteen minutes after it is too dark to see the ball. They come in, play a computer game, play chess, watch the television, play chess again, watch *Neighbours* again. I do housework.

6.15-7.30 Dinner. Husband tells us bloodcurdling stories of office life and draws our attention to series of pinprick holes in kitchen table which he suspects is woodworm. Decide not to mention geometry lesson again.

8.30: Sam decides to write project about Tsunamis. Lies on floor and starts this.

9.00: Grandma agrees to look after Sam and Sam agrees to look after Grandma so husband and I go to pub.

11.00: Go home. Find several very interesting pages about Tsunamis with instructive illustrations on floor. Watch end of *Newsnight* and *Late Show*.

12.00 a.m.: Go to bed.

12.05: Get up again. Feed cats. Go back to bed again.

Last year, Sam identified a school that he would like to attend and was able to obtain a place there. Once again the decision was made in the light of what would be most appropriate to Sam's needs at a particular time and with Sam taking a very full and equal part in the discussion. Sam says that he has continued to enjoy his education at home but has also enjoyed the prospect of going to a school of his choice. I am saddened

that some people view this change as evidence of the failure of home education or others as an abandonment of a radical approach to education for it is neither - it is an attempt to address the needs of a particular child and an acknowledgement that those needs change. I only wish the choices were greater and more diverse so that all the individual learning needs of all our children can be met all the time. I intend to work towards that goal in any small way I can, but will spend the greater part of my remaining days, freed from the obligations of home educator, to the genetic engineering of a species of self-feeding, vegetarian domestic cat and the rehabilitation of magpies. I expect somebody will tell me that is nonsense too.

Heather Martin

Next, and last, in the series: **A day in the life of ... a Flexi College Tutor**

Book Reviews

Community Need and Further Education

by Frank Reeves and colleagues

Published by Education Now in partnership with Bilston Community College (1993). Price £10 (including p & p).

This book is a fascinating introduction to the complex world of further education, as seen through the eyes of staff at Bilston Community College in the West Midlands. In his introduction, Frank Reeves succinctly describes this complexity, noting that FE colleges provide "a mixed adult and 16-19 year-old student population, some two million in number nationally, with a most diverse curriculum drawn from many different traditions, including general, vocational, and adult education, as well as industrial training". In order to map out the salient features of the Bilston experience, Frank Reeves has assembled a number of diverse articles guided by the theme of meeting community needs.

The first four chapters outline the characteristics of the local community along with the organisation, aims and curriculum response of the college. Attention focusses on national political and economic ramifications, and on local issues, illustrated by relevant statistics. Consider for example the remarkable 71% of students at the college over the age of twenty, giving the lie to the image of FE colleges as mere 16-19 sixth-form surrogates or filled with apprentices on day-release. Indeed this is a major issue in the book: people of all ages are returning to learning in greater numbers, and the nature of that learning is changing radically and swiftly, away from traditional classroom settings towards more flexible and open environments.

With an economy dependent on the kind of heavy industry which sank without trace in the early 1980s, Bilston as a community has more reason than most to be interested in radical change. The College has to address the needs of a local community characterised by high levels of poverty, unemployment, industrial decline, and relatively poor educational standards. There are large Asian and Afro-Caribbean populations with disproportionately high unemployment rates.

Faced with such a situation the College is nothing if not visionary. The main growth in jobs this decade is likely to be amongst professionally qualified people with graduate equivalent status. The implications for working-class students are stark: in 1989, 3 out of 5 students with professional fathers graduated, compared with 3 out of 100 children of manual workers. The College has therefore concluded: "a far greater proportion of the population must receive an effective, general, holistic education and not merely a narrow, occupationally-specific training." This aim is considered to be the minimum requirement in preventing a future in which divisive lines of income distribution, opportunity, and mobility are drawn along fissures initially opened up by unequal educational provision.

One of the College's basic tenets is that of open access: to enable all to benefit from personally tailored learning programmes, regardless of previous educational achievement. This policy has led to an increase in enrolments from 5,500 in 1983 to 18,000 in 1993 and a projection for 1997 of 27,000. The College has also launched a partnership scheme with local schools.

However, for me the most exciting development has been that of learning centres. The idea of such centres offering all students access to a range of flexible learning options is not

new in FE. What is special about Bilston's approach is that the centres are seen as being at the heart of the future of the curriculum rather than as bolt-on additions, catering for particular student needs such as basic literacy skills. In part this move has been financially motivated, as funding requirements began to necessitate a restructuring of the learning environment: fewer teachers for more students. Some colleges have met this challenge by packing more students into traditional classrooms. At Bilston, however, the philosophy has been to develop an infrastructure of learning centres which resembles the pattern of the Open University, where students rely upon the support of a broad range of staff and resource services, but are encouraged to develop autonomy and responsibility in their learning.

In addition, the College has developed a computer network 'METTNET', in which software-based learning programmes are available through over 100 PC workstations in the learning centres 12 hours a day, 6 or 7 days a week. This avenue is particularly exciting as it gives students the chance to gain access to very large areas of information in a very short space of time. It also enables them to make informed choices about course programmes and assessment structures, and to make plans accordingly at their own pace. This has led to groups of students helping one another with projects, developing learning strategies, and even building up more expertise in aspects of the system than staff. This reflects a coherent philosophy of person-centred education underlying the technology and support structures, which has at its base a belief in people's abilities to manage their own learning, and which for me was the enduring message of my reading of the book.

Richard Terry

The School is Us: a practical guide to successful whole-school change

by Linnea Renton
Published by DEP, 801, Wilmslow Road, Didsbury, Manchester, M20 8RG (1993). Price £9.50 (including p & p).

I find this book to be excellent, and revolutionary in the sense that it is the opposite of the Government's philosophy that 'All Schools are Theirs'!

Ten years ago when I was a Fellow of the North West Education Management Centre, I wrote a book of in-service training exercises for primary schools called *Working Together*. It was for the use of all staff and parents in helping them look at their present school practice and enhance it by exploration and discussion. So, I have complete empathy with what this practical guide to successful whole school change wants to achieve, and will achieve in schools which use it.

The School is Us, to quote from its introduction, "enables you to map out your own path through the maze of change. It contains a range of activities designed to help staff in primary, secondary and special schools to clarify their goals, identify the blocks to their progress and work together to achieve successful change".

After the introduction, the book begins with an exercise which asks "Is your school a healthy organisation?". Its declared purpose is "to help staff identify possible blocks to change within their school". This purpose is achieved by staff completing a questionnaire anonymously and honestly, then

discussing and taking action on the outcomes. In my view the process of this activity, like all the book's activities, will be as beneficial as the outcomes.

The follow-on is about **Priorities**. The declared purpose of the first activity is "to leave everyone with a positive feeling" by talking to a colleague about "a moment in your work that went really well" and sharing it with the group. There are other excellent exercises in the Priorities section, including "Setting Your Sights" - "participants can write down thoughts, draw pictures or use other means of capturing your vision, and share it with a partner". Then comes a "World View Brainstorm". To conclude, there are activities to help the group to "reach a consensus in establishing priorities".

The next chapter is called **Procedures**. It has activities about "working together", "making the most of meetings", "helpful and unhelpful roles" and "agendas" (to explore how agendas can contribute to more effective planning and running of meetings). Also, "Encouraging participation" - "I think what tends to happen is that the more vocal people have their say and the quieter ones sit and don't say a great deal. It looks as if the consensus is there, but I have a feeling that sometimes consensus is not". There follow fascinating activities about "making requests and voicing objections", "involving the whole school", "involving outsiders" and "evaluating change".

The final chapter is about **Relationships**. "You may have your schemes of work right; you may have your curriculum balance right; but if relationships between the staff in your school are not right, you are wasting your time. That is the priority for any school". An HMI said that in my hearing. I agree totally, so does *The School is Us*. "This section explores how to build open and honest relationships in the staff-room, looking at areas like dealing with strong feelings and handling criticism. The keynote throughout is a recognition of one's own and other's rights." There are excellent notes for the group about types of behaviour, rights, dealing with criticism assertively and approaches to management.

I must restate that the book is full of positive, real activities for the whole school. I recommend it.

Arthur Acton

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

The conference that never was ... but still might be

Sadly, the Education Now Conference on Creativity planned for 23rd April at Dame Catherine's School had to be cancelled. At short notice Her Majesty's Inspectors informed the school that a full inspection was to be conducted during the week beginning 25th April. Many people had worked hard to organise the event and prepare workshops; our thanks to them all. Their efforts might not have been entirely in vain, though, as Christopher Gilmore, Conference Co-ordinator, is looking into the possibility of holding a version of the conference in London in the Autumn, so watch this space.

As for the inspection, positive verbal feedback has been given and a report on the report will appear next time.

All quiet on the political front

Following Education Now's response to the Labour Party's Consultative Green Paper on Education, a small working group of Directors and Associate Directors drew up a response to the Liberal Democrats' Policy Document (copies can be obtained from the Ed Now office).

Education Unlimited: Update

The proposed consultancy offshoot of Education Now is up and running with its first major event due to take place at Bilston College on October 22nd 1994 (see notice on page 3), when 11 of its 18 consultants will be fielded as workshop leaders. A promotional brochure setting out the unique range of skills, experience and expertise on offer from the consulting team is in its final stages of production and will be ready for launching at the conference. Although we have a comprehensive team in place it is by no means exclusive and should anyone reading the newsletter be interested in joining us then please contact Derry Hannam at the Ed Now address.

New centre news

Significant progress is being made in establishing what is now to be called the *Centre for Personalised Education*. The Centre, housed in smart office and residential accommodation at The Burntlands, Tenbury Wells, will be constituted as a charity. A Steering Group has already been formed, a Board of Trustees is being drawn together and a Centre Director will be appointed. Early phases of implementation include developing a database, creating information materials and mailing facilities, and establishing a 'Helpline'.

Though initiated by Education Now, the Centre will be a freestanding enterprise, operating either as a division of the parent company or as a separate trust. The advice of the Charities Commission is being taken on this matter. Start-up funds are now being sought and the business plan is almost complete. A copy of the initial funding proposal can be obtained from the Ed Now office.

Education Now and the Rise of the Respectability?

Steve Lowden, one of our Associate Directors, has been awarded his Ph.D. by the University of Nottingham for his study of home-based education. He therefore joins **Dr. Julie Webb**, Support Group Member, who obtained her Ph.D. from the Open University a year or two back for her work on families opting to educate at home. **Professor Roland Meighan** was awarded his higher doctorate of D.Soc.Sc. last year for a treatise on 'Key aspects of alternative educational theory and practice'. Lesley Brown, Derry Hannam and Bernard Trafford are amongst those connected with Education Now currently working for their Ph.D.s.

Happy Birthday!

Yes, Happy Birthday to YOU. If you are a Support Group Member, your membership is now a whole year older. Doesn't time fly? Who'd have thought these days that £15 (or £10 unwaged and students) could still buy four issues of a value-packed newsletter and three stimulating Special Reports?

Of course, if you can manage a bit more by way of a 'birthday gift', then Ed Now will receive and use it gratefully. Go on, treat yourself to another year of educational free-thinking. Send your 'birthday money' straight away to the Ed Now office.

P.S. New members always welcome ... details on the back page.

Education or oppression?

He was twelve. The Education Office asked me to tutor him, just for a few weeks, while the doctor investigated the headaches which made his life at school so trying.

I asked him how he felt about school. He said he was quite happy there. Being small he had to put up with a certain amount of physical roughing-up, but he could handle it.

I had agreed with the Office that I should not be paid for the work I did with him and therefore I should feel free to give the National Curriculum exactly the respect it deserves. However, I knew that he would be returning to the classroom fairly soon, so I went up to his school and asked what sort of work he had been doing.

I was given some work-sheets. They had jokey little English exercises on them, sugared with cartoons and puzzles. When we had spent twenty minutes or so on them I realised that I had to make a decision: either I settled down to putting him through hoops devised by the school, with a little of my own input if there happened to be time, or I grasped the nettle and followed my own intuition about his needs.

There really was no choice. I asked him what he was interested in. He said he liked fishing, so we decided to make a book of fish, with pictures and articles about angling. He knew a great deal about it and began to enjoy writing. His essays became longer and longer, as for the first time in his life he wrote to some purpose.

We were doing well, and his parents reported that his general attitude and sense of self-worth were improving markedly. Then the Education Office phoned me one morning to say that the doctor had decided there was really nothing wrong with him. He had to go back to school next day. He burst into floods of tears, and admitted that he had told me not the truth, but what he thought I wanted to hear. In fact, he hated school. He couldn't do the work and was constantly brow-beaten and punished as a result.

Of course, I agreed to continue his education out of school. Significantly, the Office said that I was 'giving him an easy option'. Clearly the basic idea of school as, to quote John Holt, 'the army for kids', is alive and well.

Since then, the boy has grown in confidence and skill. I have no doubt that, for him at least, school was not a positive experience. I can only wonder how many more like him are struggling on unrecognised.

Christopher Shute

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Education Now is an independent, non profit-making, limited company. It publishes books, produces this quarterly newsletter, undertakes research and supports a range of positive educational initiatives. Over the last seven years, its activities have grown to the point where a sub-division has been created to manage a specific aspect of the work: Education Unlimited organises conferences and supplies consultancy.

Education Now has close associations with other groups committed to a similar educational agenda, for example Human Scale Education, University of Birmingham School of Education's International Unit, Education Otherwise and has consistently supported the innovative Dame Catherine's School and Willington Flexi College in Derbyshire. There are established connections with like-minded educationalists in Poland and developing links with groups in the USA and Australia. Most recently Education Now has initiated the Centre for Personalised Education in Tenbury Wells.

Education Now's enterprises are overseen by six Directors and twenty-five Associate Directors (none of whom are salaried or take expenses), including teachers, parents, professors, lecturers, inspectors, headteachers, teacher-educators and consultants.

Education Now's agenda is set out in its Statement of Purpose, a copy of which can be obtained free of charge from the address below. All its activities are designed to promote the key ideas of flexibility, diversity, democracy, choice, equal opportunity and personalisation both in and out of state-provided education. In effect, Education Now has created a network of thinkers and practitioners who believe in some, most or all of these principles.

Education Now's income is provided by book sales, newsletter subscriptions, Support Group subscriptions, donations and proceeds from conferences. The company's work can continue only as funds are available.

Education Now asks all newsletter readers to consider the ways in which they might be involved with us in the future, so ... if you don't already, why not:

- * **Subscribe to the Newsletter: four issues per year**
£10 organisations (three copies supplied)
£6 individuals
- * **Join the Education Now Support Group: you will receive the Newsletter, plus three Special Reports per year ... £15 minimum**
(£10 students and unwaged)
- * **Send a donation: every little bit helps**
- * **Buy our books: send for a list of Books in Print and order form**
- * **Commit yourself to attending the Conference:**
Democratic Education and Education for Democracy
- send for an application form today (see page 3).

If you don't already ... why not?

BOOKS BY EDUCATION NOW

Learning All the Time by John Holt £6-50

...quintessential Holt; readable, accessible, kindly, immensely observant... Professor Philip Gammage

Flexischooling by Roland Meighan £6-00

...a great pearl in his writings....Professor Aleksander Nalaskowski

Never Too Late by John Holt £10-00

I applaud this book heartily....Sir Yehudi Menuhin

Anatomy of Choice in Education by Roland Meighan and Philip Toogood £10-00

...precisely what is needed to clear up present confusion and set coherent, purposeful, productive patterns for the future... Dr.James Hemming

Learner-managed Learning edited by Paul Ginnis £5-00

..learners really start to explore and exercise their potential only as they take charge of their lives.

Democratic Learning and Learning Democracy by Clive Harber £5-00

Democracy is the worst system of organisation - except for all the others! Winston Churchill

Learning From Home-based Education edited by Roland Meighan £5-00

...the rich diversity of the home-based phenomenon is demonstrated..

Issues in Green Education by Damian Randle £5-00

..it certainly succeeds in provoking thought...Chris Hartnett

Sharing Power in Schools: Raising Standards by Bernard Trafford £5-00

...our students are becoming more effective, self-confident and imaginative learners and workers. examination results are improving...

The Charnwood Papers edited by Bob O'Hagan £9-00

....essential reading for community education practitioners

All prices include postage and packing.

"The 1988 Education Act is a very dangerous development for it has politicised schooling in the direction of fascist thinking. It is the worst development in the world at the moment."

Professor Eugenia Potulicka

University of Poznan, Poland

