

# The 'art of co-operation

Ten years ago a small ad hoc group of educational and co-operative professionals in the North West recognised that each of them was struggling to bring co-operative methods into their work. They met to arrange a conference in which teachers in primary, secondary and further education could get together with co-operators working in co-operative development agencies, consumer co-ops and other co-operative forms of organisation. The third critical group were people in education industry link organisations attempting to bring industry and education closer together by designing joint experiential activities to enhance the curriculum.

Little did they know that the Wentwood Woodhouse event, held near Sheffield, would set the pattern for a highly dynamic and important influence on the development of co-operative education in this country. The principles that guided that first occasion still operate today: an emphasis on networking across sectors; sharing and developing new practice; introducing theory; and striving to encourage others committed to similar ideals to participate in these events and join the *Co-operative Education and Learning Network*.

The following year the conference transferred to the *International Co-operative College* as much for its symbolism as connections with co-operative education.

In May, we held *this year's* conference entitled *Co-operative Learning - Maintaining the Momentum*. Teachers still find it very difficult to obtain financial support to attend professional development activities which are assumed not to relate directly to the national curriculum. Present day protestations by the national inspectorate which challenge 'progressive' methods, and the various political parties' references to 'back to basics', do not help. It was therefore a delight that 118 people turned up. Their evaluations and conversations revealed that the atmosphere and activities once again invigorated participants and helped to develop both their practice and their theory.

A new endeavour on this occasion was the invitation to educators and co-operators from across Europe to attend. The 36 European delegates included educationalists in agricultural co-operatives, educational researchers, teachers, officials and members of consumer co-ops, co-operative youth organisations and employees of government agencies. The countries represented were Portugal, France, Italy, Greece, Hungary, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Poland and UK.

They took part in a special introductory programme for 3 days. This enabled participants to exchange information on the co-operative movements in their countries, to identify issues of current concern, to describe links with the education sector and to outline current developments.

This programme, designed by Alan Wilkins (Officer for Member Education at the Co-operative College) and Paul Ginnis (from Education Now, and an Associate of the Co-operative College), included key inputs on the concept of co-operation, underpinning ideals, principles and values (as agreed at the ICA Centennial Congress in Manchester in September 1995), the theory and practice of co-operative learning and its relationship to the future of the co-operative movement.

The International Co-operative College, Stanford Hall, Loughborough

The conference proper opened, for the first time, with a series of parallel keynote presentations from academics and practitioners committed to the promotion of co-operative learning and its consequent benefit in equipping future co-operators with necessary values, personal, interpersonal and intellectual skills.

The conference then followed its traditionally successful format of elective workshops, base groups and plenary sessions. Needless to say, the most avid supporters were still playing co-operative games through to the early hours!

From the perspective of the UK participants the opportunity to meet delegates from across Europe brought a new and highly valued element to the programme - a number had already set up exchanges before the end of the weekend!

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The co-operative learning dimension is founded on the premise that **Co-operation** is a social process in which people 'work together' to achieve common goals and that **Co-operatives** are organisations which enable people to co-operate. A simple concept which is complex in practice.

*"Co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others."* (ICA, 1995)



## Children have a right to be heard and so do parents and teachers

Education Acts over the last decade have given parents the right to be parent governors, to 'express a preference' for their child's school, to receive a Governors' Annual Report, to see the agenda and minutes of Governing Body meetings and the school prospectus, rights to appeal and to make complaints, and rights to a ballot to decide whether their school should become 'grant maintained'. Parents can have access to their children's educational records, are entitled to one written report a year, can withdraw their child from religious education, collective worship and sex education and have to be informed immediately when their child is excluded. They are also invited to a meeting with the registered inspector and to fill in a questionnaire before their school has an OFSTED inspection and are entitled to a summary of the inspection report - and the full report on request - and the Governors' Action Plan afterwards.

Some of this is helpful. However, parents themselves frequently say they would like other information, for example to have more regular and positive reports - either verbal or written - so that they know how well their children are doing and whether there are any problems. (If concerns are dealt with early enough they will rarely become serious.) They would like to know more about the ethos and values of the school, its day-to-day organisation, who the governors and staff are and what they do, what their children are learning and how they can help. Many want to be involved in developing the school's policies on special educational needs, behaviour and religious education.

Methods of communication are important - they need to be many and varied - short and as friendly as possible. If there is an open, honest and trusting relationship between parents and teachers they can discuss important issues at any time, share ideas and learn from each other. This requires time, but is time well spent - children will achieve and behave better - and parents can support them and the school more effectively. Partnership and participation are about asking people for their views, valuing what they have to say and including their suggestions in policies and in the way the school is run.

The **Warnock Report** in 1978 stated that *"the successful education of children with special educational needs is dependent on the full involvement of their parents"*. The 1981 **Education Act** gave parents the right to be involved and informed when their child is being assessed and when a statement is being written. This has been further emphasised in the Special Educational Needs **Code of Practice** (1993) to which all schools must have regard:

*"The parental perspective is particularly important for children under five and the LEA should consider the use of parental guidelines on assessment to encourage parental participation" (5.2)*

*"The relationship between parents of children with special educational needs and the school which their child is attending has a crucial bearing on the child's educational progress and the effectiveness of school based action" (2.28)*

*"Children's progress will be diminished if their parents are not seen as partners in the educational process with unique knowledge and information to impart" (2.28)*

*"The school based stages should therefore utilise parents' own distinctive knowledge and skills and contribute to parents own understanding of how best to help their child" (2.29).*

These are important principles on which relationships with all parents need to be based.

The 1989 **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**, ratified by the UK Government in December 1991, states that *"the best interest of the child shall be the guiding principle of those responsible for his education and guidance. That responsibility lies in the first instance with his parents"*. If parents are to fulfil this responsibility it is important that they are consulted, are involved in determining school policies, are provided with as much information as possible about their children's learning and given guidance about how they can help.

Children too have a right to express their views and to be heard, as the Convention states in **Article 12**. School Councils exist in many secondary and increasingly in primary schools but most young people do not feel their views are taken seriously. They are rarely consulted on the curriculum; if they were there would be less disaffection and truanting from particular lessons. Their views and those of their parents should not be seen as a threat by schools but as a form of evaluation about the way the school is working and its effectiveness in providing education for its students.

The Government has often put a straight jacket on schools which enables little innovation and development. The most positive change has been the requirement on schools to have a school development plan. Although this is not enshrined in law it is a useful tool for schools to use in conjunction with the school aims - and both need to be regularly reviewed, monitored and evaluated by the Governing Body in consultation with all school staff, students and parents.

Professionals who work with children and their parents need to be aware that every family is different and has different needs. In order to meet these needs they have to spend time listening to parents and children and to be prepared to adapt their provision accordingly. Some training may be necessary. It is often helpful for parents and professionals to have joint training so that they can better understand each other's perspectives; fear often acts as a barrier to good communication - parents' fears result from their own school experience and teachers' are often fearful that parents will be critical of their work. A better understanding on both sides will be beneficial for all, particularly the children.

Parents are their children's first educators; they usually know them best because they initially spend more time with them than any other adult. Parents' and teachers' views of the same child may be very different. Parents may not show that they care in ways professionals might expect. This does not detract from the fact that in research interviews all parents *say* that they care and want to help their children to do well.

Some parents lose confidence through the process of having children and again when they find that what their children are learning is so very different from what they themselves were taught. Often they missed out on certain areas of their education simply because they were not interested at the time. In addition the speed of change is increasing rapidly and adults frequently find themselves less competent than their children especially in areas such as information technology. We have to find ways of meeting educational needs through discussion and debate and not by determining for others what it is they should be doing. Learning is for life and parents, teachers and children can and should be enjoying it together.

*Melian Mansfield*

## The Authoritarian View of Education

## *"You will do it our way"*

In **authoritarian education**, in its various forms, has one person, or a small group of people, making and implementing the decisions about what to learn, when to learn, how to learn, how to assess learning, and the learning environment often before the learners are recruited as individuals or meet as a group. As an exclusive method, it is favoured by totalitarian regimes because it produces the conformist, lockstep mentality.

**Discipline** is ... learning to obey the rules and instructions decided by the management.

**Knowledge** is ... essentially, information contained in the traditional subjects.

**Learning** is ... mostly, listening to subject experts and reading their books.

**Teaching** is ... usually, formal instruction by trained or approved adults.

**Parents** are ... expected, for the most part, to be admiring spectators to the experts.

**Resources** are ... predominately, subject textbooks and subject teachers trained in mass instructional methods.

**Location** is ... a central place (school) where the experts (teachers) can easily be assembled together cheaply, with large groups of pupils.

**Organisation** is ... usually in classes formally arranged for whole class instruction.

**Assessment** is ... mostly, by tests of how well pupils can repeat the subjects.

**Aims** are ... essentially, to produce mini-academic subject experts, with those who fail in this enterprise, required to be useful in industry/commerce.

**Power** is ... in the hands of an appointed individual or a small management team who impose decisions on others.

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. They do not have to re-invent the culture, but interact with it. As an exclusive method it is favoured by liberal or libertarian regimes.

**Discipline** is ... that form known as self-discipline.

**Knowledge** is ... essentially, the repertoire of learning and research skills needed to cope with new ideas.

**Learning** is ... mostly, self-directed activity and personal research to gain experience, information or skills.

**Teaching** is ... usually, self-teaching; the purpose of other teachers is to teach you how to teach yourself better.

**Parents** are ... expected to be part of the team supporting the learner's growth in learning skills and confidence.

**Resources** are ... predominately, first-hand experiences as the basis of personal research backed up by any other resources seen to be appropriate.

**Location** is ... anywhere that useful or interesting learning can take place.

**Organisation** is ... often in individual learning stations in institutional settings, but remains flexible to match the variety of learner-managed tasks.

**Assessment** is ... commonly, by self-assessment using any tests, devised by the learner or by others, that are seen to be appropriate to the situation.

**Aims** are ... essentially, to produce people with the confidence and skills to manage their own learning throughout their entire lives.

**Power** ... is seen as devolved to individuals who are seen as morally responsible for the exercise of their autonomy.

## The Democratic View of Education

*"We did it our way"*

## The Autonomous View of Education

*"I did it my way"*

In **democratic education**, the learners as a group have the power to make some, most, or even all of the key decisions, since power is shared and not appropriated in advance by a minority of one or more. Democratic countries might be expected to favour this approach, but such educational practices are rare and often meet with sustained, hostile and irrational opposition.

**Discipline** is ... democratic discipline by working co-operatively to agreed rules and principles.

**Knowledge** is ... essentially the skills and information needed by the group to maintain and develop its learning.

**Learning** is ... activity agreed by the group to gain experience, information or particular skills working either together or reporting-back tasks delegated to individuals.

**Teaching** is ... any activity, including instruction, that the group judges will lead to effective learning.

**Parents** are ... seen as part of the resources available and potentially as partners in the learning group.

**Resources** are ... anything appropriate to the group's research and learning including people, places, experiences.

**Location** is ... anywhere that the learning group can meet to pursue effective learning.

**Organisation** is ... commonly in groups where democratic dialogue and co-operative learning can take place.

**Assessment** is ... by any form of assessment using any tests, devised by the learners or by others, that are seen to be appropriate to the situation.

**Aims** are ... essentially, to produce people with the confidence and skills to manage their own life-long learning within a democratic culture.

**Power** is ... shared in the group who are seen as responsible both individually and collectively for its exercise.

*"Democracy is the best political system we have developed so far. There have been no wars between truly democratic, liberal countries this century. democracy will come about because people want it."*

**Aung San Sou Kyi**

after her release from house arrest in Burma,  
in a Radio interview 12.7.95

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

**John Dewey**

*"Soviet children normally demonstrate better results in mathematics and science..."* than their counterparts in UK and elsewhere, Froumin tells us in **Creating and Managing the Democratic School** edited by Judith Chapman, Isak Froumin and David Aspin 1995, London: Falmer Press £13-95 ISBN 0-7507-0397-0 (p. 206).

Nevertheless, he and his fellow writers want to abandon the authoritarian school, curriculum, pedagogy and testing that is responsible for these results, because they deliver the wrong kind of person. They produce the servile, authority-dependent outlook, and people good at selected mental tricks, rather than the democratic, life-long learning and flexible mentality.

Neither the Russian nor the Australian scholars writing in this book wants to follow the British reforms of the last few years, for they see them as totally misguided and counter-productive.

## Developing Democratic Education

The Green Party's Education Policy Group was good enough to part-fund my attendance at this conference. Now I must sing for my supper by passing on to the group some, at least, of my personal highlights.

The keynote speech *Beyond Authoritarian Schooling* by Dr **Lynn Davies** (University of Birmingham) was full of new insights, including:

- **Courtesy** - school pupils are rarely treated with the common courtesies considered to be the right of human beings
- **Numbers** - democracy doesn't require small classes to succeed. Dr Davies has seen democratically-run classes of 70 and authoritarian classes of 15
- **Entitlement and equal opportunities** - the right-wing have hi-jacked these ideas, making them part of an individualistic, sink-or-swim programme which ignores responsibilities and mutual support
- **Resistance to democracy within schools** - why? This needs investigation
- **Performance indicators for democracy in schools** - we should be able to "see democracy at 100 yards" and see development over time (Dr Davies presents a provisional set of such indicators in the 'book of the conference', *Developing Democratic Education*, Clive Harber ed., 1995, Education Now Books)
- **Democracy is** - the opportunity to challenge and change the way things are done: it should be transparently clear how to participate
- **Where does democracy start?** Can it be imposed? Or can it be produced by 'white-anting' (nibbling away from underneath)?

This last question was partly answered by **Lesley Browne** in her workshop *Democratising Classrooms*. Lesley teaches in a comprehensive school run on authoritarian lines. She is nibbling away at this structure in one small corner of the curriculum, the A level Sociology group for which she is responsible. (An account of this work can also be found in Clive Harber's book).

So, it seems possible to begin to democratise classrooms and schools, but is it worth the effort? Schools are already on their way out, according to **Roland Meighan** in the final session *Flexischooling and Democratic Education*. The need for mass education has passed, like the need for the town crier and the horse and cart. Subject teachers were necessary once upon a time when there were few books and other resources. Now that at least 30 different learning styles have been recognised and at least seven different types of intelligence described; now that there is increasing need for adaptability in a rapidly-changing society; and more than ever a need for lifelong learning; now that we live in an information-rich society - who needs school? School has become a barrier to information, the National Curriculum being partly to blame.

The discussion following this rousing speech revealed an audience largely convinced by the arguments, but in disagreement about the speed of the envisaged collapse. One boldly prophesied the end of schooling on 28 December 1999 (!), but others felt that schools will be with us long enough to dominate the lives of children for some time to come. Therefore, any effort towards helping school students to have some control over their own education is worthwhile.

## Learning Democracy out of School

Last year one of the parents whose children I help to educate told me that her sons felt constricted by having to study at home all the time. I offered to let them come to my house once a week, to do their studying and get any help they wanted from me.

The idea was taken up enthusiastically by a group of four homeschooled boys who constituted themselves the *Tamworth Learning Collective*. They meet every Monday in my house and spend their time working on whatever happens to interest them.

A group like this works in more than one way. Of course the opportunity to finish projects and to get individual help from me is valuable in itself, but from an educational point of view the experience it offers of democratic life and discipline is probably worth even more.

From the beginning I have always insisted that the group runs itself. The boys are all pleasant and reasonable, so there have been no real conflicts to resolve, but they have taken responsibility for funding themselves and for organising their meetings. I expect to see them develop a wider sense of what people can achieve through co-operation.

I asked them to write an account of their feelings about homeschooling and collective work. I left them to decide what was important to them. The following was their response.

### Home education

We all commented that we had freedom to do other things and weren't obliged to do subjects that we weren't interested in. Though the important subjects were made interesting for us e.g. Maths, English, History, Geography, Science, Sports.

### Sports

After school hours we meet together to do different activities consisting of swimming, rugby, football and fishing.

### Disadvantages

As many home-taught children will say, a big disadvantage is that when you are walking down the street people always question you as to why you are not at school. Another disadvantage is that we meet fewer people of our own age. There is also a lack of sporting facilities.

### Other advantages

Our tutor does not require us to wear any uniform, unlike school. Another good thing about being taught at home is that you have one-to-one tuition and there is less pressure when you are unsure.

*Christopher Shute, James, Nathan, Aaron and Ben*

*Third in the series of practical learning activities*

## Value Continuum

**This values clarification strategy was devised by Sidney Simon. It encourages people to express and explore honest views in public. It is just one example of how democratic, co-operative principles can be translated into classroom or living room practice. Suitable for groups from 5 to 35 in number.**

#### HOW?

- Arrange the group in a semi-circle. Across the open end of the semi-circle ask people to imagine a line and place a chair at each end.
- Introduce the issue to be discussed (e.g. vegetarianism) and outline two opposing positions. Do this by sitting on one chair and speaking as if you held this extreme view: *"I never ever eat meat. Meat-eating is an abomination - unhealthy, unnatural and uneconomical. I campaign day in and day out to persuade others to give up this immoral habit. A law should be passed banning the eating of meat, on pain of death"*. Then ask someone to sit on the other chair: *"I am a devotee of meat ..."*. (This bit was for demonstration purposes only. Both chairs are now vacated.)
- Ensure that the two views are extreme and balanced - one is not obviously more right (in the leader's eyes) than the other. Explain that everyone's real view will fall somewhere on the sliding scale between the two chairs.
- Explain the rules: *"You choose whether to participate or not. The person who is on the line is guaranteed that her view will be listened to. There will be no agreeing or disagreeing (there will be time for that later) - no reaction, verbal or otherwise at this stage. Honesty is expected"*.
- The leader sits down in the semi-circle with the group and anyone may begin by taking her chair and sitting in a position on the continuum that represents her view. The volunteer is expected to say a few words to the group and then stays in her chosen position.
- The process is repeated, with volunteers going out and speaking one after another. If one person's view is identical to an earlier speaker, she can sit in front of him. The process is likely to come to a natural end.

#### APPLICATIONS

- To discuss any issue about which there can be polarised, but equally plausible, views:
  - \* Religious, Personal, Social, Moral, Political Education
  - \* Science: ethical dilemmas e.g. genetics, energy
  - \* History: questions of judgement e.g. was Catherine the Great an enlightened despot?
- To assess what members of the group know about a topic before it is begun (*I know absolutely everything there is to know about this topic ... I know nothing at all about it*).
- To evaluate a learning activity (*This was the best possible way we could have learned this topic ... This method was completely useless, it had no merit at all*).

#### VARIATIONS

- If group members are reluctant to speak in front of the rest, they might just *stand* in the positions that represent their views.
- When all or most people are 'on the line', you can 'break' the line in half and make two debating teams. The teams face each other (as in Parliament) and take turns to make points. The aim is to persuade people to change sides. In the process of course, the finer points of the arguments will emerge.

*Paul Ginnis*

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# The Trailblazers ... part six ... Charles Handy

**Charles Handy is an independent writer, broadcaster and teacher. He has been an oil executive, an economist, a professor at the London Business School, the Warden of St. George's House in Windsor Castle and the Chairman of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufacture and Commerce.**

In *The Age of Unreason* Charles Handy's concern is change and, in particular, the way we may approach the challenges facing us, as individuals and as a society, in a rapidly changing world. The ideas put forward are challenging, but if change is approached creatively and courageously there are firm grounds for optimism. *"The future is not inevitable. We can influence it if we know what we want it to be."*

In the chapter 'Reinventing Education' Handy insightfully analyses the features of modern institutional education which militate against a creative, skilful approach to change and presents practical ways forward for consideration. Handy argues that *"if changing is really learning... then education has to become the single most important investment that any person can make in their own destiny."*

The extracts printed below are from Handy's speech 'Thinking Differently About Education' given to a symposium organised by the America-European Community Association Trust in conjunction with the National Commission on Education ... *Education: Direction of Future Policies* (Leeds Castle, Kent, 19-21 March 1993).

**Reading:** Charles Handy *The Age of Unreason* (1990), Arrow Books and, *The Empty Raincoat* (1994), Hutchinson.

## Thinking Differently About Education

### Workers not products

We have got to stop thinking of our students as products. I once did a study of schools as organisations. I said that the perfect model for the school was a factory, the only trouble was that the students were not the workers but the products - raw material going through various processes, stamped, inspected for quality, with only certified goods going out. What we failed to do was recycle the rejects. What an exciting thing it is to see schools where the students are actually treated as the workers, not the products; where they work in groups, solving problems ...

### Learning abroad

I would also like every child in Europe at the age of thirteen to spend at least one semester in a school in another country. It wouldn't cost anything except the travel. This should not just be for a few privileged children but for everybody. If you want to understand that your nation is part of something bigger, you have to live abroad, and do it early.

### Multiple intelligences

I want us to understand that everybody is intelligent; it is just that they are intelligent in different ways. Howard Gardner lists seven "multiple intelligences". I would list around ten: factual, linguistic, analytical, spatial, practical, musical, physical,

intuitive, inter-personal; the list goes on. The point is that some of us are lucky enough to have four or five intelligences; I

believe that everybody has at least one, and the primary job of education is to find out what that one is, and to foster it, because then you will feel that you have capabilities and have something to contribute. We send half of our children out of school feeling that they are basically stupid.

### The cycle of discovery

You will know about the cycle of discovery: it starts with curiosity and is followed by ideas, trial, review and reflection ... The implicit and secret message I got at school was that all the problems in the world had already been solved; that somebody somewhere knew the answer, of not the teacher, then the writer of the textbook. When I left school, every time I met a problem I would look for the expert. It never occurred to me that nobody knew the answer to a lot of these problems. But in those days the world was an organised system ... now there is space in the system and schools, universities, businesses are just beginning to realise this. We can kill curiosity so easily and give people no space to test out their ideas, no room to reflect or review ...

### Action learning

We have a lot to learn from the place where most education in this country happens and where a great deal of money is spent: inside the work organisation. When I started teaching managers 20 years ago, we tried to teach the way I had been taught. We put them in classrooms, I lectured, they wrote it down. I tested. ... But managers are very difficult students; they didn't tolerate this for very long. They said: you are giving us interesting information, but it doesn't in any way relate to the questions we come in with ... Follow us into our organisations, we will tell you the questions, you help us find some solutions, we will test them out, you can help us review them. Action learning, in effect.

### Standards which all can reach

Why are we the only country in the world except Russia that makes every child take the same examination at age sixteen? If everybody took their driving test on their seventeenth birthday we would probably have half as many good drivers and the others not allowed to drive at all - safer roads, maybe, but a lot of frustrated people. What I want to see are 'standards' which, like music tests, you take when you know that you can pass. ...

### A totally different kind of education

In ten years' time, everybody will have a telephone so small, so cheap, that they will carry it in their breast pocket.. The telephone will belong to the person, not the place. In 20 years' time they will have their own computer, television and fax modem; they won't need to go to school half the time; you won't need to use the teacher to convey the information ... The role of the teacher is going to be to manage the learning of a whole lot of independent individuals; all of which implies a totally different mind-set. It will need a totally different kind of education ... The same set of buildings may be there, but many different things will go on in them. Also be brave. Have the courage to create things that you won't live to see; don't underestimate the power of ideas. Then maybe we shall undo some of the harm I think we have done.

**Update: Home-based education USA**



Our roving correspondent, Professor Philip Gammage, returned to England a few weeks ago, after a two month long assignment teaching and researching in Virginia and Illinois. The Superintendent of the Peoria School Board, Illinois, asked him if he was aware of the remarkable growth of home-schooling. Philip was able to demonstrate a good working knowledge of the phenomenon - one of the benefits of being an Education Now Associate Director is that you are likely to be well-briefed on such matters! The Superintendent told Philip that 3% of the school-age population was now engaged in home-based education in his region. More and more arrangements for flexi-time were being developed to allow opting in and out of schools at will.

The figure of 3% is startling. When home-schooling, as it is known in USA, began to grow in the 1980s, it was confidently predicted by the experts that it would never grow to more than 1%, given that this was such an 'eccentric' idea and so demanding on the parents, who really had to love their children a lot to undertake such a task. Apparently more USA parents love their children enough than the experts believed!

On the current growth rate, it is now possible that as much as 10% of the school-age population could be experiencing home-based education, either full-time or flexi-time, by the end of 1999. The confident predictions of the experts of a 1% maximum is already just another bad guess to be consigned to the garbage-bins of history.

The central research question about home-based education has changed. In the 1970s it was about whether children who were educated at home would be able to match their school-based counterparts. Since about 1985, however, the question has been replaced by another: *"Why is home-based education is so remarkably successful, and what is it about present models of schooling that holds back the learners attending them full-time, both in learning achievements and in social and emotional maturity?"* My own further question has been *"What can we learn from the efficiency and effectiveness of home-based education to construct a new and better learning system?"*

This question leads me on to the **Green Party's Education Policy Group's booklet** *"Light Years Ahead"*. Having read the other Party Political reports on 'education' - by which they all mean regimental and coercive forms of schooling - the Green Party effort is easily the pick of the crop, and is, indeed, simply light years ahead of the others. It comes out firmly in favour of education rather than indoctrination. I use John Holt's simple but profound test here, that indoctrinators want to work **on** children, educators want to work **with** children. The Green Party booklet declares:

*"... education should not be controlled by central or local government, but by the learner. People should be able to draw from a wide range of learning opportunities in their local community and have access to the information and resources which they need." (p. 9)*

The features of a Green Party approach include the following:

- *Protect small schools and respect their crucial role in the community ...*
- *Promote democratic practices within educational establishments and use mini-schooling to create more human-scale schools ...*
- *Inform all parents of their right to educate their children home and provide support and guidance to home educators.*
- *Make flexi- or part-time schooling more accessible, offering parents and children the opportunity to use school facilities.*

- *Provide a range of communal resources which could be available through local resource centres, where resources could be pooled for use by individuals, school and community groups." (p.10)*

The booklet not only contains a vision for the future learning system, but has a series of recommended actions as temporary reliefs. The aim of these 'what can be done now' sections is to try and operate damage limitation within the present totally obsolete mass schooling system. Futurists like myself are often portrayed as being indifferent to the sufferings generated by the present system. I plead 'not guilty', for I heartily applaud the efforts of those trying to rescue bits from the mass schooling wreck, **provided that these efforts are seen clearly as mere temporary expedients as we work to create the next learning system**, which has to be based on quite different principles to those that have created the current mess.

I perhaps need to state at this point that I am not a member of the Green Party, or indeed any political party for that matter, and my observations are the personal judgements of an educational freethinker.

*Roland Meighan*

**Rob Wade** of Education Otherwise writes that a recent change in the regulations is helpful to home-based educators. It means that if your child is attending school but you want to begin home-educating, the procedure has been simplified. All you have to do is to write to the head teacher explaining clearly that you are going to undertake home-based education. The head has to inform the LEA and it is then up to the LEA to decide what enquiries it needs to make about your educational arrangements. In the unlikely event of the LEA disapproving of your programme, you will be able to defend it in court using appropriate expert witnesses. (You do not need to follow the dreary National Curriculum as a home-educator, as you probably know. This puts home-educators in the same category as those who live in Scotland and those buying private school education. Only those attending the state schools of England and Wales have to put up with the National Curriculum.)

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