

by a classroom assistant in role as a newspaper reporter.

# Trying to get it write

This four-lesson writing project at a primary school in Birmingham arose out of a friendship between two colleagues and a shared enthusiasm for stories. Christine was a teacher of Year 1 children (six year olds). I was an Advisory Teacher. We met as tutors on the Open University's Specialist Teacher Assistants Course. Our different but complementary styles sparked off a set of intriguing questions:

- how can we meet the National Curriculum 'story requirements' and do much more besides? For example,
- how can young children come to understand that stories carry meaning about the lives of people?
- how can we promote independent writing without losing the quality of construction skills?
- what creative processes can be stimulated so that children feel genuinely motivated to write?

As we began to plan lessons we asked ...

- what if we devise tasks based on Anthony Gregorc's four learning styles (Abstract Sequential, Abstract Random, Concrete Sequential, Concrete Random)?
- what if we group the children according to learning styles rather than by notions of reading and writing capability?
- will this improve their engagement with tasks?
- will this encourage co-operation and skill-sharing?

**Lesson one.** Drama. The lesson begins with the teacher drawing a giant's house on a hill with a village below - on a large piece of paper on the floor. The children become involved as villagers planning a big annual event. They choose a football tournament. The giant owns many strange and unusual pets. The children invite people from other villages to come and take part in the tournament, but the invitation is refused. They have heard of the giant's pets! After some persuasion, two or three villagers agree.

Preparations get underway, but one of the giant's pets escapes and heads towards the village. The children are asked what to do. There's a great deal of tension; the children know that if the other villagers find out, they won't come to the tournament. So, they hunt down, kill and bury the animal. Shortly after doing this, Teacher-in-Role as the giant arrives in tears having lost his beloved pet. Many children offer to help find it!

**Lesson two.** Whole class discussion about the story followed by an explanation of the different types of work on offer.

*Group 1* will write a letter in role as the giant to his mother or friend explaining what has happened.

*Group 2* will create a Role-on-the-Wall of the giant and coach one member of the group to be hot-seated by the rest of the class.

*Group 3* will work in role as villagers and will be interviewed

*Group 4* will create speech bubbles for the giant and for one of the villagers.

At the end of the second lesson the whole class meets together to share the work. The most successful group is Group 2. One child is hot-seated as the giant and does an excellent job.

**Lesson three.** Happens almost spontaneously. After lunch the letter writers ask if they can have another go. During this session they complete a letter from the giant to his mother and two or three children write replies back. The group making speech bubbles suddenly becomes independent and instead of struggling over every word just tries to get the meaning. They now want to use the speech bubbles to act out a scene for the class at the end of the lesson. The group preparing the Role-on-the-Wall uses the brainstormed words and writes a description of the giant. The group interviewed as villagers draws pictures of what happened and writes an account.

**Lesson four.** The children gather together for discussion. The teacher suggests they might do a frieze of their story on the wall. The children decide which bits of writing and drawing should go where. So the story is produced in sequence with a beginning, middle and end. It has more than one main character, a well described setting and a clearly defined plot. In other words the requirements of the National Curriculum are fully met ... and much more besides?

*When the children were first divided into working groups they were disorientated - they were not at their usual reading and writing tables. When I quietly asked a child what the normal arrangements were, she whispered that different group colours related to different levels of ability. Many teachers, of course, assume that the use of colour codes disguises this selection process.*

*The implications are clear. First, crude notions of ability need to be scrapped and replaced with the more accurate concepts of multiple-intelligence and diverse learning styles. Secondly, these ideas need to determine classroom management, with groups of children forming and reforming for different tasks according to different purposes at different times. Only when such flexibility is the norm will children themselves get the idea that they possess*

many types of ability and intelligence. These messages-in-practice are the foundations stones of self-esteem and independent learning.

Further, the children in this project didn't know how to hot-seat, or do Role-on-the-Wall, or prepare speech bubbles, or conduct an interview. In fact they learned these skills quite quickly, but had to do so alongside the main task of constructing a story. The two agendas detracted from each other. Again, the implication is clear. Children, even as young as six, can be taught a range of learning techniques - deliberately, discretely and systematically. Only as their tool-kit of learning strategies grows can they become increasingly independent learners. (Christine said she wished she had known about these ways of working years ago.)

As these practices become established, children can be offered choice. In this project we allocated them to groups fearing that the habit of going with friends or going into familiar 'ability' groups would not be broken overnight. There is no reason why young children cannot be introduced to new habits - habits of conscious choice and reflection through the use of a plan-do-review cycle on a regular basis. It just takes time.

In the end none of these children had written a complete story by themselves. They had all contributed to a 'shared experience' of writing. Teachers who structure learning activity in this way need to resist the 'traditional' expectations held by many parents and colleagues (and often formed by children themselves in early years) to have individual written outcomes, as if they alone guarantee that learning has occurred.

Yes, there was a great deal of enthusiasm. The children were highly motivated by the dramatic context and engaged with the tasks. They used technical language and understood the human meaning of the story they had created. Given an energetic teacher who is curious about teaching and learning possibilities and given 'permitting circumstances' (to quote Birmingham's Chief Education Officer) created by a risk-taking Head, exciting development is possible. These, though, are the minimum conditions required to make any kind of progress given the force of accepted norms. But then, as John Holt says "**Real education does not quieten things down it stirs them up**".

Sharon Ginnis

### The Cupboard

The next edition of News and Review will launch a new section called *The Cupboard*. It will review a range of educational resources. It is hoped that readers will write in and inform us of resources which they have found particularly useful so that others may benefit.

The resources could range from teaching packs that have recently come on the market, useful Internet addresses, photopacks or ideas for educational visits. We would like our readers to send their suggestions to the editors. These do not have to be lengthy articles; we believe that many of the best ideas are simple. Readers may suggest items to review or review existing materials themselves. We would welcome all contributions. I see this as the start of a resource bank that will become an invaluable starting point for us all.

Lesley Browne

## WHY I DREAD THE ANNUAL SCHOOL PRIZE-GIVING

**I shouldn't dread it, I know. It is, after all, the pinnacle of the school calendar. The traditional Autumnal**

**intemperance. The Summer exam results have been digested and the meal of achievement is served in as much splendour as can be mustered in these times of financial austerity. A chance for the school to re-affirm its community credentials and celebrate the best of its young charges. And, at a more familial level, the opportunity to play the proud parent and to savour an explosion of nostalgic memories. But, for all this, it is an ordeal that I could well do without!**

After deciding to ignore the gesticulations of an animated teacher directing the traffic, we draw to a halt on the edge of the tarmac (my wife and I, with our youngest daughter in tow).

As we make our way along the corridor noisy chatter spills over from ante-rooms where selected guests are clustered, enjoying their complimentary fare before the main event. No doubt there are the traditionalists, vigorously espousing the merits of a liberal education. But their voices are probably drowned by a more pragmatic and vociferous group. One which asserts the function of education to be the provision of a suitable labour supply. So long, that is, as their own sons and daughters are free to pursue their education, unencumbered by such harsh economic realities. Segregation, streaming and directive career counselling are inevitable concomitants to this particular dualism.

We enter the hall flanked by conspicuously clean and tidy pupils exuding exemplary manners and a credit to the standards of grooming and decorum of the school. I can't help thinking that for every one of these pristine specimens there are a hundred scruffy urchins, crammed on the couch at home, glued to Eastenders and engaging in a rather different cultural experience. Still, not everyone can be chosen. That's comprehensive education for you. Or rather, what it has become since competitive and commercial values have been inculcated into a largely compliant establishment. The great educational debate consigned to an anachronism in favour of more concrete and instrumental objectives.

As the headteacher climbs the steps onto the stage everyone is upstanding. Parents presumably taking their cue from their siblings, or else succumbing to an involuntary Skinnerian response inculcated into their sub-conscious long ago. The commanding officer of an elite brigade could not have wished for a more synchronised acknowledgement to his individual authority.

Finally replete, the special guests join the congregation and the ceremony begins. The task of the opening address is left to the Chairman of Governors. Rather an anti-climax due to a microphone malfunction. It sounds like "*rhubarb, rhubarb, rhubarb*".

The acoustic fault is rectified in time for the headteacher's speech. A bullish opening proclaiming success by numbers. Yes! The school is full to capacity and has had to turn away an endless stream of disappointed pupils. (Capacity in this case means around 2000.) This is quickly followed by a strong commitment to individuality. The paradox apparently eluding him. And then the expression of pride. Pride in the pupils. Pride in the staff, and the governors, and the caretakers (who do such a vital job) and in the P.T.A ( who are kindly on hand with tea and biscuits ) and the Education Authority and in ..., well, in everyone it seems. So much pride that the warm glow emanating from the stage can almost be felt at the back of the hall and may even be radiating into the adjoining streets.

Building into a Churchillian crescendo he makes mention of all those pupils who are not in attendance and of which he is equally proud. Like those on the battlefield they have fallen but are not forgotten. Indeed he might have added that without them there could be no prize-winners because, of course, for there to be winners there had also to be losers too.

And then, the piece de resistance. The level of achievement, as demonstrated by exam results is, apparently, the highest ever obtained in the school's history. One has to admire how quickly the statistical ingenuity of head teachers has advanced since the mandatory publication of league tables.

After a pleasant musical interlude from the ensemble the prize-giving begins. The pupils participate with an impeccable balance of commitment and respectful restraint. The audience maintains the obligatory applause whilst the chosen tramp across the stage to receive their honours, displaying a mix of embarrassment and gratitude. This ritualistic behaviour performing an essential function in cementing the mores of the school. Conveying in unambiguous terms that educational accomplishment is bestowed by those in authority.

It is left to the head of the Education Authority to close the proceedings. His speech is memorable only for what it omits. No mention of underfunding, low morale, increasing truancy or violence. No. All, it seems, is well with the world of education. The centrepiece of his delivery comprises light-hearted anecdotes surrounding his two children and their university antics. As he puts it "A timely warning to parents who have yet to experience this phase of their children's journey through the education system". It seems not to occur to him that the majority of pupils will fail to achieve such heady aspirations. Even those who overcome the hurdle of academic entry may find their efforts thwarted by their paucity of finance. Equality of opportunity, yes, but those with more money are entitled to a little more equality than the rest.

We finally shuffle out into the crisp night air and travel home, safe in the knowledge that things will unfold in the same way next time. The certain preservation of the re-invigorated status quo, with its natural order and privilege, says much about our education system, but little about learning, development and change. And even less about individual freedom and equality of opportunity.

Tim Hart

### Congratulations ... Dr. Bernard Trafford

Headteacher Bernard Trafford has been awarded his doctorate from the University of Birmingham for his research on democracy in schools which will feature in his workshop at the 'Democratic Discipline, Democratic Lives' conference in May. Bernard has a long association with *Education Now* and, amongst other things, helped formulate our *Statement of Purpose*.

### Selection - Another Perspective

In the classic Western, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Vallance*, a small group of cow-hands arrive at the town's newly formed school. They join in alongside the children.

Eventually, one of the group explains to the lawyer/teacher running the class that they have been sent there by the ranch boss who has been very taken by the idea of schooling. The boss has been won over by the arguments of the lawyer/teacher, and therefore requires some of the staff to attend. (One wonders how this compulsory schooling for adults would go down today.)

Since the ranch could not run if all the cowhands attended, selection was needed. The spokesman-cowhand explains that they decided that the fairest way was to cut a pack of cards. **The losers would be those selected to go to school.** Is this the model of selection appropriate for our time? The National Lottery equipment could be used for a modest fee.

### The academic habit - alive and kicking democracy

Roland Meighan's piece *Academic Schooling - the End Game*, is a superb indictment of the academic curriculum, the authoritarian school, and the shrinking 'clerk' economy they supply (*Education Now News and Review* No.13). While reading it I was reminded of a 'small business' club talk I recently attended. It was billed as a way of increasing creativity, problem-solving and effectiveness at work. The audience politely sat there, responding on cue to questions by the speaker. Well into the talk - when I had got close to bursting point - one member of the audience queried: "I've been listening for about 40 minutes, but cannot see how it can help my work." Thank God! At least one person present had slipped the net of our authoritarian schooling's consequences.

The speaker was an ex-school teacher launching as a business consultant. She delivered the talk with all the superiority, arrogance and lack of self-doubt that is characteristic of those used to (and feel they have the right to receive) submission and acquiescence from their audience. She was quite unprepared, therefore, and quite unwelcoming of the criticism. Like all autocrats, she was unable to deal with it honestly and constructively, and saw it as a personal attack. Despite all the talk about student-centred learning, and the semblance of involvement through practical activities and games, the one-way, top-down academic approach exemplified in this instance is deep-rooted and habitual.

Sue Jones

## Education for Creativity

## Report on the November conference

**Education Now conferences are always challenging because they bring together people who have taken the risk of thinking radically about education, and allow them to confront the implications of their reasoning. *Education for Creativity*, which took place on 9th November at the Co-operative College was no exception.**

**Anna Craft**, whose experience encompasses school-teaching, University work and teacher-training, brought to the Conference a clear picture of what ordinary children can achieve when their educators give them the right working environment. She described two youngsters whose creative ability came to light entirely outside the classroom. The focus of their creativity was almost completely ignored by their schools because it did not tie up with the priorities of the National Curriculum. The truly relevant parts of their make-up, the skills and talents which would enrich their lives when every trace of the National Curriculum had been forgotten, could only thrive outside the classroom. The conditions which favoured creativity were almost impossible to establish in the regulated, insensitive machinery of compulsory schooling.

Anna's seminar developed ideas about the environment in which creativity flourishes. Without freedom to think laterally, to leave the confines of adult-imposed thought, people become satisfied with conventional ways of expressing themselves. They need to be assured that diversity is not the enemy of good learning, but its indispensable precondition. Equally, they need time in which to allow ideas to form themselves and grow.

The participants profited from a variety of **workshops**, some focused on the theoretical basis of creative education, and others allowing practical work. The one which involved a number of teddy-bears looked particularly engaging, but the more formal seminars also generated valuable ideas and debate.

Participants from other countries, particularly Africa, shared a common sense that the future will be determined by the sort of minds which come out of the school environment. We could only hope that those minds will not share the hide-bound, often brutal outlook of so many who have shaped this homicidal century.

**Paul Ginnis**, an independent trainer, gave a valuable seminar on the practicalities of encouraging creativeness in education. I always find Paul's ideas frustrating because although they make good sense they never occurred to me in twenty-five years before the blackboard! The elegantly simple idea of allowing children to express their opinions not through words (which often confuse and distract) but by placing themselves on a physical 'diagram' on the classroom floor led to a variety of other dramatic modes of expression. Through these even inarticulate and disaffected youngsters can achieve worthwhile results. Paul made a most effective case for sweeping aside all the authoritarian attitudes and simplistic methodology with mark the English educational tradition, and putting in their place diversity, experimentation and joyous self-confidence.

Chris Shute

The loss of confidence in a child's hidden abilities is the fundamental betrayal. It is done through constant comparing, assessing and evaluating which results in making pronouncements about the child's aptitude or even its humanity. For example, "*Your child is not talented enough*", or "*Your daughter is lazy*". Passing such judgements is denying the truth in favour of illusion. It is, in fact, a deadly trap, as it kills all the possibilities of communication between child and teacher.

Educating may follow two tracks. In the **pedagogy of hope**, the teachers and parents behave as if they have no doubts about the child's abilities and creativity, and firmly support the child in its development. The **pedagogy of betrayal** offers the illusion of safety and professionalism as it lacks the basic educational elements - faith and fidelity. Teachers poisoned with this pedagogy are ungenerous and soulless, constantly checking and controlling their pupils and they neither trust the children, nor do they believe in the children's abilities or talents.

Education without faith leads to formalism and stiffness which are connected to dryness of heart and consequently result in the endorsement of power. Those who are not able to love are drawn by the lure of power over another. If this happens to teachers they become the advocates of the **chase pedagogy** where the child's mistakes and weaknesses, drawbacks and faults, ignorance and laziness are pointed out on every occasion. This destroys any sense of dignity and leaves only fear, guilt, suspiciousness and disillusionment. The school of betrayal is dominated by chase pedagogics and is an institution of rigidity, monologue and force.

The results of the surveys I have done on 2,565 Polish pupils aged 10 to 15, show that almost half have had experiences that exclude sincere dialogue with teachers. These negative experiences originate in the schools' **assessment** procedures. More than 70% of the pupils would eliminate grades because they are a source of stress, or irritation, or unfairness, or inequity, and they discourage pupils from learning.

### Here are some suggestions for a good school:

- 1 it does not divide the pupils into good and bad, gifted and untalented
- 2 it sees in every child its potential and develops it according to the sacred principle of faith in the child's abilities
- 3 it adjusts its requirements to the child's individual abilities
- 4 it co-operates with parents, taking their opinions into account
- 5 it is directed by heart, not only by rules and regulations
- 6 it teaches how and helps overcome difficulties
- 7 it helps everyone create programmes of self-development
- 8 it helps to keep peace of mind and a smile on the face
- 9 it encourages everybody to participate in the decision-making about essential matters via Student and Parent Councils.
- 10 it inspires the teachers, parents and pupils by treating them all as innovators
- 11 it has suitable tools for evaluation and dialogue
- 12 it has classes not bigger than 20 pupils

Michal Jozef Kawecki, Civic Educational Association, Szczecin

**From Poland with Love ...**  
a pedagogy of hope and a pedagogy of betrayal

In conversation with ...  
**Peter Humphreys**

Peter Humphreys is head of a primary school in Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham. He is married to Trish who is a teacher and magistrate and they have two children, Ben aged 9 and Jessica aged 6. Peter says his school is situated in what is locally accepted as an 'advantaged' ward. However, the children attend from a variety of backgrounds and the majority are not from 'advantaged' homes.

The school has been through several major re-organisations in the last few years, changing from a First and a Middle School to a Junior and Infant on two sites. Peter is the fourth head teacher in three years and then, just after his arrival, came the news that an Ofsted inspection would take place that year! I asked Peter how he approached the inspection and whether the process clashed with his values.

**Peter** The very big picture - our vision for education - is an intellectual argument at present. As Head I had to be pragmatic enough to find goals that were achievable for staff and at the same time make every effort to raise the level of debate. Before anything else could be achieved, the school had to meet legal National Curriculum expectations and prove its accountability.

I have to ensure that the school is seen and felt to be successful by staff, children and parents, especially in an area where other schools are recognised as very successful academically. My vision is that our school becomes distinctive, not just another National Curriculum clone. I feel this has to do with a growing community vision tied to lifelong learning, to a thrust towards becoming an environmentally green school and to a deep concern for the whole person. Concern for the whole person will be developed by supporting the already excellent provision of extra-curricular activity, giving access to a wider curriculum.

**Sharon** *What goals did you start working towards as your first stage of development?*

**Peter** My overall aim is to raise the children's horizons and expectations. That's why the extra curricular activities are so important. But the first task in raising personal expectations and achievement was to sort out the school day curriculum. On my arrival in September 1995 the two schools had just been combined and policies for National Curriculum subjects were fragmentary and didn't fit together. So as a staff we decided on: (1) a plan for curriculum co-ordination; (2) a school development plan; (3) a three year time line with review cycle.

Staff decided on priorities and these were mapped out until 1997, with frameworks for managing the development of each curriculum area. Action plans for each member of staff are agreed termly. I now meet with every member of staff twice a term to discuss practical support and progress. All this is very mainstream but achievable and I hope that I'm giving strong leadership, steadying the school, giving it a way forward, sewing the seeds of new ideas and demonstrating power-sharing processes to staff.

**Sharon** *What was the inspection like and what have been the outcomes?*

**Peter** The inspection was as about as positive as it could be. The people on the team were interested in what we had achieved and were supportive. There was a good deal of useful discussion about teaching and learning. The final report confirmed what we had already understood about the school and the work we still have to do. One of the key outcomes was post-Ofsted slump, otherwise known as general emotional, physical and mental exhaustion! We all worked very hard to get a good report.

**Sharon** *Perhaps Ofsted will arrange a good work assembly for schools! So what are your priorities now?*

**Peter** Now most of the main structures are in place, I'm keen to encourage staff to extend their repertoire of teaching styles with the aim of further supporting children in learning how to learn. The Development Education Centre is a good resource for active learning approaches - perhaps we will work on some markers for achievement in independent learning. I would also like the staff to become interested in circle time and peer mediation, both of which I developed with positive results in my last school. I think we need to agree on a common language in order to debate educational provision and to accept that constantly seeking to improve doesn't make life any easier - it causes anxieties about why we are doing what we are doing every day in school. But such discomfort is a good thing.

**Sharon** *At the beginning of the interview you talked about the big picture - what is your vision for primary education of the future?*

**Peter** I think we should discontinue the practice of grouping children by age and introduce a new concept of 'readiness'. There should be flexible arrangements for schooling with well equipped campuses catering for open learning and tutoring options. A primary school is often a stabilising factor in a community and could serve the community more fully by providing a library service, IT resources, a toy library, small studio theatre, meeting places, rooms for studying, a cafe and so on. To use the resource effectively, we would have to change the idea that the school day runs from 8.30 to 4.00 and open and use the facilities over longer periods. Finally, I would want to see children given more choice in what they learn as well as in how they learn it. This would require a much more flexible curriculum, perhaps with a mixture of compulsory and voluntary modules. It would also require a broader range of teaching and learning strategies than we currently offer.

*"One headteacher told John's parents to make his home life less interesting so he would not be so bored at school."*  
(from Times Educational Supplement 20/9/96 Features p.3)

**Mountaprise - building a positive self-image**  
*"Students with learning difficulties should be helped towards adult status. This requires the achievement of autonomy and a positive self-image, realistically grounded in the capacity to*

*live as independently as possible and contribute both to the economy and the community."* (John Tomlinson)

The Mountaprise Principle delivers programmes of practical education and training by making products for sale. Based at Bilston Community College, Wolverhampton, our students are mainly 16-60 year olds with learning difficulties. The method is also applicable to people with physical disabilities and to adults who have been excluded from education and for whom practical learning is the most appropriate method of re-entry.

We operate 8 departments: **component assembly** (sub-contract work from factories); **paper recycling** (sorting, shredding and bailing waste paper); **picture framing**; **woodwork** (fencing, planters); **metal work** (gates, window protectors); **decorative work**; **sewing** (cushions, aprons etc.) and **garden plants in containers**.

Each department offers particular skills. For example: component assembly requires speed and team work; paper recycling requires stamina, colour recognition and speed use of machines; picture framing requires measurement, use of equipment, cutting and assembly. Students can progress as they develop skills - there are opportunities to work at different levels. Students can acquire as few or as many skills as they wish and at their own pace.

The Mountaprise model requires staff with energy and enthusiasm, with appropriate business and practical skills and with a sensitive instructional approach. They need the inventiveness and initiative to develop marketable products.

The programmes are accredited by the Open College Network with a system of assessment that does not require student literacy. Students can progress to other College courses, to work experience with employers, or to jobs. Some start their own businesses through the skills learned

*Details of a series of one day seminars about Mountaprise can be obtained from Michael Godfrey or Anna Wright at Mountaprise Business Park, Ettinshall Road, Wolverhampton, WV2 2JT Tel 01902 821621 or Fax 01902 821608.*

*Michael Godfrey, General Manager*

**"You do not feel like that!" said teacher to unhappy child.**

**"That is naughty"!** From Arthur Acton's Diary - during his time as a primary school head teacher.

## **Vouchers and Nursery Education**

**At the end of July the Nursery Education and Grant Maintained Schools Bill became an Act.**

Evaluations are being undertaken by the Rural Development Commission, the Audit Commission and the National Audit

Office, the National Children's Bureau, the Daycare Trust and UNISON. The DfEE has just produced a document entitled *Nursery Education Voucher Scheme - Report on Phase 1* available by ringing the Nursery Voucher Hotline on 0345 543 345. Two findings in particular - that *"significant additional resources are flowing into pre-school provision for four-year-olds"* and that *"the mechanics of the scheme have been tested and found to be effective"* are in sharp contrast to the survey findings of a number of independent organisations.

Very few additional places have been created except in Norfolk where the Government provided considerable additional resources to encourage the LEA to enter the scheme. In addition a number of playgroups have closed as schools have put pressure on parents to send their four-year-olds to reception classes in primary schools. The mechanics of the scheme are inordinately expensive and complicated - much time and millions of pounds are being spent explaining to parents and providers how the scheme works.

Leaflets have already been sent to parents of four year olds in the Phase 2 areas by CAPITA - the company contracted to do so by the Government - and letters will be sent out in January asking them to apply for their voucher. Vouchers have to be in parents' hands by the end of February 1997. Parents of children who are four before April 1st will be eligible to receive a voucher - but only if they are on the register of the Child Benefit Agency. In the Budget on November 26th a reduction was made in the amount of money available for vouchers. About 1,500 parents did not apply for their voucher in Phase 1. This could have been for a number of reasons: information and application forms have not been provided in languages other than English; parents felt reluctant about filling in forms; did not understand why they needed a voucher; or found the form difficult to understand. The Government's own figures identify that 1 in 5 parents did not receive an application form. Parents without a voucher next April are likely to be refused a place.

The Government's 'research among providers' - completed in June 1996 - showed that 80% thought the scheme would make little or no difference to the quality of provision or the number of sessions offered. Most agreed it would mainly benefit private providers. A majority had found the administration time consuming and more onerous than they expected. Robin Squire has referred to these surveys as indicators of 'success'.

Inspections of providers in Phase 1 started in October. Group 4 won the contract to organise these inspections. They have contracted 12 groups of inspectors to do the inspections. Each provider will have a visit by one inspector for a half or full day. The inspector will then write a report which will identify whether the provider can achieve the *Desirable Outcomes* for all its four-year-olds - the curriculum required by SCAA. Most educationalists regard the *Desirable Outcomes* as far too narrow for the age group. The report will also 'validate' the provider to receive vouchers - or not.

### **The Tomorrow Project**

**a three-year project to provide a vision of people's lives in 2020**

The **Tomorrow Project** aims to examine political, economic, social and technological developments between now and 2020.

*"It seeks to encourage long-term thinking about the future ... It is aimed at decision makers in the commercial, voluntary and public sectors, those in higher education and the wider public. Planned outputs include in-house seminars, consultations and conferences, a TV and/or radio series, a mass-appeal book, CD-Rom material, published articles and material for education.*

*Using the best expertise available, the Project will consider how a maximum of 12 different aspects of people's lives could develop by 2020, and what decisions need to be taken by governments, organisations and individuals to secure the best outcomes. The aim is not to predict the future, but to develop scenarios which crystallise the issues. Topics will include work, learning, families, government, environment, consumption and leisure, the legal system, crime, income, religion, health and community."*

The Project Director is **Richard Worsley**, who previously directed the Carnegie UK Trust's Third Age Programme. The **Rev'd Dr Michael Moynagh**, who is Director of the Centre for Third Millennium Studies at St John's College in Nottingham, is the Project Adviser.

*Education Now* has already been involved in initial discussions with Michael Moynagh where our publications and research on ideas for the next learning system were presented.

All LEAs are now required to prepare for and publicise the scheme - their money for four-year-olds has already been removed so they need as many parents as possible to have vouchers to bring the money back. LMS schemes will have to be revised where four-year-olds are in reception classes. All this will be time consuming and costly and no additional funding will come from the Government as in Phase 1. Already much LEA officer time has been spent working out what the effects of nursery vouchers will be and informing all those concerned. In the light of impending cuts in many LEAs the cost of this will further reduce the amount of money available for other areas of education.

The Labour Party has declared its opposition to the voucher scheme and said repeatedly that if elected it will abolish the scheme. A recent 'Shadow Circular' explains to LEAs how this will be done - by September 1997. A pledge has been made to provide free education and affordable childcare for all three and four-year-olds in due course. Early Years Forums will be required by law to be set up by LEAs and Social Services Departments - they will be consultative bodies "charged with reviewing local services for the under fives and planning their expansion". This would certainly be an improvement on the current scheme which is already destroying good practice and costing huge amounts of money without benefiting the children who most need nursery education.

*Melian Mansfield*

## **Rules, Routines and Regulations**

**By Ann Sherman**

Educational Heretics Press (1996) £7-95 ISBN 1-900219-01-8

This is a timely book on a subject which ought to be thoroughly explored by mainstream educators, but is almost universally neglected: what children feel about being schooled, and what they think the whole business is for.

Dr. Sherman presents real dialogues between a researcher and small schoolchildren. From them she draws out insights into

the processes of their thought which teachers and parents would do well to share because they contradict many cherished notions about the 'needs' and perceptions we attribute to children.

The book is not a tract against schooling: Dr. Sherman presupposes - charitably in my view - that the classroom can be the scene of valuable learning and social growth. However, she insists that this cannot happen until educators stop looking at what they want to happen there, and realise that the children transform all adult purposes into something *they* can understand, and it is this understanding which finally shapes their responses.

In the first half of the book, Dr. Sherman shows how many children, from the very beginning of their time in school, form the impression that the *routine* of the classroom is its purpose. While teachers and parents convince themselves that the school leads children through a sort of garden where they pick nose-gays of knowledge, the children silently absorb a host of anti-life values which enslave them to a barren conformity. They learn that 'work' is always more important than play, that the teacher is there specifically to be obeyed and appeased, that talking in the classroom is generally not a good idea, and worst of all, that children can only, ever, learn useful things in school.

In the second part of the book, Dr. Sherman discusses the image children have of their school. She suggests that they see it as "*a place of routine and rules, where naughty behaviour is not tolerated and work is emphasised. School is a preparation for the future where the teacher is boss*". Consequently, they fail to use their natural endowments of curiosity and pleasure in trying new things and instead become dependent thinkers.

*"In order to think critically and constructively criticise something, we need practice in developing the ability from a young age."* This can only happen if children are allowed to discuss and criticise each other's ideas freely. As Dr. Sherman points out, "*It is ironic that in school, a place where there is virtually no chance to be alone, children are most often discouraged from talking. Both peer interaction and child-adult interaction promote the development of confident communication abilities in children*". The point is well made and deserves to be surgically implanted into all educators.

This book is a serious contribution to educational thought and deserves a wide readership.

*Chris Shute*

*"In the 20th century, provision has come before clients. You designed the courses and then tried to find some students to fill them. It is the other way round in the future: find the clients, find out what they want and need and then design (or redesign) your provision."*

(Sir Christopher Ball, in RSA Journal, Nov. 1996, p.9)

## **My education**

**My name is James Earp and this is about my experience with High School. I ended my 4 years at Primary School with constant bullying. After I had been beaten up, the teachers would take me to the headmaster's office and I would tell him that I had started the fight with two other kids. Even though I had a broken nose, black eyes and cuts on my face, he would tell me to go to the toilets, get washed and go back to class. Then he would give me some lines and tell me to sit outside his office and do them through my dinner break.**

When I started at the High School everyone told me it was a good place to go, but I found out different. The first week was the worst week of my life. First I was embarrassed in front of a whole class because I find reading difficult. Then I was beaten up from Monday to Friday. The second week was just as bad. On Monday the kids that were beating me up came to me. One of them grabbed me from behind and held me while the other two kicked and punched me. Then I flipped. I head-butted the kid that was holding me and lashed out in a frenzy at the others.

The next thing I knew was that the whole of the playground was silent. A teacher came towards me and said: "I'm taking you to the headmaster's office". He went to grab my arm, but I pushed it away and said: "Don't touch me!". In the end the Headmaster told me there was no bullying in his wonderful school and gave me a detention. I didn't even tell my mum or dad about it.

The Tuesday after I went to school with a severe migraine. At lunchtime I told the teacher and he sent me to the secretary's office to ring my dad to pick me up. At the end of the week the migraine was just as bad. The doctor sent me to hospital. I didn't go to school for eight weeks. The school sent me to a home tutor. I felt glad to go there because I thought that I didn't have to go back to school. After a couple of weeks the telephone rang: it was the Authorities. They wanted me to go back to school. I was angry because I didn't want to go back to the things that happened before.

*(I was his tutor. I told the Office that he had been happy with me and he was now in tears at the prospect of going back to their tender mercies, so I would take him on for the rest of his education. The lady from the Education Department seemed mildly shocked. She told me, as if the idea should have occurred to me, that I was 'giving the boy an easy option'. Presumably, she thought that the National Fibre would be undermined if James didn't go through his allotted course of suffering in the cause of Education.)*

Throughout my four years with Chris, my tutor, he has taught me self-discipline by not pushing me. He has also let me experiment on his garden by letting me dig a pond. He has taught me to read and spell better. At home I do art with my mum, geography with my dad who used to be a lorry driver, landscape gardening, window-cleaning and market trading, which has taught me basic maths.

I think home education has set me up well for the start of my working life.

*James Earp (age 15)*

Students working together across the country have organised an exciting conference to be held on Saturday **15th March 1997** at Rushey Mead School in Leicestershire. This conference is the first of its kind where students have their say on the effectiveness of today's education and what they wish for, and expect from, the future.

The conference is being organised by **four schools** across England: Broadway from Birmingham; Haggerston from London; Rushey Mead and Wycliffe from Leicestershire.

The event is aimed at influential people e.g. educationalists, celebrities and parents. It has come together through the commitment and involvement of the aforesaid schools over

the past year. They have been working together by meeting at residential, through fax and phone as well as the Internet.

This conference is a must for conscientious parents who play an integral part in their children's education and would like to participate in a first hand hearing from today's students who are the guinea pigs of the present system.

*Afsa Asghar (student))*

## Schools Beyond 2000

**Saturday 15th March 10am -4pm**

### Issues to be tackled include

students' rights: students' choices: making learning more interesting: making student councils work: school buildings fit for learning in

*Planned and run by students for students and supporting adults.*

### For further information and leaflets

SB2000 Conference, Rushey Mead School, Melton Road, Leicester, LE4 7PA

**Tel.** 0116 266 3730 **Fax.** 0116 261 1883

**E-mail.** rusheymeas@connect.bt.com

### Back to business

The new structure of *Education Now* is up and running. Anyone interested enough to read two sides of dense print is welcome to receive a copy of the details from the Ed Now office. The Central Co-ordinating Team met on 1st December and agreed a new membership scheme to be launched in June this year. It also began considering how to mark Ten Years of Education Now in 1998!

The CCT will next meet, briefly, after the **Open Meeting of Associate Directors and Support Group Members** on **March 2nd**. The main sessions of the day, to which all readers of *News and Review* are warmly invited, will take the form of a 'learning exchange' with the theme of **NEW FRONTIERS**. A leaflet is enclosed with this newsletter. Further details from the Office.

### Education Now Membership:

**Four Issues of the Newsletter, plus concessions on books etc., £15 minimum donation or in USA, \$30 (incl. airmail Post)**

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**Printed by Mastaprint on recycled paper.**