

Democracy is focus at major conference

South African Minister of Education to speak at Co-operative College

Democracy has been the context of all our lives for several generations. We esteem democratic values above all other political systems and social codes. Nonetheless, the education system which prepares the vast majority of our young people to be citizens of a democratic society has never allowed democratic thinking to inform it. Pupils in state schools may learn a great deal of knowledge, but little about living together as free, equal, and powerful members of a liberal democracy.

The Institute for Democracy in Education, in collaboration with Education Now and the International Co-operative College, are holding a prestigious a conference in May aimed at exploring both theoretically and practically the infusion of democratic values into the life of schools and colleges. The title is *'Democratic Discipline, Democratic Lives'*.

In order to mark the importance of the Conference, President Nelson Mandela was invited to inaugurate it, and although he was unable to do so himself, his Minister of Education, **Professor S. Bengu**, has agreed to deliver a keynote speech, provisionally entitled *'Developing Education in the New Democracy of the Republic of South Africa'*. To hear from a person who has been at the heart of the struggle for a truly democratic South Africa will be in itself an inspiration and an encouragement to anyone who is seriously concerned to preserve and strengthen freedom and dignity in our still divided world.

The Conference will offer a stimulating variety of workshops and plenaries, given by a strong team of experienced educators, both academics and practitioners. For example, Dr. Bernard Trafford, Headmaster of Wolverhampton Grammar School, will give an insight into the ways in which he has successfully introduced an element of democratic participation into the life of his school, with entirely positive results. In this way, he has raised academic standards and improved the social environment.

The Danish Government will fund two students to address the Conference about their experience of democracy in Danish schools. Participants from the USA, Poland, UK and South Africa will provide a vision of educational progress in the 21st Century from which English educators can gain inspiration and a renewed determination to change the paternalistic, authoritarian culture which reigns in many U.K. schools. Over three days, the Conference will explore in a serious but

practical way how modern education can be infused with democratic values.

The Conference will also be the occasion of two book-launchings. *'Children for Change'*, Anthony Swift's new study of the street-children in Brazil will be available, and the author will give a presentation of his research. The book is both inspiring and harrowing to read. Brazil has a grim reputation for creating a society in which poor children whose parents cannot or do not care to look after them go onto the streets and sustain themselves by petty crime, prostitution or begging until some off-duty policeman rubs them out with his pistol. A priest, Father Bruno, set about establishing a centre in which the needs of street children could be met, without the condescension or paternalism of a Barnardo or a Shaftesbury.

Like Father Borelli in Sicily, he went into the edgy, suspicious society of the street children and started where they were. The focus had to be on *their* needs, and on the slow awakening of a sense of authentic human solidarity. Beginning with a restaurant for street traders, Bruno and his volunteers developed a pedagogy of democratic self-help, through which the children became confident and determined not to accept marginalisation.

In addition, Professor Roland Meighan will also launch *'The Next Learning System'*. Dr. Meighan has pioneered thinking about models of education which do not include compulsory schooling, and which will meet the needs of people in the next century rather than those who lived in the last.

'Democratic Discipline, Democratic Lives' runs from 12th-14th May 1997. This event dovetails with a conference organ-ised by the Co-operative College itself from 9th -11th May entitled *'Developing Co-operation in Education'*.

Details of both conferences can be obtained from the Education Now Office or from The International Co-operative College, Stanford Hall, Loughborough, Leicestershire, LE12 5QR (Tel: 01509 857219/857220 Fax: 01509 854072).

Education Now Press Group

Education 2000 News - a Digest

The Education Now office receives lots of requests to use our material, along with letters of support and messages of appreciation, such as: "Your latest News and Review arrived here in the US the day before a key meeting on education in the future, so I photocopied sections of it to take in for everyone to see ... ". We also receive newsletters and research reports from all over the world, especially from

grassroots initiatives. One of the regular arrivals is Education 2000 News. Here is a digest of recent issues:

MARCH 1996

"For a decade Britain has assumed that its education system needs reform, not re-design ... Consequently Britain has been largely uninvolved with that emerging body of research worldwide into the nature of effective learning that challenges the very underlying principles of the system that we have simply taken for granted." (p.1)

"Studies in Neurology challenge the metaphor frequently used in recent years which has sought to compare the brain to a linear computer waiting to be programmed in favour of a far more flexible self-adjusting, biological metaphor - the brain as a living, unique, ever-changing organism that grows and reshapes itself in response to challenge, with elements which wither through lack of use." (p.2)

JUNE 1996

"But even as test scores and the like inch up, we continue to get graduates who think narrowly, are teacher dependent, and who have too little ability to tackle challenges or embrace change." (p.2)

"We've tended to think of ourselves and our behaviour in rational logical terms, but our emotions more often direct the decision. Emotion drives attention, which drives learning, memory, and behaviour - and so emotion is the triggering mechanism for just about everything we do." (p.6)

SEPTEMBER 1996

"Children entering primary school this year will be in their mid-50s in the middle of the next century. By that time, it is suggested that the world will be facing a double crunch - the population will have more than doubled and, according to the American economist Neil Heilbroner, capitalism as a system may well have exhausted itself." (p.4)

"Mounting evidence world-wide suggests that traditional education systems are becoming increasingly dysfunctional in the face of escalating technological, social, and economic change. Education systems based on out-of-date or incomplete assumptions about how people learn, can, unwittingly, create and perpetuate dependent societies. People who come to see themselves as 'learning failures' when young have no confidence in their ability to embrace change as adults." (p.5)

DECEMBER 1996

"... this technological revolution puts learning and conventional education systems on a collision course." (p.5)

"For those children who haven't got the technology in the home, it seems to me that it would make eminent sense if Primary Schools became the 'local area learning node', with at least one room open for 18 hours a day, 7 days a week, to providing any form of formal instruction, but giving those children who live in the neighbourhood open access to the technology ... to support their own study." (p.6)

Education 2000 is a trust dedicated to achieving cultural change in education from passive to active learning in the strong belief that it is only sure way of unleashing the full potential of today's and tomorrow's young people.

Tel: 01462 481107

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... is to meet with Lord Hindlip of Christies who is Chair of the Arts Dyslexia Trust. Watch this space for further developments.

The Derek Slater Professional Support Centre ... is now open at Bilston Community College. We are interested in collecting information, ideas and resources about democratic education. So if you can help please contact Sharon Ginnis on 0902 821742. Sharon, allowed to leave the Brighthouse Outfit at Birmingham on a free transfer, is now scoring prolifically for her new team, Bilston Community College.

Monthly Seminars on Creativity in Education
These take place at the London Institute, Oxford Street. Thursday 17th April is on Visual Learners, exploring how dyslexic learners can be better supported by creative approaches.

Intuition - Wednesday May 7th - exploring the interaction between intuition and creativity.

"As I said at the Scarborough Conference ..."
Janet and Roland Meighan were invited to speak at a fringe meeting at the Green Party conference at Scarborough in March on 'The Next Learning System'. Although originally billed for 90 minutes, they were pinned down for 3 hours by enthusiastic questioners keen to find out that there is hope beyond the present despair.

We'll meet again ...
The next **Education Now Day** will be held on Sunday September 7th at Barrow-on-Trent (in Philip and Annabel's 'Chapel of Performing Arts'). In the morning, the Central Co-ordination Team will meet, followed by the AGM. In the afternoon there will be another of our highly successful Learning Exchanges - offers and suggestions to Josh Gifford, 22 Dallas Road, Lancaster, LA1 1TW - Tel: 01524 37894.

The Resources Cupboard

Feed your mind. To apply brain science research successfully to the classroom or living room, take regular and healthy helpings of:

Accelerate Your Learning - how to fly through school and college, by Colin Rose and Louise Goll, 1992. Video, cassette and 3 superbly practical study skills booklets. Excellent for personal use, for use with students from Year 10, and for the professional development of all subject teachers.

ISBN 0 905553 40 3. Available from Accelerated Learning Systems, 50 Aylesbury Road, Aston Clinton, Aylesbury, Bucks, HP22 5AH.

Accelerated Learning in the Classroom, by Alistair Smith. **Readable and readily applicable professional development resource. Focusses on classroom practice based on modern understandings of the brain in all its glory.**

ISBN 1 85539 034 5. Available from: Network Educational Press Ltd., Box 635, Stafford, ST16 1BF Tel: 01785 225515 Fax: 01785 228566.

The list of variations in learning institutions gets longer by the hour. To the list that already includes Mini-schools, Charter Schools, Magnet Schools, Home Schools, Community Schools, Steiner Schools, Montessori Schools, Flexi-time Schools and Flexi Colleges, you can now add *Cyber and Virtual Schools*.

In Alberta, Canada, 7,000 students are registered on home-based education programmes. Families may devise a learning programme of their own or they may choose to use the Alberta Distance Learning Materials.

The families who choose to link up to cyber or virtual schools, (which seem to be alternative names for the same thing), receive a computer from the school district which is either rented or on loan. They are then able to access on-line lessons and services via the Internet, call up assignments, and make use of 'chat lines' with staff. The 'chat lines' can link up numbers of learners for group discussions. Alberta has developed distance learning materials, and assignments are e-mailed to teachers operating from ten different schools in the province.

Some of the arrangements are of a flexi-time nature. At the E-Quest On-Line School, Elk Island Public School District, students meet face-to-face with teachers once every two weeks for such activities as group work, oral presentations, and tutorials. Some students register for school-based option classes to complement their home-based programmes. The home-based education programmes are monitored by specially trained staff on a regular 'plan, do, review' approach. (Their task sounds much like the personal tutors role as envisaged in John Adcock's book *In Place of School*).

Similar schemes are being developed in parts of USA. The Open School in UK is developing along the same lines. In Australia, the Tasmanian Education Minister has a working party looking into similar ideas of partnerships between home-schoolers and conventional state schools.

In his book *The Home School Manual*, Theodore Wade Jr. claims that Science is one of the strongest subjects for home-schoolers when it comes to results in standardised achievement tests. Results from Tasmania confirm this, for in the Australian Schools Science Competition run by the University of South Wales, thirteen home-schoolers entered. One gained a High Distinction, six gained Distinctions and two gained Credits.

Readers of *News and Review* are likely to be familiar with the research of Alan Thomas, a psychologist who has studied the methods and success of home-schoolers in both UK and Australia. One of his observations is that: "*You home-schoolers are the first genuine pioneers since universal schooling became a reality 150 years ago*". In the concept and development of Virtual and Cyber schools, do we have another breakthrough?

But, it is as well to remember what **cannot** be learned from home-schoolers: "*Home-schoolers will not teach the schools what they so yearn to know, the one best way to do anything. What they will teach is that there is no one best way, and that it is a waste of time and energy to look for it; that children (like adults) learn in a great many different ways ...*" John Holt

The Open School, based at Dartington in Devon and Bethnal Green, London is a national educational charity tackling problems of access and underachievement and supporting children's learning through new technology and innovative materials.

Since 1991, The Open School has pioneered distance learning for young people using fax and e-mail. **Teletutoring** provides support to a variety of students (in school, in hospital, at home or in other situations) where educational access is either limited or where classroom teaching is inappropriate. A range of programmes are offered: direct teletutoring to students - often customised to an individual's needs, training for teletutors, or consultancy to help LEAs and others to develop their own distance learning solutions.

"This method of learning is very different from what I am used to, that is learning in a class with 25 other people. With an open learning course, you don't get bored and switch off and you can go over something as often as you like. Apart from sessions working on my own I have fax lessons twice a week. This is an unique thing for The Open School and I think it's a really excellent idea. I get some conversation practice first, then I do activities with instant feedback and corrections. I find the lessons by fax very helpful" Joanna, aged 13, learning from **¡Entendido!**

TeleWeb - the young persons' alternative to the Internet - uses computer communication to enable children aged approximately 8 - 16 to explore and interact in a safer environment. **TeleWeb** combines live on-line chats with a bulletin board system to discuss subjects from Poetry to Red Dwarf, Euro '96 to BSE - subjects are chosen by the children, and supported and mentored by The Open School. "*You feel as though they are right beside you,*" says Jamie who is effectively housebound, "*It's a magnificent thing!*"

The possibilities for discussion and interest are endless and the friendly, unintimidating atmosphere of **TeleWeb** encourages openness and imagination. One parent commented "*I don't know who had the idea of a limited access Internet but I think it's brilliant and Kate and her friends think it's cool. I'm very impressed by the quality of what they write to each other*". **TeleWeb**, unlike an Internet service, is a closed system. This is quicker to access, more secure and the time for each person can be negotiated. Designed to be used on most computers via modem, the **TeleWeb** software is supplied free of charge by *The Open School*. If you are young and fresh of mind, come and join us!

**The Open School, Park Road, Dartington, Totnes, TQ9 6EQ.
Tel: 01803 866542 Fax: 01803 866676
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*The Open School Team
including Paul Bernal, Julie Talbot-Dunn and Lynette Gribble*

Open School

Some lessons for learning from brain science

We have learned more about how the brain works in the last fifteen years than in all the preceding decades of scientific research. These findings are now beginning to provide usable insights into how we learn.

A key finding is that the brain works as a whole and that learning involves the areas which control our emotions and motivation. Among these is freedom from feelings of threat. Most of us carry some fears connected with learning within us. *"If it includes maths I'm sunk", "I can't do the practical work, I just go to pieces"*. These fears and others like them will sound familiar. What is the basis of these and of our sudden feelings of helplessness?

Our brains have developed to ensure our survival individually and as a species. When we are faced with a threat we can either stand and fight or turn and flee, and the brain is organised to help us do so. Messages reach us through the senses and are sorted in the thalamus, a structure roughly in the centre of the brain. Most are ignored as irrelevant but some secure attention and are then tested against our experience. It may be a welcome message, the face of a friend seen unexpectedly or a spoken word with associated memories of interest. Or it may be threatening and then the message goes to the Amygdala which instructs the body to prepare for action. Flight or fight require the use of heavy muscles and they in turn need extra blood and some of this comes from the top of the brain. As a result the part of the brain which we need for most thinking, and eventually for learning, becomes temporarily less effective, even disabled.

What can we do about it? Parents and teachers can help at two stages. One is to try to prevent the fears developing. The child who is having difficulty with, say, reading can be encouraged. *"Yes it does take a bit of time, but you will be able to do it"* is reassuring. *"Yes, I know, I was never any good at it and you're just like mummy"* may console temporarily but leads the child to expect failure. Subsequent attempts to teach them to read have first to overcome the obstacle of a lack of self belief. The other stage is to provide the small steps which provide success. This changes the sorting process from *"I can't do it"* to *"Perhaps I can do it"* and eventually to confidence.

'Downshifting', the process by which the centre of activity in the brain moves to the organs of the limbic system, is only one of many ways the limbic system is involved in learning. Most of our learning involves feeling as well as thinking, emotion as well as cogitation. The emotion can be excitement or curiosity though it can be one of the painful emotions. Someone who

tries to probe a light switch with a pencil will remember that the graphite of pencil lead carries electric current in a different way from someone who has merely heard about it!

Learning involves the whole brain and we now begin to see how the two halves of the cerebral cortex, while somewhat specialised in function, are also supportive of one another. It is easy to over simplify the specialisms as it is to over simplify most of the brain's working. But in general there is a tendency for the left hemisphere to function in a linear and sequential way, to process language and be dominant in computing and manipulating numbers. The right side tends to be aware of things without using language, synthesises experience into wholes and makes connections or fills in gaps with the leaps in experience we know as intuition.

When these insights began to emerge twenty years ago, the emphasis tended to be on how we could make use of the specialist functions. There was a particular concern to make more use of the capability of the right side. Now the emphasis is more on **interconnectedness**. When the two halves are enabled to supplement one another the brain appears to function more efficiently and growing evidence points to learning being faster and more secure. One of the best known ways of achieving the state of mind in which this happens is the use of music. For example a background of music while studying helps to engage the right side of the brain, to encourage helpful blood flow and also get electric impulses working at a lower rate than that most helpful to problem solving. The accelerated learning method of teaching modern foreign languages uses this (and other processes) in its method.

Other ways of engaging the two halves involve cross lateral physical exercises before starting. For example you can try lifting the left knee and touching it with the right elbow, then the right knee with the left elbow and repeat the sequence about fifteen times. This helps to co-ordinate the physical functioning of the body, and also the two halves of the cerebral cortex.

Downshifting and left-right brain co-ordination are but two examples of how brain science can provide better explanations of our learning behaviour and modify, or correct, the rules of thumb, and short-cut aphorisms which so often pass for theory. There is much good practice in place, but we can always look for ways of making the good better. The growing body of brain science and related disciplines can help us to do so.

For further reading

Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: why it can matter more than IQ.*, Bloomsbury, 1996

Geoffrey Cain and Renate Numella Caine, *Making connections: learning and the human brain*, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria, Virginia, 1991 (Their new book *Education on the edge of possibility* is out this Spring)

Bradshaw(ed.), *Bringing Learning to Life: the learning revolution, the economy and the individual*, London, Falmer Press, 1995

David Bradshaw, Learning Consultant

The Next Learning System ...

"In the majority of states, organisations of school administrators are now urging principals to look toward the future and to become 'issue oriented'. The efforts have focused on finding answers to a multitude of problems: drugs, gangs, test scores, accountability, fiscal support, at-risk youth, limited English-

speaking students, overcrowded schools, homeless children, non-college employment preparation, vigorous curriculum preparation, militant unions, non-grading, year-round education, and the affective domain.

"Educational futurists state that though these concerns are of the utmost importance, and must be addressed in the real world of today, they are not the keys to tomorrow. **To those envisaging the twenty-first century, there is only one overriding issue facing educators today: the transformation to communication age learning systems.**"

Don Glines, Educational Futures Project, USA

"The future of education is glorious - though it has nothing to do with schools and colleges. Education is bursting out of the school system. School is a feudal industrial concept, and is obsolete and unworkable. School systems must develop into communication centres. They must cut down on their industrial rituals: grades, hierarchy, competitiveness. Rather they must foster a love of learning."

F.M.Eslandiary, quoted in Living Green, 21, Autumn 1996

Ahead of its official publication date, Roland Meighan's new book *The Next Learning System* has arrived from the printers, so advance copies are available from *Educational Heretics Press*, price £7-95

"I started reading it at 10 o'clock at night and I could not put it down until I had finished it, so it cost me some sleep that night. ... The truth is we haven't even begun to adapt to the fundamental point made by Roland Meighan, the flexi-education protagonist, that we are now in an information rich society."

Colin Rose, Director, Accelerated Learning Systems

EDUCATION NOW LEARNING EXCHANGE DAY

Education Now Associate Directors and Support Group members are, of course, educators of the utmost seriousness and composure. So the goings-on at Barrow-on-Trent on **Sunday 2nd March** can only have been therapeutic. In fact, they were the Five Rhythms of Gabrielle Roth, a form of dance and musical mediation, in

which the body responds to five fundamental modes of feeling, initiated by specially selected music.

At first blush - and I did a lot of blushing, being far from a natural dancer - the activity resembled an alliance between eurythmics and disco. However, under the sensitive direction of **Anna Comino-James**, the group began to experience strong contrasts of feeling, which corresponded to the underlying 'graphic' of each piece of music: the darting movements suggested by a staccato passage giving way to sinuousity, and then to strongly marked rhythmic progression. My arthritis held me back from taking a full part in the movement, but from my seat, in which I moved with as much energy and elegance as my physical limitations allowed, I could see that for many of the group the activity was proving creative as well as perspirational.

Iris and Geoff Harrison introduced their voice-recognition technology, a truly amazing marriage of computer and software by means of which anyone who can speak can create a text on a word-processor and have it printed, without needing to read or write. The computer can transform the spoken word into text, read it audibly, and print it: in short, it can do everything dyslexic people might want to do but can't because of their disordered perception. If ever I have seen an entirely positive application of computer technology this is it.

At present the system still takes up rather too much space to be carried about and used as easily as a calculator, but I suspect that before the turn of the century people who cannot easily decode the written word will be able to call on a hand-held audio text-writer light enough to sit discreetly in a breast-pocket but powerful enough to abolish dyslexia for all practical purposes. I can already hear knee-jerk reactionaries complaining about how "*no-one makes the effort to learn difficult things any more because there's a machine to do it for them*", but it will be worth all the effort if the new technology sets dyslexics free from the eternal confusion which surrounds them at present.

Sharon Ginnis introduced the group to creative writing as a communal activity. I never cease to wonder at the variety of techniques Sharon seems to know. This one was simplicity itself, but I have to confess it would never have occurred to me. She just spread some vaguely related items on the ground, inviting the group to imagine how they could have contributed to a story, and to express part of the narrative through a tableau.

The Expressive Arts Centre in Barrow-on-Trent is ideal for this sort of meeting. It is intimate enough to favour easy communication, but there is enough space for group activities. Speaking as a Christian I appreciate the harmony between the purposes of the Methodists whose Chapel it once was and the largely humanist groups who use it now. Both in their own way were and are seeking better things, and on this occasion at least, they found them.

Chris. Shute

Informal Education: conversation, democracy and learning

by **Tony Jeffs and Mark K. Smith**, price £7-95

Education Now Books and YMCA George Williams College

"Nobody would pay me for what I do!" I remarked, with resignation, to a friend with whom I was discussing my part in education. "After all, I just sit and talk to children, or help them do what they have already decided to do. People only

pay for tangible things like instruction or training which lead to children changing their behaviour in ways that can be assessed come the end of term, or when they leave school". I rather wish I had been able to read this book before I said that, because it goes a long way towards supplying people who do what I do with a rationale and a technique.

The authors, who work and lecture in the field of Community Education, have created a handbook of informal educative techniques which avoids polemic without losing sight of the essential distinction between 'education' as this book defines it, and the daily business of schools.

They recognise that if you are going to set as the aim of your work in education improving and strengthening people's ability to think, feel and act in all the unforeseeable circumstances of their future lives, you cannot rely on a prescribed curriculum. There may well be a place for a modest programme of basic instruction somewhere in the education system, but Jeffs and Smith insist that "education is concerned with all aspects of thinking". As much as anything else it is bound up with equal, democratic human contacts, designed to promote new thinking by focusing on the interaction between the student's own mind-set and that of the educator.

The authors make it very clear that informal education is not accomplished simply by occupying space near the students. The educator has to be able to follow the flow of a conversation, recognising its dynamic structure and either intervening effectively or holding her peace until she can contribute something of value. She may have to alter the environment or persuade the company to go somewhere quieter. She must be constantly sensitive to the undercurrents of feeling and body-language which may show that a particular line of talk is not being well-received, or that boredom has set in.

This book is a strong cure for the misapprehension that talking together is somehow 'trivial', and therefore only tolerable when formal lessons or lectures are over for the day. Jeffs and Smith see informal conversation as an extremely powerful, though subtle, tool for opening minds to their own creative potential. They insist that serious educators need to promote it, and to reflect constantly on the values which shape it. There is no room in their practice for demagoguery, for the disrespectful, dismissive tone of voice which says to students: "Shut up and listen to me because I know much more than you". Three thousand years and more of formal education have been conducted along those lines, more often than not.

This book can be recommended as a 'vade-mecum' for everyone who has taken a serious decision to base his approach to

SB2000 is a group of students aged 11-16, from mainly three schools: Broadway School in Birmingham, Haggston School in Hackney, and Rushey Mead School in Leicester. The students, with their teachers, have worked for over eighteen months to plan a conference which aimed to achieve better standards by giving students a proper voice. Too often, they felt, young people in schools are not given the right of expression and so feel marginalised and devalued. It took place on Saturday 15th March 1997 at Rushey Mead School.

200 people attended, soon filling the school. They came from as far afield as Yarmouth, Sheffield, London and Lincoln. The day began with three drama presentations. There followed a wide choice of workshops on such themes as: school council skills, equality issues, global issues, school drugs policies, networking and web-siting. It was hailed as a 'brilliant day'.

Ten out of ten for the Potential Trust!

The *Potential Trust* is funding ten places for school students to attend our conference 'Democratic Discipline, Democratic Lives'. The Trust supports *Education Now's* commitment to the involvement of students in educational debate:

"One way to begin the process of changing school policies is to listen to students' views about them, (but) student perspectives are for the most part missing in discussions concerning strategies for confronting educational problems."

Sonia Nieto in *Harvard Educational Review*, 64,4,392-426

Dear Education Now,

We are the Head Co-ordinators of The Interantional Democratic Conference 97. IDEC has been going since 1993. Last year the conference was held in Israel by a large democraic school called Hadera Free School. This year it will be held in England, hosted by Sands School, which a small democraic school in the south-west of England. IDEC will be for ten days and held under canvas ... largely aimed towards students, although many educators, teachers and people with an interest in unconventional learning also attend. Despite the fact that the conference is a lace to discuss education, listen to lectures, have debates, we still have a lot of fun. There will be many organised activities i.e. circus

The Trailblazers ... part eight ... Ted Sizer

education on being with people, listening to them and interacting with them, not in order to force them into his mould, but rather to earn from them the right to be heard, and to offer them the riches of his mind.

Chris. Shute

SB2
Schools Beyond 2000

workshops, sport games, music and drama.

The conference will be in July from the 17th to 18th. We hope to see you there,

Jessica Woodward and Rachel Roberts

For further information, contact Conference Office, Sands Democratic School, 48 East Street, Ashburton, Devon, TQ13 7AX Tel/fax 01364 654265 e-mail idec@sands.demon.co.uk

Theodore R. (Ted) Sizer is one of those rare individuals who not only sees what is wrong with centralised education systems but also has the political energy and 'nous' to do something about it. He went from being Dean of Harvard School of Education to spend twelve years as principal of a High School. Then, having clarified what needed to be done from personal experience, he founded the Coalition for Essential Schools (CES), in 1984 based at Brown University, Rhode Island.

Throughout the 1980's he published a stream of highly readable pieces in *Phi Delta Kappan* and the *US Journal of Teacher Education*, arguing for school reconstruction not just reform. He also wrote a best-selling book in which he describes the problems facing an imaginary secondary school teacher who really wants to nurture a spirit of independent enquiry in his students (*Horace's Compromise*, 1984). A second book, *Horace's School*, followed in 1992 in which the fictional Horace (he might as well be called Ted!) sets out his blueprint for the creative secondary school that ought to be. By now his **Nine Principles** 'essential' for a school to do justice by its students had clarified. A large number of US secondary schools, private and public, had either become full members of the Coalition or else had begun to be 'exploring schools'. He had also successfully attracted very large sums of private trust funding into the CES project.

His writings are often reminiscent of the *Educational Heretics Press*. A letter to the October 1985 *Phi Delta Kappan*, signed "*Lefty. L. Thomas Paine, Thoreau Professor of the History of Ideas*", said that centralised curricula amounted to "*neat, productive mush*" and demanded "*where is the dissent? Where is the creative sloppy freedom that allows a Thomas Edison to emerge? Where are the children who ask fundamentally challenging questions?*".

He states the obvious things that rarely get stated these days - certainly not in England. For example, that we expect the students to make sense of a secondary curriculum fragmented into subjects taught by a multitude of teachers and in a multitude of lessons. Yet none of the specialist teachers understands the thing as a whole or even ask themselves if it is understandable - neither do the so called group tutors. This question was very much on my mind as a curriculum 'integrator' in the supposedly standards threatening Sixties - but Ofsted or SCAA never seem to consider it!

Sizer questions whether teaching that is based on a perceptive understanding of how each student learns is possible when teachers have to teach so many students in a week. I am often in schools where, as an extreme example, the music teacher is expected to teach up to 600 students in a week! Sizer rightly says that this is impossible within any meaningful understanding of personal learning or teaching. He wants large schools to be broken down into all-age units of around 200 with teams of teachers who are much more generalist in their teaching. He also wants control of the curriculum to lie in individual schools and their local communities. He wants risk-taking and experiment to be encouraged. Fundamentally, he wants all concerned for education to realise that "*less is more*", that although content is obviously important, most of it will quickly become obsolete and forgotten and that the focus must be on helping young people "*to learn to use their minds well*".

More schools join the project every year, each being encouraged to implement the nine principles in its own fashion. Others give up the struggle to change and drop out. The first research studies are now appearing. At least two UK comprehensive schools are participants, as is a Northampton independent school. Sizer attended the North of England Education conference last year and went on to address a well attended meeting at the Institute of Education in London. David Blunkett expressed interest in his message. I hope he understood it!

Sizer's Nine Principles of an Essential School (as abridged by Derry Hannam)

- Schools should focus on helping students to learn to use their minds well.
- Less is more. Prescribed skills and areas of knowledge should be kept to an absolute minimum - with strong emphasis on student mastery rather than 'covering content in specialist subjects.'
- The goals should be the same for all students but teachers must both understand and act on the understanding that different students need different means.
- Teaching and learning must be personalised. No teacher should be responsible for the learning of more than 80 students. Decisions as to courses, methods, and use of time must be made **in the school** and not by some central or local government curriculum constructors.
- The metaphor should be 'student-as-worker' rather than 'teacher-as-deliverer-of-instructional-services'. Coaching is needed to help students learn to teach themselves.
- Intensive remedial help must be given in literacy and numeracy if students enter secondary school unable to make successful use of its opportunities. The emphasis to be away from examinations or tests taken by all simply because they reach a particular age and onto 'exhibitions' that demonstrate that 'students can do important things' whenever they are capable of doing them.
- The tone of schools should be one of 'un anxious expectation' but free from threat with parents treated as full partners.
- Principals (Heads) and teachers should see themselves as generalists first and specialists second - willing to teach several subjects to fewer students with a view to gaining deep insights into the learning styles of individuals.
- There should be 'substantial' time for teachers to plan and collaborate.

Derry Hannam

Cider With Sharon and a Rosie Glow at a Learning Centre

A trip to Bulmers Cider in Hereford seemed like a good idea for a number of reasons, including enjoying a pleasant drive through picturesque countryside taking me out of the industrial West Midlands for a day. The main point of the

visit, however, was to see Bulmers Learning Centre for employees and to discuss education and training with Julie Johnson, the centre manager.

The Learning Centre is very impressive, located at the heart of the company's operations. It is well designed and furnished, with welcoming and helpful staff.

Bulmers Cider is an international business and employees work shifts to keep the manufacturing plant open 24 hours a day. Consequently, the Learning Centre is open and staffed 24 hours a day too. Julie has been responsible for its development from initial idea to final product. Impressively, she found ways of involving all staff who wanted to be part of decisions about the Centre's look and function. This meant presenting ideas and holding meetings at all hours of the day and night to meet the needs of staff on shifts.

The principles behind this way of working will be familiar to readers of *News and Review*. First, the Learning Centre exists for staff to access the education and training they want and need. The company is convinced that employees will, **of their own accord**, seek training to enable them to do their jobs better. Secondly, this training will be available at suitable times and through a choice of methods. Julie wants the staff to feel as much ownership as possible so they will choose to use the Centre as a resource for personal, not just professional, learning.

Resources on offer include CD rom packages, book and paper resources, a range of training courses for groups, individualised programmes and taught courses by request.

The Centre is a flexible facility, a venue which caters for drop in sessions and continuous programmes of study. The accommodation comprises a comfortable reception area with drinks machine and seating, and a connected open plan study area with computer bases. There are two seminar rooms suitable for private study and a resource base/library. A member of staff is always available to help and support the learning process and will discuss individual learning plans if requested.

The Centre has been a great success. Staff use its resources effectively and the company has seen a rise in productivity, believed to be a direct result of the increased interest in education and training.

My thanks to Julie Johnson and her staff at the Bulmers Cider Learning Centre in Hereford.

Sharon Ginnis

Research into home based education

As part of my Advanced Level Sociology coursework I carried out a piece of research into families who have decided to educate their children at home.

I was particularly interested in the fact that home based education has increased from a mere 20 families in 1977 to over 20,000 in 1995. Why has such a growth taken place? Do increasing numbers of people consider this type of education more successful? I was particularly interested in the reasons behind the decision to educate at home.

There are two main aspects of this study which I feel *Education Now* readers might find interesting. The **first** concerns the initial research where 85% of my sample thought that it was compulsory to send a child to school and that those who did not were breaking the law. 25% of the sample said that they felt "trapped" in the existing system, believing that no alternative existed. 15% were under the illusion that home based education was only for wealthy members of society.

This leads me to question why so many people are unaware of their rights concerning their child's education. Is this intentional? Is this somehow seen as a threat to the mass system of educating children?

My case studies also highlighted a **second** worrying issue. The issue of class emerged during a number of interviews. One home educating father complained bitterly about the Education Authority's total lack of interest in their daughter's progress. An education officer only visited them on one occasion and did not want to look at Sarah's work or talk to her about her education. Instead he seemed more interested in her parents' capabilities, education and social class.

When I visited Sarah she was determined to show me her latest piece of work, which I don't mind admitting was of a quality I didn't think a child of her age could achieve. The presentation was immaculate, having been word processed. The information included was up to a standard I did not reach until much later; I was genuinely impressed. I found it hard to believe that it had been produced by the same child who minutes earlier had been playing with her dolls. This family said that once they had left the State system they were treated like social outcasts.

My research into home based education has opened my eyes to

the realities of the system. It would appear that if you fail to conform you are discarded, if you choose a different system of educating your child you are often regarded with suspicion and rejection.

*Angela Poulton, age 17, a student at Park Hall School,
West Midlands*

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Year-round Education

The Educational Futures Trilogy is made up of three books from the Educational Futures Project, USA, directed by Don Glines. The first, 'Creating Educational Futures' logs the experience of the now defunct Mankato Wilson School, still recognised as one of the most innovative public educational institutions ever to be created. Its new principal, Don Glines, introduced 69 immediate changes to the traditional school he took over, setting the scene for his venture into personalised learning programmes, individualised integrated curricula, non-graded assessment, elimination of compulsory classes, and a timetable that was reconstructed every evening for the following day. Year-round Education was part of the plan.

The other two books in the trilogy deal with this idea of Year-round Schooling and Year-round Education. One is entitled *'Year-round Education: History, Philosophy, Future'*, and the other is *'The Great Lockout in America's Citizenship Plants: Past as Future'*.

Year-round Schooling

In 1969, Dr. White, Superintendent of the Fayetteville, Arkansas, schools presented a building plan to his Board of Education. The president, Henry Shreve, felt moved to ask why was it not possible to operate schools year-round so that maximum use was made of them and the need to build new ones avoided. "We try everything else, why can't we innovate in the area of school calendars?" This set in motion a revival of all year use of schools which has now extended to 39 States. The National Association for Year-round Education will hold its 28th annual conference this year. Another book by Don Glines and James Bingle about the history of this Association has now been published.

The idea is not new since versions of it can be found in 1904, and before that in 1870 and even before that in 1840. Schools were open all year, with students attending on a flexi-time basis.

One of the most noted calendar options was devised by William Wirt, a superintendent who began the programme in Bluffton and then moved to Gary, IN. The scheme ran from 1907 to 1937, 50 week a year, 12 hours a day, six days per week. In some variations, activities were also available on the seventh day too. The World War II marked a pause in these arrangements and they were not revived until 1969.

Year-round education

The first moves to re-establish year-round schooling were economic - to save money and land. The second wave of concern was to go beyond flexible calendars to a flexible concept of year-round education:

- **Continuous learning**
The concept that schools, like hospitals, are helping institutions and should never close, is a central idea in Year-round Education. Students should be able to learn in any of the twelve months at will. Some of this learning will be on site and some in other locations in the community on a flexi-time and flexi-schooling basis.
- **Employment realities**
Flexible employment patterns are now the norm for more and more people and families involved in Year-round Education have grown to value the flexibility of choosing periods of school attendance and periods of vacation throughout the year to suit their circumstances.
- **Lifestyle diversities**
Families can be offered four short breaks in a year or one long one or other combinations. Those who like travel, or winter sports or summer breaks can all be accommodated at will
- **Curriculum facilities**
Pressure on facilities is reduced if computer suites, art studios, drama studios, sports facilities are all available all year and another result can be smaller classes and less crowding in schools.
- **Improvement catalysts**
The flexibility in the calendar enables staff to plan and implement innovations. It opens up the opportunity for change and re-appraisal of practice.
- **Community enhancements**
Flexible attendance has effects on traffic congestion, on use of community facilities, on volunteering, on staff morale and on student motivation. The culture of the school is changed from compulsory uniformity to invitational variety.
- **Personal choices**
Year-round education allows real choice for families. Those who particularly like the present calendar, can still have it whilst others can select the pattern that meets their needs in a particular year.

Further information can be obtained from:
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