

Power to the learner!

Technology is the catalyst

It is hardly new news to say that this is a time of change. Across society, new technology is driving a root-and-branch restructuring of many of our ingrained ideas and many of our most established institutions. It is now a cliché to say this. Even so, many of the implications of this wave of innovation have yet to sink in, or to be widely discussed. This is as true in education, as anywhere else.

A lot of attention has naturally been given to the impact of computers in the classroom. With new tools, different modes of teaching can be developed. For many, the process of coming to terms with the possibilities has hardly started. No one knows where this will lead, nor should we expect to. The likelihood is that the classroom will look very different in due course. No doubt the advent of the printed book had quite an effect on teaching styles. As tools change, so does practice. It takes time, measured in decades. We shouldn't underestimate the extent of what is going on.

Innovative educational practice will get a big boost in all kinds of ways. In school and out, communications technology provides unparalleled tools for information retrieval. High-quality, up-to date information about virtually any subject is available without fuss as a matter of routine. The issue is no longer *access*, the price of which is falling rapidly, so much as how best to use the plethora of resources pouring in.

To concentrate just on this though, is to miss the main point. Something else, even more radical is in train. Simply put, communications technology will put control in the hands of the learner. The importance of this is hard to exaggerate. By extending choice and widening opportunity, it will kick off a shift in practice and policy that is global in nature, but which has profound local implications.

As a result, we can expect much more diversity in the manner in which education is conducted. If much of the wherewithal of learning is available down a wire, those who want it can get it - or organise it themselves - without going through the established structure. And communication need not be one way, nor only between two points. For anyone wanting to do things differently or outside the current dispensation, the opportunities are obvious.

Take home-schooling. For a few people, the idea of the state removing their children and drilling some approved version of the world into them in large groups is anathema. So far, to take the responsibility as a parent to opt out of this, has been a daunting task. Some have. As work patterns and accepted norms shift, driven by the same technological factors, it will get easier for others to join them.

Such trends will be reinforced by the power that comes from networking. Enhanced quality and ease of communication gives critical mass to many such hitherto fragmented interest groups. The idea of a global community for those who share a passion is a real one. It becomes as easy to swap information and gossip with someone on the other side of the world, as it is to do so with a friend in the next town. Another cliché, but only because the reality is here now.

New arrangements will come in many forms, driven increasingly by the aspirations and needs of those who use them. When people have choice, they exercise it. New channels of access and the choice they facilitate, more than anything else, will stoke up the pressure for change.

We can expect the emergence of a new generation of educational institutions, supplementing and eventually transforming or replacing those that exist now. Whether it be via networked links to school resources, video-conference contact with specialist teachers, or through software bought off the shelf, in some places this kind of innovation is already having a substantial effect.

By enabling more variety in how learning is configured, and by making it easy to link options together, technology will significantly extend the range of possible alternatives. By enabling learners to access them and to switch between their providers, it will stimulate trade in educational services, accelerating the process whereby information, choice, control and ultimately funding is pushed away from institutions and towards the learner.

There is another straightforward implication – that the driver behind this will be commerce. That will open a can of worms. The idea of learners, parents and children as consumers goes against the prevailing orthodoxy. But perhaps we'd better start getting used to it now. For all the issues that it will raise, the growth of new for-profit service providers, is likely to give a major impetus to the delivery of improved education, not just in the UK, but throughout the world. In the end, this may be the most important consequence. **For anyone who wants to see change in education, the next few years will provide a ringside seat.**

Paul Ardern

The author is co-director of the Learning Technology Project, run in association with *The Institute of Economic Affairs* and *Demos* to promote debate about education. Other material and a discussion group can be accessed at its website, www.ithaca.org. Comments and participation welcomed. Mail responses may be sent to paulardern@ithaca.org or to Learning Technology, 18 Nassington Rd., London NW3 2UD.

Virtual school for Islington

Can you imagine a school without walls and classrooms, but that still meets every day; where the children choose their own curriculum and meet at museums, galleries and at other city resources to learn; and are assessed and communicate with each other the rest of the time via the internet?

Don't worry if you can't. It took me a while to work through all of this but, having done so, I'm convinced that *The Virtual School* - for that is what I've called the initiative - is a radical and exciting way for our children to learn. It's an idea that has yet to get off the ground, and it will need the energy and ideas of similarly-minded parents to help this happen - but more of that later.

The Virtual School will be for both home-schoolers and those dissatisfied with their current school but who worry that home-schooling may be too isolating. It is also a project in which state (and even private) schools can participate, possibly sending pupils on some of the learning modules to give them a flavour of a different style of education, or to enhance an aspect of their own tutorials.

The Department for Education and Employment has been awash with ideas for their Education Action Zones. Needless to say, *The Virtual School* is among them and, as we're based in Islington - an educationally-deprived area by anyone's definition - we're hoping we can win some financial support.

We've already got a few expert people on board to help guide the project and so avoid some of the pitfalls, such as, Philip Toogood from the Flexi College, which has a similarly democratic approach to learning. Roland Meighan is also on hand to help where he can. Others have been invited, and we're waiting on their response. But the most important people will be like-minded parents who can see and share the vision of *The Virtual School*, and who can put flesh on bones, offer practical advice, and help make the project a reality.

Not that the concept is unique. Although I didn't realise it when I first came up with the idea, I've since discovered that other pioneers have gone a long way down the same path. In this country, the *Open School* in Devon and Bethnal Green has been using the fax and e-mail as part of its teaching resources since it started in 1991. Its method, known as teletutoring, provides distance learning to students in school, hospital, or at home, for instance, and offers a range of programmes, which are often customised to an individual's needs.

In Canada, *The Virtual School*, or cyber school, idea is flourishing among the 7,000 home-schooled children of Alberta. Home-schooling families there can devise their own learning programme or can use the Alberta Distance Learning Materials, a series of learning modules that are e-mailed to teachers operating from 10 different schools in the province. The teachers, in turn, fax them on to the families on the course.

Perhaps the most famous example, though, is John Gatto Taylor's 'city as school' project in New York City. Taylor, once a conventional teacher who rebelled against the regimented and authoritarian approach of state education, uses all the resources of the city to encourage the innate learning skills of his 'pupils'. They will often set up camp for a term at one of the New York museums and will explore it from top to bottom.

A teacher friend of mine in New York says the children are some of the best-informed in the whole city! But the miracle is that this has happened with the city's cast-off children, those who have been discarded as no-hopers for a variety of reasons, be it drugs, violence or petty crime.

It was never my intention to produce something unique or different, but to provide the best possible learning environment for our children. But if it is uniqueness that you're looking for, *The Virtual School* project is probably the first to combine the elements of 'city as school' with all the benefits of digital technology.

This is possibly, on the face of it, the hardest trick of all to pull off. But, as we begin to explore subjects, so we come to understand the truism that all things are inter-related. The child who decides he wants to learn about the dinosaurs will inevitably encounter geography, climate changes, outer space (the idea of the meteorite hitting the earth will doubtless be discussed), evolution, mathematics (in understanding the time scales, the life cycles of dinosaurs), biology, history and palaeontology along the way. And that's just with a set of creatures that couldn't read, write, talk (certainly not in the way we understand the word), paint, build or write music! Imagine how much richer and complex the material would be if the child chose the Ancient Greeks or How A Newspaper is Prepared, for instance.

The key to *The Virtual School* is to rekindle the child's love of learning for its own sake. This can be achieved only when the children are back in charge and so become self-motivated all over again. It will take time for them to realise that this isn't another adult 'con trick'!

Whichever module is chosen, the child will get to discuss the subject with the real experts in the field - the people who know the subject because they're living and breathing it every day, and so are still excited by the subject, something that will be communicated to the child. Suddenly the emphasis is shifted from 'being taught' to 'learning and discovering' - passive to active.

An important element of the process will be for the child to prepare work - it could be a folder, or perhaps a newspaper if that was the module chosen - which could provide a co-ordinator with important benchmarks. Is the maths right, for instance, or does the child really understand how to construct a sentence? Some individual attention could be given to 'weak' areas - but the level of intervention and help will be up for discussion among the 'founding' fathers and mothers.

The internet will play a vital role. It will be a resource in its own right - *The Virtual School* will create its own web site, and guides and tutorials could be pulled down as required. It will also be used as a communication media between children, and between child and co-ordinator.

The children will meet frequently at the museum, gallery or wherever is appropriate for their chosen module, and physical activity will also be an important ingredient (personally, I'm determined to create *The Virtual School* football team, and any other team the kids may prefer!).

Should *The Virtual School* have a centre? Should there be a drop-off location? Should there be any teachers involved? Does it just have to be in London? Should we be aware of the National Curriculum? What age group should we cater for? These questions, and many more besides, need to be discussed by the founding committee.

If you would like to participate in this exciting initiative in learning, please write to me indicating what expertise you bring to the party (and it might just be your enthusiasm).

Bryan Hubbard

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Review

The Art of Education: reclaiming your family, community and self,

by Linda Dobson,
Home Education Press,
USA, 1995

Radical comment on schooling is now a collectors item. Linda Dobson is not put off by this and resumes the debate where John Holt left it when he proposed that schooling was not a good idea gone wrong, but a bad idea from the outset.

For Linda Dobson, school erases key abilities such as curiosity, imagination, creativity, inner peace, humour, artistry, self-motivation, and intuition. In return, school offers "indoctrination in accepted ideas". Indoctrination is defined as a "the teaching to accept a system of thought uncritically". Dobson writes: "Can you think of a better way to ensure that you will be a "made" according to the dictates of others than by forcing you, by law, to appear at a government-funded, state-controlled institution, where you spend a predetermined number of years, as part of a crowd, subject to constant scrutiny and evaluation? No, I am not talking about prison. I refer to ... school."

In defence of teachers, Dobson observes that one in five leaves the profession within five years. The official explanation is burn out, but she calls it disillusionment - living the life of an indoctrinator is not what they intended.

School develops bad habits, and she quotes Silberman: "far from helping students to develop into mature, self-reliance, self-motivated individuals, schools seem to do everything they can to keep youngsters in a state of chronic, almost infantile, dependency. The pervasive atmosphere of distrust, together with rules covering the most minute aspects of existence, teach students every day they are not people of worth, and certainly not individuals capable of regulating their own behaviour." Such methods are more appropriate to totalitarianism than to a democracy, better suited to crowd control than to education.

A notable bad habit is learning to rely on experts to solve problems for us. Dobson echoes Illich: "Once a man or woman has excepted the need for school, he or she is easy prey for other institutions." She goes on, "The institutions' answer directs us away from life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, toward possessions, corporate slavery and the pursuit of the almighty dollar. Lack of time together leaves us indifferent to human connection, compassion, co-operation, trust, courage and love."

For Dobson, home-based education is **family-centred education** where the members grow into self-reliance and healthy scepticism of experts and professionals. It uses the principles of natural education which require only a guide providing direction, and a learner ready to discover and create goals and values that are personally meaningful.

Families acting in co-operation can do things together and even evolve into open resource centres. But resources, though useful, are not the central issue. "Not even designer toys substitute for good quality conversation".

For Dobson, the question is no longer, "Can I teach my own children?" But, "Can my children and family be truly healthy and happy, functional, free, and educated if I don't?" Human beings are capable of wise decision-making when they are not

paralysed by authoritarian hierarchies, conflicting cues, or impersonal structures that diffuse individual responsibility.

In proposing that the government way is a poor one, and that family-centred education is superior, Dobson sets about exploding various myths about home-based education. She does this by describing a day in the life of a home educator. All the wealth of learnings she lists, are "accomplished in the warm, loving, safe environment of home! No bells, no tests, no peer pressure, no competition! Individual attention, individual progress, individual choice! The art of education - pure, stress less, naturally occurring ... "

In chapter 12 we learn how the Dobson family began home-based education. The oldest child's brief stint in public school kindergarten had already revealed a number of worrying features. There was the stress of formal book learning begun too soon. Then there was the behaviour-altering effects of peer pressure. Next there was the personality-altering effects of school discipline. Finally, there was the spirit-altering effects of boredom and irrelevance.

Home-based education worked for the children, but also expanded the life of Linda Dobson:

"As the children acquired basic skills - reading, writing, arithmetic - their interests expanded. So did mine. Their sense of wonder blossomed. So did mine. Their abilities multiplied. So did mine. Their confidence increased. So did mine."

Some friends were impressed but protested that they could not cope with being with their children all day long. They failed to see that the irritating behaviour of their children is a consequence of schooling. Other friends worried about the cost, but the sum of money needed is flexible, especially now that we live in an information-rich society with plenty of free resources available. Besides, there is the time to go bargain-hunting together at auctions and sales.

Another gain was a strengthened family life. "Our institutions still give lip-service to the family as the first and most important building block society. But by destroying the natural cycle of love and respect inherent in family life through their demands that children 'socialise' in artificially inflated institutional settings, they are contributing to the destruction of society itself."

The radical thought is developed that education could be improved with one simple reform - eliminate schools. Instead, establish learning centres dedicated to meeting the unique needs of all the learner who took up the invitation to attend. Several examples of such learning centres are described: Paris, Lexington Virginia, Providence Rhode Island, and Kansas City.

Dobson reminds us that the Smithsonian report on high achievement noted that schooling reduced all the three factors that encouraged genius. They were, firstly, plenty of time spent in the company of warm responsive parents and other adults, secondly, only limited time spent in the company of peers, and thirdly plenty of free-exploration with parental support and encouragement.

Home-based education can restore the three conditions required for high achievement. In appendix A to the book, the list of famous adults who were home-schooled, makes the point. It includes seven presidents of the United States and various scientists, inventors, authors, explorers and business people.

Roland Meighan

Self-awareness - the road to self-discipline

Breaking the cycle of conditioned behaviour

Most school populations consist of a large body of unquestioning conformists, who we call 'well-behaved', and a relatively small number of 'rebels' or 'disaffected' students. To achieve healthier learning environments, what we need to aim for is a large body of thinking, creative individuals, who, although questioning about all aspects of their lives, are able to work harmoniously with others within the organisation, while at the same time putting their creativity to good use for themselves and others. The problem with most disciplinary systems is that they use 'object referral' methods to modify behaviour e.g. the 'carrot and stick' approach. Unfortunately, this method does not lead to self-discipline, because the approach focuses students on being motivated by 'external' cues. An approach which uses 'self-referral' methods is needed to develop in individuals the ability to be aware of, and act appropriately on, 'internal' cues, in other words to manage their own behaviour. For this to be successful the actual teaching of awareness techniques and emotional intelligence or literacy is required. The essential elements of such a course are that young people need:

- to be able to recognize accurately and take ownership for what they are feeling
- to have a vocabulary to be able to communicate these feelings and where appropriate
- to be able to manage these feelings
- to be able to choose from a variety of responses and then act in appropriate ways
- to be able to take responsibility for the consequences of these actions.

It is the ability to be aware of and respond to internal cues in this way that is the hallmark of a self-disciplined and mature individual.

Most behaviour is guided by our thoughts, the response of our memory to situations. It is automatic and unconscious - we 'shoot from the hip'. A great deal of the time we are 'asleep', lost in what we are doing, so that most of our behaviour, both 'good' and 'bad', is habitual. To be more creative and be able to break free of this conditioned behaviour we need to be 'woken up'

so that we

become aware how we are feeling and acting and the consequences of these actions for ourselves and others.

To achieve this involves two steps. Firstly, we need to develop the ability to be aware in the first place. It is our sole identification with our thoughts as 'us' that makes us slaves to our conditioning, so we need to be able to take a 'step back' from our thinking to be able to act in new ways. We need to be able to break the endless stream of conditioned thinking which normally fills our heads in order to allow new ways of responding to arise. Techniques for quietening the habitual thinking processes, on which we act most of the time, are needed to create this space or gap in our thinking. There are a number of simple physical techniques which can be easily learned and are helpful in developing more clarity of awareness.

The second stage in creating more aware, integrated behaviour is to direct this awareness to our internal processes. This is where the teaching of emotional literacy is important and will involve the development of full awareness of feelings, a vocabulary to communicate these feelings when and where appropriate, and the ability to take appropriate actions based on these feelings.

The teaching of these techniques and skills can take place individually or in groups for both staff and students. It is key to the effectiveness of a programme such as this that staff 'model' appropriate behaviour for students. Young people, particularly adolescents, are quick to spot inconsistencies between what is practised and what is preached. The use of staff development also makes teachers more sensitive to their own behaviour and that of the students with whom they work and, therefore, more able to guide them.

We often think that mature behaviour is the result of following rules, and that it is healthy when this becomes habitual, but it is the other way round. Mature individuals naturally act in appropriate ways, rules are 'obvious' to them. How much better to devote our energy to providing the skills necessary to reach this state to those that need them, rather than concentrating on trying to modify behaviour from the 'outside'. To allow creative, mature individuals to develop, requires an environment in which the individual is valued and, able to practise the skills to lead their life more effectively.

Old paradigm

everyone 'asleep' in their conditioning.....
conformity.....
teacher seen as controller.....
one manager of 30 + individuals.....
teacher responsible for everyone's behaviour.....
teacher playing role.....

everyone acting out internal states.....
'them and us'
imposed rules.....
students motivated by 'external' punishments and rewards
appropriate actions to them
feelings projected and 'acted' out.....
conflicts suppressed.....
conflicts seen as threats to 'order'
maturity expected to 'develop'
rules are to be followed.....
'I am my thoughts and feelings'
information on which I can choose to act'
acting rationally from accumulated knowledge.....

New paradigm

everyone 'awake' to their conditioning
active participation
teacher seen as 'reminder' of what has been learned
potentially 31 managers of behaviour
everyone responsible for their own behaviour
teacher being 'real', giving feedback on their feelings to
students

the games are named
'we'
rules jointly formulated, agreed and understood
students motivated by their 'internal' states and

feelings taken responsibility for and 'owned'
conflicts examined, understood and resolved
conflicts seen as learning points
mature behaviour explicitly taught and practised
rules are 'obvious' ways of behaving
'these thoughts and feelings are part of me giving me

acting intuitively from the gap between our thoughts.

Tony Graham

Family learning is the foundation of education

David Blunkett talks passionately about family learning and parents as a child's first teacher, yet there is still little support for parents as educators. To transform education we need to reorganise services to support families as the foundation sector of education.

Since taking office Labour has made a significant shift towards supporting families. There is a high-level ministerial group on parenting. Home-school agreements could make a difference, if linked to a whole school approach to working with parents. The National Lottery is funding a £2.8m Family Learning Award Scheme. But recognising the home as our primary place of learning would transform how we think and act even further.

Education reform is almost entirely concerned with schools, yet children spend less than fifteen per cent of waking time in school. Numerous studies show that the home environment has the greatest influence on educational attainment. Indeed, half of our learning ability develops by the age of four.

Families influence every other sphere of life. They are our largest welfare service and the first court in the criminal justice system, teaching everyday ethics and behaviour. Without their work the economy would collapse. They are our largest leisure service. They are also political entities in which parents are leaders and educators using many systems, from anarchy to dictatorship, to prepare their children to run their own lives.

Most people have a 'good enough' childhood, but more than six million people suffer from mental disorders at any one time. Much of this can be linked to experiences of violence and emotional abuse in the family. They struggle to unlearn these damaging early lessons through therapy, the Courts or a muddled, unhappy life. As society becomes increasingly complex even 'good enough' may not be enough for 21st century children.

We need to recognise parents as the 'primary' agents in their children's lives. This won't be easy. Many parents have effectively been taught that they are powerless, and education, health and other concerns are the preserve of professionals, who, when they talk about partnerships with parents usually mean getting parents to support them.

There is, however, a shift in attitudes among professionals as well as parents. New partnerships are being created throughout the country. David Blunkett's Education Bill could transform aspirations and achievements by building on local initiatives to create a flexible national framework to support families as a foundation phase of education. This must involve strengthening and supporting voluntary initiatives, in partnership with statutory agencies, not a take-over by the State.

A campaign for family learning could draw on the last Labour government's experience with 'On the Move', an adult literacy campaign involving television, voluntary organisations and education institutions backed by a small national team (which is now the Basic Skills Agency). Carlton Television's parenting weeks and the BBC's family literacy campaign last year show how television can play a powerful role in parenting education and encouraging parents to help their children learn.

Local support for families must be more coherent and co-ordinated, matched by policy coherence between education, health, social security, criminal justice and national economic policy. The Government's commitment to integrated early years education, childcare and primary education through Early Years Forums is welcome. But they must develop in partnership with parents and local networks, many of which have struggled with little official support for many years.

Finally, early-years Centres of Excellence have considerable potential to support learning within families. But the Government should enable every neighbourhood to develop an early-years Centre of Excellence, with parenting education for all who want it. Local links with health visitors, child-minders, libraries, and others who work with families can encourage learning from birth, through education visitors and projects like *Bookstart* in Birmingham. Every school needs to treat parents as equal partners in education, with the same needs as every other educator. Many Local Authorities already help schools to work with parents.

The DfEE could build on this experience by:

- providing guidelines and models of good practice;
- including partnership with parents in initial teacher training;
- earmarking funds for in-service training in parental partnerships;
- requiring schools to develop and finance policies for working with parents.

We can learn a lot from the continental model of termly class meetings of all parents with their teachers. Class meetings provide an opportunity for parents and teachers to discuss the curriculum, to get to know each other and to address shared concerns. These meetings would create a much deeper partnership and understanding than annual parents' evenings.

This is an ambitious programme to support a sector of education older than schooling, but submerged by employment and statutory schooling. Investing small amounts of money could yield continuous improvements in achievement over the long term. A national television campaign for family learning would cost about £6 million. Parenting education for all who want it would cost almost £200 million. A family learning support worker for every primary school could cost a billion pounds. Not all of it has to come from taxes, but Government must take a lead. Investing in parents as educators will stimulate lifelong involvement in education that will cascade through the generations.

Titus Alexander

(abridged by Chris. Shute.)

Titus Alexander is a free-lance author and educational adviser.

For further comment see *Family Learning: The foundations of effective education*, DEMOS £7-95 from 9 Bridewell Place London EC4V 6AP

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Review

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Roland Meighan

Flotsam and jetsam

That schooling touch ...

At the party to celebrate his early voluntary freedom, Professor Barrie Wade told us that he was watching a young man pen these words doing an English lesson:

*"Yesterday, yesterday, yesterday,
Happiness, happiness, happiness,
Today, today, today,
Misery, misery, misery,
Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow,
Death, death, death."*

Barrie, complimented the writer on his striking poem, only to be informed that this was not a poem, but his spelling corrections.

Sackcloth and Ashes time

As far as I can tell, only the *Times Educational Supplement* has taken the trouble to tell us that economic collapse in the Pacific Rim countries has led them to question their education systems and to set about changing them. (see TES June 26th, 1998) Those politicians, civil servants, and educationalists and journalists who have forced through the idea that educational salvation depended on UK copying the Pacific Rim model of regimental education, are now invited to appear in public in their sackcloth and ashes, and ask for our forgiveness. (Is it now time to declare such things as OFSTED, Key Stages, the Teacher Training Agency, the National Curriculum, the League Tables, and all that regressive apparatus, as an expensive mistake, and to set about doing something more intelligent?)

Good news and bad news

A recent MORI poll, commissioned by the *Campaign for Learning*, found that 90% of adults were favourably inclined towards further learning for themselves. In the right environment, they were willing to undertake further learning. The bad news is that 75% said they were unhappy and alienated in the school environment, and that they therefore preferred to learn at home, in the local library, at their workplace - *anywhere* other than a school-type setting.

Cure your own depression

We shall need less doctors in the future if the idea of monitoring your own health catches on. Self-treatment appears to have taken a step forward with the introduction of a CD-ROM called *Beating the Blues* which teaches you to be your own psychologists, then begin treating yourself.

Mathematics watch 1: the thinker

Edward de Bono, well-known for his ideas on introducing thinking as a major curriculum initiative, declares on his WebSite, that in the European Union about 25% of schooling time is spent on Mathematics. Yet 90% of those leaving school probably use less than 3% of what they have learnt in mathematics lessons. "*When did you last use algebra, trigonometry, set theory or calculus?*" he asks.

(Has Maths acquired the status of a mass superstition?)

Mathematics watch 2: the teacher

A former Maths teacher, Leslie Duffen, suggested that we should abolish compulsory mathematics in secondary schools and greatly reduce the time spent on it in primary schools. Few adults needed much mathematics in everyday lives, so teaching more than basic arithmetic was a sad wast of time. (TES 8/5/98)

Mathematics watch 3: the journalist

Last year, Linda Grant writing in *The Guardian*, (20/1/97) questioned whether most of the time spent teaching mathematics was wasted, since most of it was never used again by the people who learnt it.

Mathematics watch 4: the mathematician

Bertrand Russell wrote, "*In universities, mathematics is taught mainly to men who are going to teach mathematics ...*" who go back into school to teach maths ... "*Sometimes, it is true, there is an escape from this treadmill. Archimedes used mathematics to kill Romans, Galileo to improve the Grand Duke of Tuscany's artillery, modern physicists (grown more ambitious) to exterminate the human race.*" Russell regarded mathematics as a form of art and its most benign function was entertainment.

Guru watch 1: Seymour Papert

Speaking in London in June 1998, Papert forecast that the British school system is within five to ten years of collapse. "*Relatively speaking, Britain is going downhill faster than most. I do not have a harsh view of British education, because it was in British schools that I learned about open education, but it's especially painful to see all this being reversed.*"

Guru watch 2: Edward de Bono

"*I have not done a full survey or review of education systems around the world so that the views I express are based on personal experience. I would say that all education systems I've had contact with are a disgrace and a disaster.*"

Guru watch 3: Tony Benn

"*... democracy is still detested by those in power as it always has been throughout our history ...*" (The Guardian, 24/7/98)

In memory of Frank Sinatra (tune-'My Way')

I came, bought all my books, lived in the dorms, followed directions,
I worked, I studied hard, met lots of folks who had connections,

I crammed, they gave me grades, and may I say, not in a fair way,
but more, much more than this,
I did it *their way*.

I learned all sorts of things, although I know, I'll never use them.
The courses that I took were all required, I didn't choose them.
You'll find that to survive its best to act the doctrinaire way,
and so I buckled down, and did it *their way*.

Yes, there were times I wondered why,
I had to crawl when I could fly,
I had my doubts, but after all,
I clipped my wings and learned to crawl,
I learned to bend, and in the end,
I did it *their way*.

And so, my fine young friends, now that I am a full professor,
Where once I was oppressed, have now become the cruel oppressor.
With me you'll learn to cope, you'll learn to climb life's golden stairway.
Like me, you'll see the light, and do it *their way*.

(source: Bryn Purdy)

Educational Beachcomber

In conversation with ... Paul Ginnis

I first met Paul when he was visiting Dame Catherine's School with Sharon during the time Philip Toogood was Head. At that time he was a teacher adviser for Birmingham LEA, and had written *A Guide to Student-Centred Learning* with Donna Brandes. He was already a subscriber to the *Education Now* magazine, and conversation on that day, which revealed common values in education, led to involvement in *Education Now* for its entire ten-year life-span. During that period, he has been prominent as one of the dynamic figures instrumental in developing the organisation, contributing as an Associate Director and as editor of *News and Review* for eighteen issues. Although Paul has given so much in enthusiasm, commitment and ideas to education, including *Education Now*, there are many other aspects to his life. He is, "a self-confessed vinyl junkie, a gamester (in the sense of loving games), a fanatical supporter of Stoke City Football Club, and a delighted father of three by a previous marriage."

Janet: Paul, first and foremost I see you as a family man - both your immediate and your extended family are very important to you. How do you view this part of your life?

Paul: Yes, we have a very close extended family, including my mum, my two sisters, brothers in law, niece, myself, Sharon, Clare, Steven and Helen. We attempt to have at least two major events a year when the extended family is bound together. This usually involves a summer holiday and Christmas or New Year. As you know, Sharon has a very close, rich relationship with the kids. This has paid off handsomely in terms of their feeling of security. They now have more than three very caring adults around them.

Janet: As the proud owner of a juke-box in your kitchen, where do your music interests lie, Paul?

Paul: Going to live music has been very important to me. A bit less so now, I guess, as middle-age is getting its grip. But there was a time, when we would follow Southside Johnny and the Asbury Jukes around the country for a whole week, working in Birmingham during the day and setting off for Norwich, Bradford or London each night. Now we're becoming more interested in world music, meditative music, folk and roots, and see ourselves as explorers of music. We came to a

point of real distress - to remain stuck in time with our beloved vinyl or to take a leap forward with technology and get a CD player, which we reluctantly did.

Janet: Education nearly lost you to the entertainment world

Paul: Yes, we had a very cheeky idea one day that we would approach Shugborough Hall and ask if they wanted any entertainments doing. They provided us with the opportunity to develop our 'Twenties Night' and that set us off on a road which became the '*Entertainment Industry*'. At that time I had asked for, and been given, voluntary redundancy from Birmingham LEA. The impact of the 1988 Education Act, with the introduction of the National Curriculum, training in assessment... meant that all that I

stood for and believed in was washed up on the beach. The notion of being an entertainer presented itself as an energetic and creative option.

"There is, I believe, actually nothing more powerful to say about education than this: that all people, however young or old, have an enormous drive and capacity to learn; that many aspects of typical schooling get in the way of this, ... that learners really start to explore and exercise their potential only as they take charge of their lives ..."
Paul Ginnis in *Freethinkers' Guide to the Educational Universe*

Janet: How did *Education Now* fit into this period of metamorphosis?

Paul: I decided I wanted to make contact with the people whose work I had read and come to respect. It was a great thrill to become an Associate Director. Then, to be invited to edit *News and Review* was another great thrill, and a challenge, as it came to be regarded as 'the voice of *Education Now*'. A few editions in, I recognised the need for balance; that the publication should speak to people who were both in and out of mainstream education, concerned with early years through to adult learning. We needed to have a balance between national and international interests, and between theory and practice. At our best, we did achieve that balance, and we were learning to improve our computing, editing and layout skills all the time.

We gradually became aware that *News and Review* was being regarded as an assessable introduction to new ideas and was being read by people with influence in this country and abroad. With that came a sense of responsibility as an editor, to do the best by the readers.

Janet: During this time your working life had moved on?

Paul: I went down the path of consultancy largely by chance, due to a phone call from a deputy head in Dewsbury who invited me to work with her. I had taken voluntary redundancy because I was constantly being asked to do things that were against my principles educationally. I realised I was now seeking an opportunity to do what I believed in, and so I offered myself on the national scene.

The introduction of the National Curriculum did take people's attention away from issues of teaching and learning - it was a huge red herring for us as a profession. Over the last two years, however, rather more enlightened schools have understood that raising levels of attainment means focusing on the **quality of learning**. Immediately, we then look at the diversity of learning styles, multiple intelligences, research into how the brain works ... **this leads to an awareness that the learners learn best when they are empowered to be independent in their learning.**

Janet: How do you see the future of the education system?

Paul: I am in many ways optimistic about the future of education in this country. I think there are two main creative forces at this time. The first, is the **force of technology** - it is propelling us into an educational environment in which learners will become independent because technology provides the 'tools of independence'. The second, is **what we know about the learning process** and the increasing acceptance of messages from brain science and humanistic psychology. Accelerated learning is a clear example. We are moving into a **reconstruction of schools based on the notion of independent learning** of the kind that Philip Toogood has been attempting to create, and for which Roland Meighan has been arguing for some time. I think that what we will see is a much more varied map, and while some schools will continue to exist in a fairly traditional mode, most will become converted to bases of learning rather than factories of teaching.

Janet: What is this we hear of you and an 'affair' with Stoke City Football Club?

Paul: I would like to scotch the rumours of an 'affair' - sadly, it was never anything more than a 'flirtation'. In the close season, I was invited to take up a consultancy with the club to work with their youth teams on issues of motivation,

psychology and so on. The new management team, however, are saying that they want to get accustomed to the club before they work with any outsiders, and so while waiting for 'the phone-call', I am happy to carry on playing ball with education.

Janet Meighan

Book Reviews

Further Education as Economic Regeneration: The Starting Point.

Bilston Community College staff and friends.

Edited by Frank Reeves. £9-50 Education.Now Books

Traditionally, colleges of FE have been principally places for training people in trades such as engineering, bricklaying, carpentry, plumbing, hairdressing, car-mechanics, etc., on day release courses whilst doing a job. They are also the place where people can have a second chance at academic education. But what happens to such colleges in areas where traditional industries have been eroded to the point of extinction? With the demise of industry not only goes opportunities for training places in those industries, but any chance of a job in them as well. If people are not earning, then they cannot afford to buy their second chance, and the local college is in real danger of suffering along with everyone else in the economic downturn of its area.

This book is about how Bilston Community College, and its very innovative dedicated staff, have challenged this situation by taking advantage of incorporation and its new responsibility for running its own affairs. The book describes how the College has set up its own businesses in the area, designed to create vocational training opportunities for its students that have ceased to exist locally in the private sector, and a strong argument is presented from all the 29 writers in the book that this is real economic regeneration, which is sustainable and meets the needs of local people.

The book is split into four sections. The first describes the vision behind the work of the college and argues the case for moving education from within its ivory tower and out to where people need it: away from 'stuffing heads' and instead, to encouraging active, participative learning, which, as it is delivered within a real business, has real sustainable economic value. The second part describes a number of entrepreneurial projects the college is currently engaged in, or is planning to become involved with. All the projects have partners, and this is to make sure that the college is not setting up a business in competition with someone else locally. The example is given, of their printing business, which was combined with a local printer who wanted to expand, and two new jobs have been generated as a result. The third section centres on Bilston's international links, and describes, amongst many ideas, how Bilston is finding a new market for its training packages in the ex-Soviet Union. This will generate money for the college, which it will be able to invest back into their community-based economic regeneration projects. The fourth part is a critique of traditional FE college structures and how Bilston has had to move away from the pedagogical approach of many education establishments in order to be free and flexible enough to engage in business generation work. There is a different role discussed for the teacher and for the students and an account of how learning can be used in confronting the malaise of disillusionment and under achievement that is so often present in areas of high unemployment and economic disadvantage.

It is a refreshing book, easy to read, and full of good ideas and much optimism. The philosophy behind the work is soundly based on democratic principles, and the focus of all the writers' efforts is to improve the lot of the people of Bilston. Educationally, the college is saying loud and clear that it needs the active co-operation of learners to achieve its ends, and this must be applauded. As the book's title points out, this is just the beginning, and I look forward to Bilston's next volume where it is promised that the success of some of these projects will be evaluated.

Glen Buglass Community Arts Development Officer, Walsall

Real Education - Varieties of Freedom

by David Gribble, published by Libertarian Education, £8.95

The title is as radical as the contents, suggesting - declaring is more like the truth - that the education which is on offer to the vast majority of children, in the undeveloped world as much as in the advanced countries of the West, is fake. It satisfies adults, who are conventionally seen as its chief beneficiaries, but if at the same time it disables their children's capacity for independent thought, self-motivated action and freely-chosen learning - and there is a growing body of evidence to show that it does - it is a poisoned gift, because it is the youngsters, not their parents, who have to live with the consequences of it, whether good or bad, for the rest of their lives.

Gribble surveys the alternatives to that provision and shows that models of education which value children as they are, and respect their right to grow at their own unique pace, not only 'succeed' in the conventional academic sense, but also protect students from the life-long lack of self-esteem, with its concomitant tendency towards depression and even mental illness, which frequently results from conventional schooling.

He begins with Summerhill - I am tempted to add 'of course'. Neill's school is undoubtedly one of the foundation-stones of real education. Gribble paints a portrait of this community, where children live and grow without incessant interference from adults, which recognises that you can only understand it if you can look at it through a child's eyes. The same is true of all the reports on alternative schools which make up this book. The children are allowed to speak, and what they say is taken as the most authoritative testimony to the strengths and weaknesses of the education offered in each school. From the Hindu-based spirituality which integrally informs Mirambika on the Shri Aurobindo Ashram campus in New Delhi, to the restless, uncompromising democracy of the Hadera School in Israel, Gribble demonstrates that effective, child-centred education does

not depend on a sort of universal liberal consensus known only to the privileged few. Even in rural South India, at the Neel Bagh school (now defunct), Sumavanam children grow up learning enthusiastically and respecting each other even without material wealth or a strongly voluntaristic culture.

Not every experiment succeeds. Gribble includes accounts of Dartington Hall and Countesthorpe College, both brought down by adults who could not see what was really happening in front of them, but only what they wanted - needed - to see. Gribble refrains from calling these happenings shameful. I shall go as far as calling them tragic.

The book is readable and inspiring, both as an account of serious and successful education, and as a reminder that all over the world children can and do come to adulthood without 'learning to obey' and 'accepting that life is hard and you can't always have what you want'. In England, America, Japan, India, Germany, and Ecuador, Gribble finds the same essential recognition that no-one can do children's growing for them.

Chris Shute

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Book Review

Strengths of Their Own: home schoolers across America by Brian D. Ray
N.E. R. I. publications, 1997, ISBN

In 139 pages packed with information and analysis, Dr. Brian Ray, director of the USA National Home Education Research Institute, presents the results of his recent study of home-based education in the USA. He took a USA nation-wide sample of 1657 families and their 5402 children and all 50 states were represented. The results support earlier findings that indicate that home-based education is the best option available, and that schooling, whether private or state, is the second best choice. Michael Farris, of the Home School Legal Defence Association, observes that:

"... parents who take personal responsibility for the education and socialisation of their children reap a harvest of exceptional children who are well prepared to lead this country into the next century."

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

The research identifies the positive outcomes of home-based education on topics as varied as students academic achievement, social and psychological development, and the performance of the home-educated when they become adults. Adults who were home-educated are, typically, in employment rather than unemployed, independent-minded, and entrepreneurial in outlook, and think positively about their previous home education experiences.

The study explodes the 'lack of socialisation' myth. Children were engaged in a wide variety of social activities spending, on average, 10 hours a week in such things as music classes, play activities outside the home, sporting activities, Sunday School and church organised groups, Scouts and Guides.

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

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

One reason offered for the success of home-based education, is the increased interaction time that children have with adults, compared to time spent with peers, and that this contributes to their academic prowess, greater range of social skills, and psychological health. Home education parents have accepted the primary responsibility for the education, training and provision for the offspring, but not in isolation. The study shows that these parents do value and participate with a variety of people, organisations, and institutions throughout their communities, their states, and

across the nation. They have a strong dedication to their families, but there are also socially engaged and socially responsible.

Two main reasons for home-based education are identified: to enhance learning, and to provide an orderly and moral social environment for their children that is consistent with the parents values. The large majority of the sample identify their value set as Christian, but various other value systems are found too. A third reason, is that parents are increasingly seeking physical safety for their children via home-education. Home-based education typically provides an emotionally warm, physically safe, academically challenging, and philosophically consistent place in which to learn.

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

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

Ray suggests that home-based education may eliminate, or at least reduce, the potential negative effects of certain background factors. He shows that low family incomes, low parental educational achievement, parents not having formal training as teachers, race or ethnicity of the student, gender of the student, not having a computer in the home, starting formal education late in life, or being in a large family, all seem to have little influence on the success of the home educated. He explodes another myth - that home-based education is for the well-off. The average family earnings for home-educating families was below the national average.

Roland Meighan

Janet and Roland Meighans' 'best of *News and Review*'

Our first choices are from the Trailblazers series, (now available as a book), which introduced the ideas of some lively current thinkers on education. The first selection is from John Taylor Gatto (*News and Review* 7, p.7), on why libraries educate but schools indoctrinate, the second from Nel Noddings (*News and Review* 11, p.5), on education as 'themes of care'.

John Taylor Gatto: On libraries and schools

"To begin with, the libraries I've visited have always been comfortable and quiet, places where you can read instead of just pretending to read. People of all ages work side by side in a library; not just a pack of age-segregated kids ... nor do they presume to segregate readers by tests ...

The librarian doesn't tell me what to read, doesn't tell me what sequence of reading I have to follow, and doesn't grade my reading. The librarian appears to trust me. The librarian lets me ask my own questions and helps me when I want help, not when it's decided that I need help. If I feel like reading all day long that's OK with the librarian. I'm not told to stop reading at regular intervals by ringing a bell in my ear. The library keeps its nose out of my home too. It doesn't send letters reporting on my library behaviour, or issue orders about my time at home.

There are no records at all detailing a readers past victories or defeats. If the books I want are available, I get them - even if that deprives a reader more gifted and talented than I am of the book ... the library doesn't play favourites for any reason. It's very class blind. It's very talent blind. And that seems proper in a country that calls itself a democracy. The library never humiliates me by posting ranked lists of good readers for all to see. It presumes good reading is its own reward ...

One of the strangest differences between library and school is that you almost never see a kid behaving badly in a real library ... I've taken literally thousands of bad kids into real libraries ... not once in 29 years did I have a complaint. The library never makes predictions about my future based on my past reading habits; nor does it imply that my days will be carefree if I read Shakespeare ... It tolerates eccentric reading because it realises that free men and women are always eccentric.

Finally, the library has real books, not school books ... School books are tools made of paper. They are vehicles of training; they reinforce the school routines of close order drill, public thinking, endless surveillance, endless ranking, and endless intimidation. Real books educate. School books school. When you take the free-will out of education, that turns it into schooling. You cannot have it both ways."

Nel Noddings: On 'themes of care'

"The traditional organisation of schooling is intellectually and morally inadequate for contemporary society ... Too many of us think that we can improve education merely by designing a better curriculum, finding and implementing a better form of instruction, or instituting a better form of classroom management. These things won't work ...

I have argued that education should be organised around themes of care rather than the traditional disciplines. All students should be engaged in a general education that guides them in caring for self, intimate others, global others, plants, animals, and the environment, the human-made world, and ideas. Moral life so defined should be frankly embraced as the main goal of education. Such an aim does not work against intellectual development or academic achievement ... it is a firm foundation for both.

Some of the best planning for curriculum and instruction that I have observed has been at the nursery-kindergarten level. Here, teachers work together to create and gather resources, plan options for development growth, and allocate tasks so as to capitalise on their own individual strengths. At the high school level, this kind of planning is almost unheard of, but it can be done ... Here curriculum will be co-operatively constructed by teachers and students ... Some money will have to be set aside

for mid-year allocation to resources that could not be ordered ahead of time. Patterns of spending will shift from an emphasis on textbooks to one on paperbacks, kites, charts, tools, art implements, excursions, and museum mini courses.

Today many educators are calling for smaller schools and more family-like groupings. These are good proposals, but ... if test scores do not immediately rise, participants should be courageous in explaining that test scores were not the main object of the changes. Most of us who argue for caring in schools are intuitively quite sure that children in such settings will in fact become competent learners. But, if they cannot prove their academic competence in a prescribed period of time, should we give up caring and on teaching them to care? ... **There is more to life and learning than the academic proficiency demonstrated by tests ..."**

Amongst various notable books featured in the first twenty editions of *News and Review* was John Adcock's book, *In Place of Schools*:

When schools are gone ...

In another vision of educational futures, John Adcock tells the story of how a new system came into being in the UK in his book *In Place of Schools* (New Education Press, £5-95):

"It is Friday, 28th December in the year 2029. The hour is 0808 EST (European Standard Time) Susan Smith checks this on her personal computer screen together with the local weather and traffic news, and her day's appointments. Susan, born in the first hour of the first year of the 21st century, is a professional personal tutor to nineteen children aged from eight to ten years.

She tutors the children with their parents, or in small groups, in their homes, in her home, in community resource centres, in field stations, in museums and art galleries, in concert halls and theatres, in libraries and sports centres, and in other places where, in her professional opinion, advantage to her clients will accrue.

Susan is not a teacher in the 19th or 20th century sense of the word. She does not teach in a school. There are no teachers and there are no schools. There are simply personal tutors, pupils, parents and extensive support facilities.

Susan possesses for each of the children in her tutorial group a personal study programme. She devised each programme with the help of the child, his parents, and colleagues' notes on the child's earlier achievements."

(from *News and Review* 11, insert)

The Conference on *Democratic Discipline, Democratic Lives* was the occasion of the launching of an important book on the street and working children of Brazil:

... '*Children for Social 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.

(from *News and Review* 15, p.1)

* * * * *

The Sharon Ginnis cartoons have been a feature of *News and Review* and we have picked two typical ones to view again: The first is from 18, p.6

Sharon drew a cartoon to celebrate a happy event:

Celebrations of a closer partnership

Wedding bells rang out in July to mark the marriage of Paul, the editor of *News and Review*, and Sharon, whose cartoons enliven its pages. An active, participative role was expected of everyone present, including providing the evening entertainment! An eventful, joyful day marked the start of their future life together. We send them our congratulations and good wishes. (9, p.2)

Paul wrote various pieces and a short extract from the Winter 1996 edition gives the flavour of his contribution:

The developments in these schools (with which I am currently involved) are in the direction of what I call student-centred practice. Such thinking, rooted in humanistic psychology, accommodates learners' preferred learning styles and dominant forms of intelligence. The practice seeks to enhance self-esteem and to share as much responsibility with learners as developing awareness and skills will allow.

A commitment to these ideas is already to be found in many nursery schools, yet is seldom built on in later years. At junior and secondary stages student-centred work can begin in individual classrooms, but sooner or later whole-school implications have to be addressed ... Beyond this, changes to 'the system' are demanded.

Student-centred thinking, taken to its conclusion, leads to the vision of educational reconstruction now offered by Sir Christopher Ball, the vision upheld by *Education Now*. In the interim there is much to be done to bridge the gap between such vision and perceived day-to-day reality. Fortunately, there are increasing numbers of teachers and head teachers who are wanting to do just that, to take achievable steps in the 'right' direction. *Education Now* is happy to support them.

Living with the shifting balance (at times, the shifting tension) between future ideas and present constraints is the art of change. As an old preacher friend of mine used to say, "*live with your head in the clouds and your feet are on the ground*". This uncomfortable posture is, of course, preferable to keeping your head in the sand.

Philip Toogood's work (no.10, insert) is featured next:

Flexi college

The education system of the 21st century is likely to see a radical replacement of the existing authoritarian school by a new kind of school. This will feature flexi-time use of some existing school buildings and new resource centres for use by home-based educating families to create a regenerated education system in which person-centred learning in democratic and co-operative groupings enables a wider diversity of provision to meet individuals needs for creative self-development ...

Flexi College is designed to be an adaptable model of such a school. The East Midlands Flexi College has grown out of Philip Toogood's previous 20 years work in mini-schooled large comprehensives, small schools and community education ... Here parents, teachers, students and local people contract together in an education venture at the heart of which is a small flexible school for students from 8 to 16 years old. In September, a 16 to 19 years group is planned and the Flexi College will be complete when an early childhood section is added later. This cluster of small groups served by a flexi-teaching partnership will be managed by a limited company with charitable status ...

Meanwhile at East Midlands Flexi College, students and teachers start each day with exercises, a review of world affairs, meetings to plan the day, mornings of intensive small group directed work in Maths, English, Information Technology, and French, afternoons of long autonomous tutor-supported sessions in Art, Design, Expressive Arts, Humanities and Science and finish each day with supported Independent Study sessions. GCSE, 'A' level, GNVQ and NVQ examinations are on offer. The year is framed into 6 modules containing 6 symposium presentation weeks, 3 expeditions and 3 specially negotiated activity weeks. Parents, students, tutors and local people join a Life-long Learning Association. By co-operative work, funds are raised and practical maintenance done. Underpinning the whole development is the informal support and advice provided by the very diverse membership of the Education Now Ltd research, consultancy, and publishing network.

Philip Toogood

The aims of Flexi College are supported by 'a voice from industry' letter (News and Review 18, p.2):

"Thank you for your book *The Next Learning System*. It opened my eyes to what I had long suspected - the tragic waste of time, opportunity and natural ability inherent in our present educational system. Of course, that goes for most programmes of training and development in industry and commerce too.

My experience is that at every level in my own industry, the majority of people dislike learning anything to do with work. In fact, a significant proportion of them detest formal learning which involves assessment especially examination ... Most of us are only too aware of the futility of learning definitions, formulae, methods and procedures that we will surely have forgotten within weeks ...

... our schools and colleges perpetuate a fearful rigmarole which, it seems to me, are as irrelevant as clog dancing and felt hat making is to C&A's clothing store ...

A largely redundant and wasteful system of education which operates at enormous cost, and very inefficiently, can be replaced with a modern alternative that can change the lives of countless millions. Reformed education can radically change the outlook of a new generation ..."

From a letter by Jeremy Delvarr, Halifax Heating Systems

Democracy and Education has been a strong and recurrent theme in *News and Review*:

Is Professor Bengu, Minister of Education for South Africa, 'one of us'?

In his inspiring address at the Co-operative College, Stanford Hall, Loughborough, during the conference on *Democratic Discipline, Democratic Lives: educating citizens for a changing world*, Professor Bengu noted a key characteristic of democracy as being **"the absence of domination"**. **"Democracy means doing away with relations of domination"**. Yes, Education Now supporters would agree.

Professor Bengu explained how the idea of **school governing bodies** *"are transformed to become fully representative of the major stakeholders - students, parents, teachers, and the other workers in the school,"* and that this was now law in South Africa.

He also talked of the need to move to a **"learner-driven curriculum"**. *"Democracy in education does not just end with the way the school is managed or governed. In fact it is my contention that these are meaningless if the real essence of schooling, the learning process, is not democratised."*

... Early childhood practitioners in the audience were thrilled to hear that the best of nursery and infant practice, **(the plan, do and review, the interactive approach)** was to be the basis on which the rest of the system in South Africa was to be built.

(from *News and Review* 16, p.1)

Is democracy about to catch on?

"We need democratic philosophy ... We've got to restart morality. And this needs to be done, not just by a handful of intellectuals but at the democratic and popular level. In schools. And politics has got to be about more than just managing the economy and training people to be technicians in the daytime and couch potatoes in the evening."

(Don Cupitt in *The Guardian* Face to Faith series)

(from *News and Review* 9, p.2)

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

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

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

(from *News and Review* 12, p.5)

"... the revolution in business ... will, over time, take place in education, too. We will move away from a system that assumes every child of a particular age moves at the same pace in every subject, and develop a system directed to the particular talents and interests of every pupil."

Tony Blair

(quoted by Michael Barber in *The Guardian* 30/1/96)

(from *News and Review* 16, p.1)

Home-based education as the main radical initiative in current practice, appears regularly:

Home education: are there by-products?

One of our aims in home-educating our two daughters was to give as much time as possible to their musical development: a fairly straightforward aim, and one in which we have succeeded ... their 'academic' education has progressed happily alongside: but what about their wider development?

I refer largely to social and moral issues, which I have not tried deliberately to teach. The girls are nine and seven-and-a-half years old and discussions with them have been stimulated by a variety of sources - books, radio, television, friends, relatives - one unusual one being *The World At One* on BBC Radio 4. Whilst protesting through mouthfuls of lunch at having to listen to 'Mummy's favourite programme', they nevertheless began to explore with me such subjects as the IRA and why it exists; coal-mining and pit closures; the James Bulger murder trail; the M40 school minibus crash. The social and moral implications of that short list have taken a long time to discuss, and I am repeatedly forced to return to them when further news items are heard or the children have another idea. In consequence their vocabulary has developed as has their perception of 'right' and 'wrong' ... (and the) ... massive grey area in between.

'But what about sex?' I hear people cry. Well, the surprising source for us has been the study of painters and their paintings. Their biographies are littered with such words as *mistress, lovers, erotic, illegitimate, brothels*, as well as *alcoholism, neurotic, insanity, suicide*. Such words and their meaning have led to lengthy discussions of a sexual and moral nature before any appreciation was attempted of the paintings themselves!

But why is it important that these discussions should take place at home? Apart from feeling more sure of themselves in familiar surroundings, I think it is important for my children ... struggling to make sense of what appears at times to be a senseless world, to try out their views and opinions privately first, at home, not in the 'public' environment of a classroom.

I certainly used to think that these areas of discussion were by-products, but within two years I have changed my view and now consider them to be essential elements. Long may the conversation flow.

Katherine Trafford (from News and Review 3, p.6)

Unfair Competition!

In our last year in England - 1991 - I tried to enter a team of deschooled children in the Observer 'Mace' Public Schools Debating Competition. As you may know, this is a rather prestigious contest. My team would have comprised Aliah Blackmore and Caitlin Moran. Everything seemed to be in order, until in June I suddenly received a letter from David Bussey, Assistant to the High Master of St. Paul's, who was responsible for organising the competition. The new message was that these two deschooled girls would not be allowed to compete. It was felt that they represented "unfair competition".
Salaam Blackmore (from News and Review 8, p.8)

Bravery is in the eye of the beholder ...

One parent in Worcestershire explained that her friends and neighbours said she was **so brave** to take on home-based education. Her response was that they were the really brave ones because they entrusted their children's education to a bunch of complete strangers and then hoped for the best!

(News and Review 8, p.8)

Social mis-education

Homeschoolers often face the criticism that by taking their children out of school they are depriving them of something called 'social education' ... homeschoolers challenge the idea

that what happens in school playgrounds and classrooms can properly be called 'social' anything, least of all 'education'.

'Social' implies freely-chosen, amicable relationships, knit together by an organic solidarity growing out of common interests and endeavours. Very little that goes on in school satisfies that definition. Schoolchildren are where they are because others have put them there. Adults divide them up into groups by an arbitrary process which takes little account of their choice of friends. Schools are organised so that during much of the day communication with companions is limited or simply not allowed. Break-times, because they are short and therefore fairly turbulent, give little opportunity for sustained, sensitive relationships ... The pupil-group commonly puts pressure on children to conform to its often neurotic and pitiless culture of reaction to Authority. This ... may include experimenting with tobacco, drugs and sex in an atmosphere of covertness.

The home is the natural centre of social education

In contrast, homeschooling families allow their children to make close relationships with a manageable number of other youngsters and adults in safe conditions. Schools base their attempts at socialisation on the premise that fitting into a large group is a skill which everyone needs to acquire early, and that all the conflicts and competitive relationships attendant on large-group experience are valuable in themselves. If homeschooling parents disagree it is not because they are shortsighted or sentimental: rather, they have observed ... school playgrounds ... they can see no positive value in it ...

Consequently, many homeschooling parents feel dispensed from the need to give priority in their social provision for their children to cumbersome large-group experiences. They have found that their youngsters mature quite adequately among a small group of friends with whom they have had a chance to form deeper relationships. If they need to make a larger circle of companions they arrange to do so in their own way. Not having been forced to take their place in the often spiteful and over-competitive community of ... (school) ... they become impressively self-confident, self-critical and sociable.

Homeschooling puts children in control of their environment. They no longer have to expend their energy on compensating for their almost total lack of influence over their own lives. They usually develop flexibility and adaptability. Imagination, ingenuity and creativity are encouraged and found to develop frequently. They become what every employer will want them to be: clear-sighted, honest and realistic.

Chris Shute (11, insert p.4)

"Home-schoolers as a rule have no quarrel with teachers. My own parents are both teachers; I've seen a lot of work that teachers do, on their own time and out of their own pockets ... Our reservations are about the system of schooling, not the people who are doing their best within it."

Canadian home-educating parent (from News and Review 8, p.8)

Sadly, there was no room for other treasures such as:

Dyslexia (5,p.8), **Cuts, What Cuts?** (8,p.1) **All-Year-Round Education** (16,p.5) **OK- You're Certified** (11,p.1) **From Poland with Love** (14,p.4) **Co-ops - the closely guarded secret** (9,p.2) **Global Alternatives** (2,p.3) **League Tables and Cheating** (9,p.3) **View from the Condemned Cell** (3, p.8) etc., etc.