

Indoctrination! Indoctrination! Indoctrination!

Why is it that some politicians cannot distinguish between education and indoctrination? Is it that, once in power, they suffer from an enhanced view of their own authority? Is it perhaps simply that most of them are fairly old and that their own childhood has receded? They have forgotten, perhaps, that childhood is about *being* as well as *becoming*.

I was horrified to hear from the radio one morning recently the earnest tones of the British Secretary of State declaring that it was important for young British children to have government guidelines over homework. *"Moreover,"* he said, *"it won't increase bureaucracy, or workload for teachers, because we have given them the materials they can use."* In short, 'we will prescribe the content and type', or words to that effect.

Has the world of education come to this? Already they are planning to test five-year-olds this autumn in a simplistic twenty minute 'base-line assessment'. Soon they are introducing 'optional tests' at age 9. Alongside the existing plethora of 'key stage' tests (a ridiculous idea from the Black Paper publications of the '70s) they will now impose state-suggested times for homework. The whole educational apparatus becomes more mechanistic, increasingly bureaucratic and profoundly indoctrinational. If you place this in the context of a National Curriculum, you have a series of recipes that might make even Stalin look *laissez-faire*!

What is it all for? Ask this question and the platitudes pour out. *"It is about raising standards". "What sort of standards?"* you might innocently ask. *"It is about competition and beating others"*, you are told. *"But are we not a Global Village?"* you query, *"are we not talking about the Euro, and the need to co-operate?"* *"Ah yes, but we still have to compete, to be the leaders, to be the technical imperialists of it all. Moreover, we have many incompetent teachers. We cannot even trust the universities with their training. We are busy prescribing that too. After all, we do not want them upset by examining values, learning philosophy, or encountering sociology, do we? As for teacher education in other countries, it is known to be terribly value-laden. Why, they even talk about emotional development in countries like Belgium, Finland and France."*

At this point you play your trump card. *"But"*, you say, *"even the successful competitive Japanese have decided against the rigidity of their curriculum and the tendency of families to force homework on their children. They are changing to a gentler, child-oriented approach. The Finns are top of the international reading tables and they have NO set curriculum under the age of 7 and they believe in play-based approaches"*.

Back comes the answer. *"We cannot pay attention to what other countries do. After all it is easy for the Finns, or the Swedes, or the Danes, or the Norwegians because they are small countries with agreed philosophies based on democracy, social justice, and co-operation."*

Am I alone in feeling so saddened by what has been done to our education system? All this has been sparked off by my third visit to Finland and Lapland, coming as it has, on top of

experience of 14 other countries during this last decade, and of working between two in particular, England and Australia. I thought, as an educationalist and psychologist with 37 years of teaching, travelling and lecturing in education, that there was reasonable agreement on how important young children's learning is, how it takes place; and something near agreement on the optimal conditions for it. Whether I talk in Cheltenham or Vancouver, Munich or Adelaide, I find professionals sharing virtually the same paradigms, based on their own detailed research and observations. Their informed opinions are **nothing like** those of the politicians quoted. My worry therefore is very simple. Do some politicians have fundamentally different views from the informed professionals of what is desirable learning? Are they more concerned to have competitive robots incapable of 'questioning the answers' and merely conditioned to 'answer the questions'?

To return to Finland for the moment: here I saw five-year-old children concentrating on play, on choice, on investigations, all in environments of great beauty. The Finns believe a well-chosen, aesthetically attractive environment is a very important learning device and calming for children. Here I saw rooms decorated by children with the enthusiasm I **used** to perceive as typical of the best British infant school tradition. Here too, I saw a system which allows young children a break (play time) every 50 minutes. Contrast this with the fact that 30 percent of British infant schools have already given up play time, because they apparently have too much work to do.

My own studies tell me that children learn best from hands-on experience, that play and choice are central and crucial to providing opportunities for self-discipline and responsibility, for ownership and co-operation. Recent pronouncements in the media about the 'uselessness of making models,' display a profound ignorance of early learning and miss the point altogether. Children learn from day one, if not earlier, and they learn by imitating and role-modelling, by social events, through care and attachment.

All those years ago, when training as a teacher at Goldsmith's, we spent time debating indoctrination versus education. As a Norwegian teacher said, *"you do not just **train** teachers or children, you educate them. You only train **dogs**."* Or do we?

Philip Gammage, de Lissa Professor of Early Childhood

The Trailblazers ... *final word* ... William

Richmal Crompton's books based on the William character have amused children and adults alike for many years. The author found that the tables gradually became turned on her: *"For many years I looked on William as 'my' character. He was my puppet. I pulled his strings. But gradually the tables have been turned. I am his puppet. He pulls the strings. For he is resolute, indomitable and inclined to be tyrannical ... he refuses to co-operate in some plots ... "* But it is William as educational critic that concerns us here.

William on the curriculum

"William: When I ask my father anythin' about lessons he always says he's forgotten 'cause it's so long since he was at school, and then he says I gotter work hard at school so's I'll know a lot when I'm grown up. Doesn't seem sense to me. Learnin' a lot of stuff ... jus' to forget it, ..."

Thus, in one devastating blow, William demolishes the whole rationale for the National Curriculum.

William and motivation

"William glared furiously at the logs. Had chopping the logs been forbidden, William's soul would have yearned to chop them. Had the chopping been an act of wanton destruction, it would have appealed immeasurably to William's barbarian spirit. But the chopping was a task enjoined on him by Authority. So William loathed it."

So, the enthusiasm of adults for coercing children to learn is lost on William. Like John Holt, he would suggest that if it is actually necessary for everyone to learn Maths, a dubious assumption in itself, it might be better to make it illegal.

William on the aims of education

"My father says that education is a glorious thing, and that it fills our minds with noble thoughts and gives us noble occupations to fill our leisure hours with in later life, but I cannot help noticing that when HE has any leisure hours, he does not sit down to solve a Geometry problem or translate a chapter from Caesar. No - he plays billiards or reads the newspaper ..."

William on the effectiveness of school learning

"Do you know any Latin, William?"
"Jus" a bit," said William guardedly. "I've *leant* a lot, but I don't know much."

William on language codes

"It's impossible to speak to you", (his adult brother Robert said).
"No wonder father says you can't speak English".
"It's the Kings English he says I can't speak," said William. "I can speak my own all right".

Next, William would have been unimpressed by attempts to make homework more extensive and compulsory:

William, teachers and homework

William's attitude to his school masters was one of pitying forbearance, but he was, on the whole, quite kindly disposed towards them. He indulged their whims, he smiled at their jokes, he endured their sarcasm; but he refused to concentrate his mental powers on x's and y's and dates like 1815 in the few precious hours that were at his disposal in the evening. Instead of doing homework, he preferred to play at Red Indians or Pirates, or to hunt for rats and rabbits with Jumble, his mongrel dog.

But William was not opposed to the idea of education. He just did not see much evidence of it in the adult world:

William on education

Education is one of the things that I feel strongly about because I think that at present it is all wrong. I don't mean that I don't want people to be educated, because everyone ought to want to be educated so as to become a fine noble character when he grows up, but education as done at present does not do that.

You only have to look at the grown-ups around you to see that it does not do that ...

Bryn Purdy

Bryn is author of A.S.Neill: bringing happiness to some few children, (Educational Heretics Press, 1997, £8-85) where

The Libertarian Family Network

The Libertarian Family Network was formed eighteen months ago as a support group for families following a non-coercive way of living with their children out of school. The three families who came together to define the group had all been involved in various local home education groups, but as the children grew bigger, none of these groups truly met the needs of their families, nor offered the support needed to follow a libertarian philosophy and a committed autonomous approach to their children's living. Mine is one of those founder families.

In coming together, we found it vital that we describe our ideas, our thinking, so we clearly outline our libertarian orientation in our founding document. Other like-minded families will, we hope, hear and respond to the clarity of our guiding principles:

- The recognition that childhood is the time for children to be fully children in any ways they need or choose, to grow without coercion, manipulation, fear or pedagogy.
- That children are free people, self regulating and autonomous in every part of their lives - and that this is not possible within the schooling system which acts as an insidious form of social control.
- That as adult parents it is our responsibility to respect and fulfil the child's needs, honour their equality and put our needs second, after them, because we are no longer children - however challenging we might find this.
- That the legacy of our own childhood is intricately woven into our present day parenting - and that the recognition of our own past childhood trauma, loss and grief, is an important step towards enabling us to be better parents, freer people, and our children to be less damaged than we are, their integrity and dignity intact and their joy as whole as possible.

Our concepts are our ideals. With all humbleness we must stress that although we recognise them as true, we so often fall short of them - we fail our children everyday, although we try. It doesn't damage us to acknowledge this, it gives us a clearer idea of where we must focus our attention.

The Libertarian Family Network offers us support, friendship and a strength to keep believing in our children, to keep on pushing the frontiers of what childhood could be for children whose freedom is not eroded. For the children, the group gives them a sanctuary to be themselves in a society which denies children a voice, clear and loud, and as more families join us, surrounds each child with supportive adults and children.

On a practical level, we meet and do things together, child-chosen things because as parents we make no demand or expectation of our children that they do, learn or accomplish anything because that is their own unique and personal choice, this includes reading and writing and anything else society considers 'educationally' important. The young people take full responsibility for their own lives and learning. As their parents, we support and facilitate their interests where they need us - recently the families involved obtained lottery funding to make real the young people's enthusiastic ideas for a series of animation films.

We recognise the fundamental truths in the work of Alice Miller, for our children and ourselves; we share a growing understanding of the necessity to challenge the inherent sexism, at the deepest levels, within society, marriage/partnerships and families, which is damaging to all children and adult women. Adult men are also damaged by sexism, they create it and diminish their own lives thereby; and we feel it is vital to be working towards a situation, within two-parent families, where fathers are committed to dual-parenting, to enrich both the lives of our children, and ourselves as parents.

We use the word *libertarian* carefully, in our context we understand it to mean the child's right to be recognised, treated and respected as an autonomous individual, and libertarian parenting to mean parenting which supports the child in this. We place the responsibility with the parent, the *liberty* belongs to the child. In using the word libertarian, we reclaim it from any usage where its connotations denote right wing ideologies. We define it anew by our thinking and actions and our children describe it by growing up freer than we did.

We see what we are doing as a route towards deep and lasting social change. We urgently need to recognise and understand that delicate nature of each child's psyche and how easily damaged they can become through mistreatment, gross or subtle, most especially by their parents, but also by other adults and the prevalent thinking by the mass of our society which condemns children into being an underclass. Compulsory schooling is an integral part of this thinking. We need to acknowledge that damaged children become damaged adults, that every mistreatment absorbed by the child finds a way to be vented in adulthood, somehow, somewhere, most commonly on their own children when those adults become parents themselves. We are trying to break this chain of damage. It isn't easy. Alone it might be impossible, but with the support of others, I hold a deep conviction that it is achievable.

The Libertarian Family Network is based in South Devon. We are a small group, working towards setting up a child-run play/meeting space for families following a libertarian/autonomous approach to living. We have been contacted by many families who are interested to meet, to talk, to consider moving to be part of what we are doing, to create a larger network. We invite families who would be interested to become part of the group, to come to our open meetings and meet us, so we can meet you too.

Sammy Vidal-Hall

For a copy of the concepts, details of open meetings or for a chat about the group, please contact: Sammy and Nick Vidal-Hall 01548 830716 or Belinda Harris Reid 01364 643343 or Corinne Lindsey Turner 01626 361856 or write to Sammy and Nick at Homecroft, Brownston Street, Modbury South Devon PL21 0RQ

As a sister voice to the Libertarian Family Network, the Vidal-Hall family edits a separate national magazine *To Be Free: A Radical Alternative for Children and Parents* which aims to support libertarian parenting and autonomous non-schooling and is a forum to exchange ideas, thoughts, feelings and discuss other related subjects. Price £7.00 waged or £5.00 unwaged for three issues, cheques made payable to *To Be Free* and sent to us at the address above.

he Centre for Democratic Education

Founded in 1987 by a group of educators in Israel, the Centre aims to encourage the idea of democratic education both within the Israeli system and world-wide. The learning of democratic values is seen as the primary goal for education. This requires **experiencing life in a democratic community**, as well as learning the content of democratic ideas and the discipline of procedures.

The Centre has three components. *The Hadera School* of some 350 students aged 4 to 18 operates as a living democracy. Then, the *Institute of Democratic Education* supports other schools interested in engaging in democratic education and runs professional training courses. It runs an international conference every year in a different country and produces a journal.

Thirdly, *The Democratic Academy* offers BA and MA degrees in the field of democratic education. The rationale of the Centre is expressed in these words:

"If we are interested in changing Israeli society into a pluralistic democracy, central to the Israeli educational system should be the ideal of the democratic person, who is the basic stratum for the existence of this type of regime ... Culture and society in today's Israel need academics who are critical, open, involved, authentic, deeply aware of democratic values, and sensitive to human rights. In addition, the Israeli economy is undergoing change; the job market now demands creative workers who ask questions and are intellectually flexible."

Centre for Democratic Education, Brandeis Forest, Hadera 68245, Israel.

(We could do with a few 'democratically aware' academics and politicians here, instead of the usual control-freaks!)

Chicago Neighbourhood Learning Network

The network is a partnership of the Chicago Public Schools, the Chicago Housing Authority, the Office of Catholic Education, and the Chicago Urban League working with neighbourhood organisations to extend learning beyond the classroom into the community. Using conveniently situated sites, it will provide students, parents and teachers with expanded access to learning resources to develop lifelong skills to compete in the 21st century information society. Terminals will be sited in libraries, community service centres and public housing sites for use by learners of all ages.

The project will address the following issues:

- the barriers low income communities face in accessing information technology
- the limited hours schools remain open
- the information technology needs of neighbourhood groups
- teachers untrained in information technology
- reverse practices that tend not to involve parents with their children's education.

The New Learning Centre

The Centre is training people to run a community parenting programme. Leaders are mostly parents who learn how to be more positive and effective, and to develop more respectful relationships within their families. Courses cost £95 for ten Tuesday evening meetings. There is also a programme of free evening talks. Details can be obtained from:

Helen Segal or Geoff Kayyum at The New Learning Centre, 211 Sumatra Road, London NW6 1PF. Telephone 0171 794 0321

Herald

(Home Education Resource and Learning Development)

Since opting to take responsibility for the education of our children a few years ago, a lot of the telephone calls I receive are from would-be home-educators who want practical help in getting started. *Herald* offers a topic-based approach which is structured yet flexible, and allows plenty of scope for your own ideas and selections. It also makes available some supplies such as Multi-link bricks, reading schemes, and specialist publications which are not always generally available.

Mary trained as a teacher and had fifteen years experience in secondary, primary, infants and special needs teaching. Teaching in school is, however, quite different from educating at home, which is much more personalised. Paul is a professional computer consultant. Together they educate their five children at home in west Gloucestershire.

The *Herald* introductory pack covers an introduction to home-based education, an outline of the *Herald* scheme, the first topic web which is Food, notes on designing a scheme of work and study planning, and suggested resources.

Membership costs £15 a year and this covers the cost of three topic packs per year. There is a helpline and an e-mail address for use by members. There is also a membership card to be used to deter any accusations of truancy. A work plan is provided which covers the subject areas found in school apart from religious education, which is regarded as personal and best left to individual families. The work plan will cover the main aspects of the National Curriculum without becoming determined by it, and can be used to help satisfy LEA enquiries about the suitability of a family's home-education programme.

Full details can be obtained from:

Herald, Kelda Cottage, Lydbrook, Gloucester GL17 9SX
(e-mail paul.stanbrook@virgin.net)

Green Party Education Working Group

The Green Party Education Group stays top of the league table for educational ideas. As the government hails the great advance of escorting truants to school in police cars, the Green Party group proposes:

- that all parents be informed of their right to educate at home that flexi-time schooling will be made readily available
- that LEAs be required to provide information about all educational facilities in their area including libraries, museums, play areas, parks, arts centres, and activities run by the voluntary sector
- that Schools Councils be introduced in all schools
- that small schools will be protected and developed as community resource centres
- that large schools be encouraged to reorganise as mini-school clusters
- that schools be required to publish plans for the democratising of their running within a three year period, including children in the process
- that each District Council will begin to transform at least one of its schools into a resource centre for use by schools, especially small schools, and home-based educators.

etc., etc. Full copy of the report from: Hazel Clawley, 26 Taywood Drive, Birmingham B10 0DB

Growing up without schooling

The Nelsons are an average family in most respects, but their two sons have never set foot in a school. Mrs Nelson had not enjoyed her schooling, and with her husband she decided to spare her boys the experience which had caused her misery.

The governing assumption of traditional schooling is that without it children will grow up bad. Deprived of instruction, the reasoning goes, they will never learn anything worth knowing, and will become idle young adults. It is important to put on record that this did not happen in this family.

Mrs Nelson taught Nathan and Aaron to read and write at more or less the usual point in their lives. She did a certain amount of teaching, though much less than they would have received in school, and by time I got to know them - when Nathan was 12 and Aaron 11 - they read and wrote as well as the average schoolchild. They had not done a great deal of formal maths, but they were perfectly proficient at all the everyday practical activities school maths is supposed to 'equip' children for.

Play was still a major part of their education process when I first knew them. I was impressed by the positive results which flowed from their freedom to explore and test their minds through activities which, I strongly suspect, many teachers would have condemned as trivial or time-wasting. I have long theorised that in order to develop an active, clear mind children need far more time to play than we adults generally allow them, since play is the means by which they shape their own intellect at the time when it is most plastic. The boys gave me the clearest evidence I have seen that I was right.

Despite having largely skirted the school curriculum and totally avoided the 'social training' which is supposed to go along with it, the boys have not gone through childhood without learning useful things. I was amazed to see that when they came to a natural watershed in their lives - about the age of 14 - they turned quite naturally to the question of their future careers. They felt they needed at least English and maths at GCSE, and they set out with their mother's help to prepare for those examinations. Nathan also decided he wanted to pass music - he had been learning to play the electronic keyboard - and Aaron had been studying electronics with his father for some time. They both attended classes in information technology leading to the award of a CLAIT certificate, which they obtained without any apparent difficulty.

Their commitment to this burst of learning and exam-passing was impressive. I was used to jollyng pupils through GCSE, sometimes against both our better judgements, not because they wanted it but because they were in school and I was a teacher. Nathan and Aaron seemed to have a purely utilitarian, and therefore adult, view of the process. Both of them at one time or another confided to me that the work they were doing in English and Maths wasn't always particularly interesting to them, but it was important for their future, so they did it with a good grace.

Their results were good enough to let them begin serious preparation for their future. They have both enrolled in a local F.E. College and are now studying such things as business practice and computer technology. Aaron already has a job with his father's company, installing and maintaining security equipment. By some standards the Nelsons have failed. Their sons have not passed a truck-load of GCSEs. They have not been exposed to the fringe subjects, such as R.E. and P.S.E. which are supposed to etch the higher values of society into their character. They have not 'learned' to conform and obey by submitting to arbitrary authority. Yet by any standard they are rather exceptional young men.

Their education has not turned them against obeying reasonable rules. They do not expect everything to happen as they want it to. They realise that adults often know better than they do how the world functions. They accept the slings and

arrows of life in contemporary society with impressive good grace.

The Nelson boys are an eloquent testimony to the power of ordinary parents, who are committed to their children and responsive to their needs, to educate them as well as any school, or better, and to spare them the stress which so often distorts young people for the rest of their lives.

Chris Shute.

Book Review

Edmond Holmes and 'The Tragedy of Education'

by

Chris Shute

Educational Heretic Press

ISBN 1-900219-12-3

Price £7.95

Chris Shute has written an elegant and sympathetic little book. It is both scholarly and accessible: no mean feat. As the blurb on the cover says, "*A book about the Chief Inspector of schools can hardly fail to sound a controversial note in the 1990s*". Why should we be interested in the career of a talented young man who left Oxford some 120 years ago? Why should we be interested in his career and ideas? It is because, in the brief unfolding of Holmes' life and some of his principal writings, we see the bureaucracy at work and its crushing impact on individuality and human worth (acutely and sorrowfully observed by the man in charge of that bureaucracy). We see the flowering of integrity and honesty in the observations: we also see bravery, humility and careful reflection; the gradual realisation that, in trying to make children what we want them to be, we might often be stultifying learning and smothering the creative spark. We begin, through Shute's eyes, to see a man of power becoming more and more uncomfortable with the purposes and organisation of his domain.

Shute's own interpretations and sympathies lie unequivocally with Holmes. He takes point after point from Holmes' writings or career and juxtaposes them with current situations or against his own reflections. As much as this book is about Holmes, it is also about education's easy journey into indoctrination. Shute re-educates our critical awareness. He divines, like Holmes, in much of our formal schooling, the smell of hypocrisy, the taint of fashion and compulsion for 'slavishly answering the questions, rather than questioning the answers'. He says, in the chapter entitled 'Education: a tragic failure', "...as we look at the process of education we intend for the foreseeable future, it seems as if we have learned nothing, and complacently think that the old, failed methods...will somehow succeed in the future..." (p.47). Shute understands that many modern teachers claim to be different from the elementary teachers of Holme's days. They claim to respect their pupils and to try to support independent critical thinking. It is clear, however, that Shute thinks this but a pale shadow of what could be, and that such aspirations remain a part of a total system discredited by Holmes and recognised as unjust by many children and adults. Despite all this, the book is not a gloomy tome. One ends up admiring Holmes, liking Shute's quiet, but telling insertions and being inspired by the thoughts of what yet might be. One is also full of hope that a book by a Chief Inspector can be so appropriate a 'lesson for today'. Don't miss this little book. It

is a thought provoking read which ends on the optimistic note, a note we should echo through to the next millennium, "*Loosen the chains of unreason*", as Shute says!

Philip Gammage

Flotsam and jetsam

Truancy watch 1: Japan

In Japan, teachers communicate with truants using e-mail and multimedia technology, sometimes holding video conferences with the children. The feedback has so far been positive. The approach stems from the view that bullying and the pressure to succeed are driving pupils to truancy. Bullied students who commit suicide inevitably become headline news. (Report by Michael Fitzpatrick, *Times Educational Supplement*, 10/4/98)

Truancy watch 2: Parents

According to a report from the National Foundation for Educational Research, parents believe children misbehave and play truant because they are bored by the national curriculum which fails to make their needs. The report, entitled *School Attendance, Truancy and Exclusion*, found that complex factors led to disaffection. Approaches which support and encourage individuals were most likely to be effective. Those with a strong reprisal element were less likely to be effective.

Truancy watch 3: the Truants

In a report to the Social Exclusion Unit, panels of truants reported that boring lessons, unsupportive teachers, and restrictive school regimes are to blame for soaring levels of truancy. Many truants on the panels reported that truancy started as a result of boring lessons, where copying from a book or a board was common. The truants saw schools as regimented environments which stifle individuality.

Truancy watch 4: the Journalist

Decca Aitkenhead, writing in *The Guardian*, 15th May 1998, suggests that the government has misread the problem of truancy which lies in the nature of classrooms rather than in the learners. She confessed that she, herself, was bored out of her mind at school. The surprise is, she suggests, not that so many truant, so much as that so many actually turn up. She suggested that the government should reconsider the ideas of A.S.Neill.

Truancy watch 5: the MP

Speaking to the National Association of Schoolmasters and Women Teachers, Margaret Hodge MP said that there is evidence that we start formal lessons in this country long before children are ready for them. This could lead to later truancy as well as doing other damage.

Truancy watch 6: the Government

Police are now to have the power to arrest truants. Whether this means that children will be delivered to school in hand-cuffs, is not yet clear.

Guilty verdict on OFSTED?

Leading statisticians claim that OFSTED's judgements, which cost more than £100 million a year, are uninformative, unreliable and can blight the careers of teachers. (*Times Educational Supplement* 20th March 1998). The National Audit Office has been urged to investigate the widespread criticism that the schools inspection service has spent vast sums of money while doing little to raise educational standards.

Revolution in education needed

The Royal Society of Arts report, *Redefining Work*, says that the structures, processes and outcomes of education need radical re-appraisal. The incessant education reforms of the 1980s and 1990s have simply bolted changes on to system which is essentially a 19th-century one serving the social and cultural norms of the past. There is no point, the report says, preparing people for the world which no longer exists.

Education Now Press Officer in print

Chris Shute had this letter published in *The Guardian*, 14th April 1998:

Margaret Hodge MP recently called for the return to payment by results in education. She should consult the opinions of a Chief Inspector of Schools who experienced an earlier attempt at this clumsy measure. Edmond Holmes, who retired in 1910, recognised that a national curriculum and payment by results were bound together. The former furnished material for regular examinations; the latter enabled the results to be turned into a convenient, apparently objective, sliding scale of remuneration.

But, says Holmes, the system obscured the true purposes of education. In his book, What Is and What Might Be, Holmes speaks of the "tendency of the examination system to arrest growth, to deaden life, to paralyse the higher faculties ... To involve education in an atmosphere of unreality and self deception." He also describes the flurry of rote learning and mechanical drilling that occurred when an inspectors visit was due, since financial futures depended on the pupils' performance. He called the system a source of "infinite mischief". There is still a little time left in which to think again.

Chris Shute's latest book, *Edmond Holmes and the 'Tragedy of Education'* has been described by Sir Christopher Ball as 'both disturbing and inspiring'. It is available from Educational Heretics Press at £7-95

Battery hens to get more room

The European Commission has proposed giving Europe's 250 million egg-laying battery hens a bit more room. All hen houses built after next year will have to allow each bird at least 800 square centimetres of cage area. The present minimum space is 450 square centimetres. In the light of this advance, teachers in overcrowded classrooms, may be hoping that the European Commission will soon turn their attention to their plight as well.

News from Human Scale Education

Since 1848, Dutch parents have had the right to found schools with alternative approaches, and since 1917 these have been state-funded. The *Third Sector Schools Alliance* is trying to get a similar situation operational in UK in 1998 - 150 years later. (*Charter Schools*, as they are known in USA, have been growing there too, from 5 in 1993 to 750 in 1997.)

The HSE Annual Conference, *Educating on a Human Scale*, will be held in Oxford on 26th September 1998. The keynote speaker will be Anita Roddick. For advance details phone 01879 230443.

Education Now - 'Inside' and 'Out'

A 'blue-print' for the future

Since the last issue of *News and Review* members of *Education Now* have been active in participating in a number of conferences. A crucial one for the future of the organisation was a two day residential event, generously funded by the Potential Trust, to enable Associate Directors to review the past ten years of *Education Now's* existence and plan the way forward. This proved to be a challenging, yet stimulating experience, which resulted in the development of a modified model for the activities of the organisation.

The vision of *Education Now* as enshrined in its 'Statement of Purpose' remains as the 'key' to its activities, with *News and Review* very much at the core of the organisation. Networking, publishing books, holding Learning Exchanges/Conferences, offering support and seeking to influence appropriate agencies will continue to be amongst its concerns.

Beginning in 1999, all members will be invited to attend the two main meetings/learning exchanges held each year. There will also be opportunities for those wishing to, to take a more active, responsible role, as Associate Directors, in the running of the organisation.

(Detailed information to follow for members)

Five 'go wild' in South Africa

Following last year's stimulating international conference held at the Co-operative College, Stanford Hall, on *Democratic Discipline, Democratic Lives: educating citizens for a changing world*, where representatives from South Africa included Professor Bengu, the Minister of Education, a symposium was organised in April this year by Professor Clive Harber, an Associate Director of *Education Now*, at the University of Natal in Durban. Its focus too was on *democratic education*, and the eighteen participants from the UK and South Africa were invited to share, compare and reflect on their experience of democratic practice in education. Later, the symposium book will be published by *Education Now*.

The five members of *Education Now* who enjoyed the combined pleasures of a week in South Africa were Lynn Davies, Bernard Trafford, Janet (photo stand-in is Mary Harber) and Roland Meighan and, of course, Clive Harber. Following the highly concentrated, stimulating and rewarding days of the symposium, Lynn, Bernard, Janet and Roland spent two

splendidly organised by Clive and his wife Mary. A 'highlight' of this event was the escape of the group from an ambush by a bull elephant, apparently so unsympathetic to *Education Now's* ideas of a more humane, personalised and flexible education system that it became known as Woodhead.

Out and About

Education Now members' contributions to other conferences included:

a.

Children's International Groundwater Summit held in Nebraska (in March '98): Peter Humphreys, Headteacher of Mere Green Combined School travelled with two eleven-year-old pupils, Elizabeth and Daniel, who were the sole UK representatives, to this event. Here, one of the greatest pressing global issues, the significance of groundwater, was brought centre stage by the Groundwater Foundation and an international contingent of young delegates. The young people focused on three groundwater themes, Children's Health, Global Climate Change and Wildlife, and Wetlands, and also participated in the 1998 Groundwater Festival attended by hundreds of other children. Through a variety of activities, they experienced active, democratic, global citizenship.

b.

Building Blocks for Global Learning organised by Global Education Derby at Swanwick Conference Centre (in March '98) focused on personal and social education with infant and nursery children. *Education Now* contributed a workshop on democratic practice in early childhood education, refuting the idea that you can be too young to start experiencing democratic discipline. A handbook covering the main themes of the conference is planned.

c. *Developing*

Co-operation in Education: Putting Values Back into Learning, held at the Co-operative College, Stanford Hall (in May '98). The Co-operative College has been encouraging the practices of co-operative learning at its weekend conferences for many years now. *Education Now* provided a workshop on 'powerlessness corrupts' which explored the ideas of democratic practice in schools and classroom through power-sharing.

d. *Democracy and Human Rights in School and Community* held at the Development Education Centre, Birmingham (in May '98). Workshops included 'Schools and the Community', 'Democracy in Schools' and 'Human Rights and the Curriculum'. *Education Now* members quizzed Bernard Crick, (chair of Government appointed Advisory Group for the teaching of citizenship and democracy in schools) on how young people's critical interactions with their learning institution could form a significant plank in any real 'citizenship' development and why token schools councils were not enough.

e. *Home Education in Scotland: Progress in Partnership* organised by Schoolhouse Home Education Association in Dundee (in June 1998)

to raise general awareness of home education and promote partnership and co-operation between home educators and local education authorities. Home-based education is seen either as

an alternative in its own right, or as a complement to school-based learning. *Education Now* contributed a 'futures' session on 'home-based education and the next learning system', a discussion group and a bookstall.

© Education Now Publishing Co-operative Limited 1998.
113 Arundel Drive, Bramcote Hills, Nottingham NG9 3FQ

No part of this newsletter may be reproduced without prior permission from the publishers. While all reasonable care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of this publication the publishers cannot accept responsibility for any errors or omissions

Printed by Mastaprint

The pick of *News and Review*:

The Paul Ginnis selection of 'best buys'

Education Now is a ten-year-old network of practitioners and thinkers bound by a broadly common set of values. Whether parents, teachers, students, lecturers, trainers or professional friends, members of *Education Now* believe that learning is most effective and efficient in humane conditions. This has led some to work for change within mainstream schools, while others have chosen to adopt, or to create, 'alternative' practice. Yet others provide analysis, comment and rationale. Some are nationally, even internationally renowned for their work. Whatever their field and style, for the past five years *News and Review* has been their voice.

The first nineteen editions create a 'shop window' in which are displayed the varied contributions of this diverse membership. On the limited budget of a four-page supplement, however, only a handful of these highly desirable items could be chosen. In selecting my 'best buys', I have attempted to reflect both my own interests and something of the breadth of the network's activity.

This first piece appeared in Spring 1994 and describes the down-to-earth world of a teacher doing extraordinary things in an ordinary school. I had the recent pleasure of working with Lesley Browne and some of her colleagues on questions to do with raising levels of achievement. They need have looked no further - the answers were in their midst ...

* * * * *

A day in the life of ... a democratic secondary school teacher

Democratic approaches to learning are a rarity in the British education system. However, for the last few years students at the school where Lesley Browne teaches have been given the opportunity to choose how they learn Advanced Level Sociology and Advanced Level British Government and Politics. Students have been invited to choose the syllabus they study, areas of study, whether to opt for courses based on 100% examination or coursework components, and how to organise their learning. What follows is an example of a typical day.

8.00 a.m.: Arrive. Sign in. Clear pigeonhole. Sort out materials for duplication for Jane's 'A' level Sociology presentation. Sort out resources for simulation after break.

8.35: Two students arrive to arrange the furniture in the classroom for their presentation.

8.40: As usual, I stay in the tutor room so that I am available to discuss any pressing issues. Zoe arrives to explain that she is going into hospital. Richard follows, delighted at UCCA's offer. Gareth is worried about his 'A' levels.

8.55: Tutor period and register followed by Assembly.

9.20 - 10.30: 'A' level Sociology lesson. Kerry and Kate have prepared one of a series of introductory lessons on Social Stratification. They are focusing on apartheid as an example. Kate and Kerry distribute handouts and explain the changing system to the group. A discussion follows and draws on the group's existing knowledge.

Kate introduces a photo pack they found in the resource base on apartheid. We have to select and put our name on the three photographs which are of most interest. We now have to pair up with someone who has chosen the same picture. Each pair chooses a photo and has to explain its choice. Kate and Kerry debrief and add further points. They set homework for the group on the changes in South Africa.

10.30: Break. Joanne remains behind to let me know that she intends to invite a visitor for her session on the family. This is a lecturer at the local college who is shortly going to have an arranged marriage and move to Pakistan. The visitor also wishes to use video clips of the two engagements, one in England and that of her fiancé in Pakistan. She gives me the visitor's name and telephone number. Go to staff room via the deputy head's office to gain official consent to invite speaker.

10.40: Go to the hall to set up the room for the second session of *Star Power*, which is a social stratification simulation.

10.45 - 11.45: *Star Power*. Teach three groups of Year 10 sociology students. This is not a democratic session. However, as the simulation develops the students decide that the mini-society that has been created in the hall is totally unfair. The 'Squares' are exploiting their position of power to such an extent that the two other groups move their chairs to form one large group and refuse to play any more. Their mini-society has broken down. Students get into three groups and debrief

themselves on their experiences during the simulation and how it relates to the real world.

11.55 - 12.45 p.m.: Lunch followed by extra revision lesson with upper sixth 'A' level Sociology students.

12.45: Drop off notes for reproduction at 'resources' and book the video camera for next week. These are organisational tasks which students have requested I carry out on their behalf, because they are not allowed to do them themselves.

12.50: Speak to parent on the phone. Collect register and attend tutor period.

1.00 - 2.10: See Vicky about her session next week. She is concerned about her lesson plan. Reply to letter from M.P. concerning Nicole's request for the British Government and Politics group to visit Parliament in the next holiday. Fill in insurance forms in triplicate, book mini-bus and collect parental consent forms from deputy.

2.10 - 3.20: Year 13 'A' Level British Government and Politics session. At the start of the session I enquired what they did in Tuesday's lesson when I was absent. Instead of taking the time off as usually happens, the majority of the group had attended. As one student commented, *"We'd have felt guilty if we'd have just gone home. We knew Sharon had prepared the work and I'd have been really cheesed off if I'd done all that work and the teacher was away."* Another student, however, did not feel such a strong sense of motivation. He said he hadn't attended. When I asked why, he said *"I was told you were absent, so I thought we wouldn't have a lesson, as simple as that. So I had a lie in, stayed in bed."* Nevertheless, the rest of the group said they felt he had let Sharon down. Another said *"We had to attend, because Sharon had prepared the lesson, she had all the leaflets and everything. We had an obligation to her."* The group members were quite annoyed with the individual who didn't turn up and he said that he felt awkward now he realised that the lesson went ahead as normal. After this initial discussion Tina took charge of the session. We did a quiz on 'Women and work' which she had sent for from the Equal Opportunities Commission in Manchester. This was most enjoyable and the lesson ended with a review of statistical charts on women's position in the labour market. She suggested that the group transfer key statistical evidence on to index cards as a revision exercise for homework and for use in examination essays.

3.20: James remains behind to discuss a comment on Mike's profile. After repeated requests for this student to complete a long overdue essay, and many comments from other members of the group, I had made a comment on Mike's profile. James felt that this was wrong. James argued that although the group had moaned about Mike not doing his work, I did not have the right to use my power as the teacher if we were truly involved in a democratic learning environment. He felt that in such an environment the student should be able to choose to fail. I had to explain that I would find it very difficult to allow an individual to fail in a school environment, although I actually believe that we should all have this choice. I tried to explain to James that I found situations like this very difficult because they represent a contradiction between my own theoretical position and practical application. I found it upsetting to be accused of 'selling out' on fundamental principles. But when we try to develop educational innovations we still have to operate in the world as it is and not as we would wish it to be. I had to conclude by saying that whether it is right to make compromises and how far to do so, remains a dilemma for me.

3.35 - 4.40: Meeting of Heads of Subjects.

4.40 - 5.15: Meet Richard in room to help with his assignment. Show him how to computer spell-check and print out his work.

5.15: Arrange furniture for tomorrow's lesson and take Year 10's books home to mark. Then go home!

The above summary of a typical day highlights the fact that democratic learning environments do not run themselves. They require a great deal of organisation and commitment on the part of both the students and the senior learner. Many sessions are unpredictable. This can be quite stressful when compared to the so-called 'safe' method of the teacher delivering a session. Perhaps the hardest thing to do is to be able to listen. I often find myself wanting to make a contribution, but if I wait, another member of the group often makes the same point. Other work which is involved includes counselling students, reviewing lesson plans, and directing students to useful resources. It has also been necessary to develop an extensive range of materials in the form of a resource bank as well as a list of people who are prepared to help students.

As each group progresses through the year, the students seem to co-operate more and more and provide each other with mutual support and encouragement. They often clap when a presentation is particularly good. I too have found helping students prepare their presentations particularly rewarding, especially as most of the presentations are very successful.

The democratic learning environments have provided an opportunity for students to contribute to their own learning and to experience the process of democracy. This has encouraged them to use their own initiatives, and allowed them to develop a sense of responsibility. Just as importantly, it has also enabled them to develop a sense of responsibility for each other. It has helped their development and given members of the group the mechanism for coping with a variety of problems. Values, like those of democracy, tolerance, and responsibility, grow only as they are experienced.

Lesley Browne

For all that Lesley's teaching is genuinely transformative, there is a limit to what a single enlightened teacher can achieve. Many school aims state that students *will learn to take responsibility for their learning and their lives*, but few actually **do** anything about it. Here a primary school takes action - and to prove it, the mouthpiece is 11 year-old Carly Barrett.

Our primary school council

Dallimore childrens' school council was set up in early 1992. It was set up, for us children to be involved in decisions that affect us and to create an opportunity for us children to 'voice' our ideas and opinions.

The school council consists of 14 children who represent each class and two teacher representatives. We meet every Monday and discuss any issues that the children of Dallimore want us to. After the meetings the representatives report back to their classes at circle time.

Over the last three years we have accomplished a lot. Schools Council have provided a healthy tuck shop for the school, we have bought over 200 toys for the children to play with at playtime and dinnertime and we have also paid to have many games and drawings painted onto our playground. E.g. Giant chess board, Maze, Compass, British Isles etc. We have also

introduced separate playtimes for Infants and Juniors. We have recently applied and been given a £410 Grant for a Derbyshire crime beat competition which paid to have to have a camera installed on our playground. We are in the process of having a Wendy House built and seats placed around the playground. They have all helped to reduce bullying.

Dallimore children's School Council wrote to Derbyshire County Council about the school dinners. We got them to change the dinnertime menu and include a vegetarian choice. We also recently devised a dinnertime rota that makes lunch time more fair. We raised money to pay for all these activities in different ways. So far we have had a toy sale, colouring competitions, drawing competitions, lots of discos, fancy dress competition and selling cakes.

Should any child at Dallimore, whether in a nursery, infant or junior class, wants to say anything at all then they can contact school council by asking their class representative or by writing a letter and putting it in the School Council box which is opened once a week. They do not have to sign the letter if they don't want to. School Council has been very popular. We were even interviewed by Radio Derby when we had the playground painted and had an article written about us in a magazine. We think that it has made the school a better place.

Carly Barrett (Council Secretary, aged 11 years)

There are those who feel that the institution of schooling itself is flawed, or that schools have simply passed their sell-by date and are of no use to a post-modernist age. Either way, they cannot be repaired or reformed - they have to be replaced. These arguments have never been set out more succinctly than in the *Winter 1996 edition*:

The next learning system:

"Alternatives for everybody, all the time"

In an article written by Don Glines of the Educational Futures Project, USA, he asked whether schools could survive for long into the 21st century. He thought not. A new synthesis was already coming into being. Learning is moving into more flexible patterns for several reasons:

We know of thirty different learning styles in humans

It follows that any uniform approach is intellectual death to some, and often most, of the learners, and is therefore suspect. These learning differences fall into three broad categories, cognitive, affective and physiological. Some learners have a style which is typically deductive in contrast to those whose style is usually inductive. Others learn best from material which is predominantly visual as against others who respond best to auditory experiences. There are contrasts between impulsive learners and reflective learners. Some learn better with background noise, others need quiet.

We now know of at least seven types of intelligence

Howard Gardner in his book *The Unschooled Mind* (1994) reports his work on multiple intelligences. Seven types of intelligence (analytical, pattern, musical, physical, practical, intra-personal, and inter-personal) are identifiable. Only the first is given serious attention in UK schools.

It is now clear that in a complex modern society, all three behaviour patterns and forms of discipline - authoritarian, autonomous and democratic - are needed

Effectively educated people need the flexibility to turn to each of the three major forms of behaviour and discipline as, and

when, it is appropriate. People schooled in only one form of behaviour are handicapped in the modern world. Rigid forms of schooling produce rigid people, flexible forms are needed to produce flexible people.

Adaptability has priority in a rapidly changing society

There is now widespread recognition that with rapidly changing technologies, economies and life-styles, there is a chronic need for adaptability and flexibility in learning and in behaviour. Uniformity is, therefore, counter-productive.

We now recognise the need for life-long learning

The idea that essential learning is best concentrated between the ages of five and sixteen, and for some up to twenty-one, has given way to a need for life-long learning.

We have the arrival of the information-rich society

When mass schooling was established, people lived in an information-poor environment. Assembling large numbers of children together in one place called a school, with teachers who had been exposed to the scarce information made a kind of sense. Since then, radio, television, the explosion of specialist magazines, computers, videos and the like, have all provided the means of making most of the products of the knowledge explosion readily available to anyone who wants it. This is just one of the reasons why home-based education is so successful.

Democratic schooling is now an international concern

After the demise of State Communism in the former USSR and Eastern Europe, new governments looked to schools in USA, UK and elsewhere hoping to find democratic models of schooling in operation. They found to their surprise, the

familiar totalitarian-style model of authoritarian schools, which are not just non-democratic, but anti-democratic. In the authoritarian approach to schooling there is a chronic fear of trusting students and sharing power with them, and a fear of opting for the discipline of democracy.

In summary, the new synthesis means more flexible patterns. The new situation means **alternatives for everybody all the time**. People trying to persist with the domination of the inflexible authoritarian approach, are condemning our children to the obsolete rigid mind-set.

Roland Meighan

Roland indicates only some of the very many sources of research and theory that feed the network's thinking. However, members of *Education Now* don't just trade ideas, they **use** them - they practise what they preach. This is, perhaps, the most powerful feature of the network. There are too many examples to quote in full, so I end with 3 snippets. The first is from Autumn 1994, p.1. As outgoing editor I look back over the last 5 years with a sense of pride at the achievement - not mine, but the achievement of all who contributed their ideas, their passions, their actions. Congratulations!

Seal of approval for Dame Catherine's

Seven years ago, in September 1987, Annabel and I were living in a small bedroom in the Assistant Land Agent's house of the Harpur Crewe Estate. It was only a short step away from the shell of what earlier in the year had been the Ticknall Voluntary Controlled Parochial Primary School.

We had agreed to join with a small group of parents who were angry at the closure of their small village school by Derbyshire Local Education Authority. "We never Closed" was going to be our motto and we were going to make a small school together. Annabel and I had made three conditions, that our school should be: non fee paying (and therefore independent but not private); for all ages of children in the compulsory education range; and should develop as a model of use to others in the country who were willing to adapt it.

Seven years later the Primary school is full and the Secondary Section has moved off-site to form an independent secondary school called Willington Village College to be part of a federation of small secondary mini-schools in the community called Flexi Colleges.

Dame Catherine's has been given the seal of approval by Her Majesty's Inspectors at a full inspection last Easter. They used the OFSTED framework and were unequivocal in their support for practically all aspects of the school's operation.

The time came for Philip and Annabel Toogood to move on. (see Winter 1996 Feature Supplement, p.4.) By 1996 they had established the ...

East Midlands Flexi College

... at East Midlands Flexi College, 17 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

Meanwhile, Chris Shute, an ex-teacher of modern foreign languages offered a facility dear to many members of *Education Now*: home-based education. (from Spring 1996, p7.)

Learning democracy out of school

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

The idea was taken up enthusiastically by a group of four homeschooled boys who constituted themselves the *Tamworth Learning Collective*. They meet every Monday in my house and spend their time working on whatever happens to interest them. A group like this works in more than one way. Of course, the opportunity to finish projects and to get individual help from me is valuable in itself, but the experience it offers of democratic life and discipline is probably worth even more.

From the beginning I have always insisted that the group runs itself. The boys are all pleasant and reasonable, so there have

been no real conflicts to resolve, but they have taken responsibility for funding themselves and for organising their meetings. I expect to see them develop a wider sense of what people can achieve through co-operation. I asked them to write an account of their feelings about homeschooling and collective work. I left them to decide what was important to them. The following was their response.

Home education

We all commented that we had freedom to do other things and weren't obliged to do subjects that we weren't interested in. Though the usual subjects were made interesting for us e.g. Maths, English, History, Geopgraphy, Science, Sports. After school hours we meet together to do different activities consisting of swimming, rugby, football and fishing.

Disadvantages

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

Other advantages

Our tutor does not require us to wear any uniform, unlike school. You also have one-to-one tuition and there is less pressure when you are unsure.

Christopher Shute, James, Nathan, Aaron and Ben