

Accelerating learning

*"The world is changing at an ever-increasing pace" and the speed of change demands "a matching ability to learn faster". Moreover learning is "not just taking on board what other people know" and "it can't simply be measured by grades and examination results". Few, if any, would wish to question these statements from the early pages of *Accelerated Learning for the 21st Century*, by Colin Rose and Malcolm J. Nicholl (PIATKUS Publishers Ltd. 1997) but any who consequently assume that what follows will be unexceptionable will be seriously wrong. The book is always full of interest, challenging and stimulating.*

After a discussion of changes taking place in the world that pose challenges for education, there is a section that provides a platform for much of what follows. In a chapter entitled 'The Awesome Brain' the authors outline some of the current research findings that throw light on both the structure and the functioning of the brain. The work itself is obviously highly specialised and very sophisticated, but the essence of it is presented in a readable and quite gripping way. Fresh understanding about ways in which we learn and remember emerge, and how we apply the knowledge that we gain. It would be easy to feel quite overwhelmed by the sheer complexity of the picture that is being revealed, but instead the authors lead us with great skill to an increasing awareness of the possibilities that are being opened up. The significance of this, and it is a major contribution of the book, is that the reader is drawn to look afresh at many of the educational practices that are being followed in schools and elsewhere, and pointers indicate some of the possible ways ahead.

Prominent among the specific messages that come across is the recognition that in a modern society linguistic and mathematical abilities are very important, but there are other intelligences and *"it is when you marshal all of your intelligences that you really begin to use your brain fully"*. Within the chapters of the book there is a clear and wide-ranging exploration of Howard Gardener's 'Theory of Multiple Intelligences', and its implications at all levels become apparent. In addition, research evidence is quoted to show how engagement with different areas of experience can strengthen performance generally, which - for example - might raise questions about a policy that recommended (say) cutting back on the Arts in the curriculum in order to have more time to raise standards in language and mathematics.

A second powerful message is related to the link between effective learning and the emotional engagement of the learner. Professor Robert Sylwester is quoted, *"By separating emotion from logic and reason in the classroom we have simplified school management and evaluation, but we have also then separated two sides of one coin and lost something important in the process"*. This is not new of course. When in the 1960s Bloom's 'Taxonomy of Educational Objectives' was produced, three domains were described, Cognitive, Affective and Psychomotor. But in the assessment and evaluation procedures that were developed, the last two were hardly used because they were difficult to measure.

There are many other insights that emerge linked to our growing understanding of the way in which the brain functions. The chapter on 'Mastering a Foreign Language' is rich with suggestions. The ways in which, and the reasons why, the early years are crucially important are brought out strikingly in relation to the *"growing body of research showing that it is during the first five or six years of life that some 50 percent of the brain nerve cells are connected - the foundation upon which all future learning will be based"*. One gets a renewed understanding of Tolstoy's statement that *"from the child of five to myself is but a step, but from the new born baby to the child of five is an appalling distance"*. And there are continuing reminders that *"learning how to learn needs to take priority over what we learn"*, that students should be *"active controllers of their own learning"* and that the aim should be not so much *"the transfer of knowledge as helping students in the construction of their own meanings"*.

Are there any reservations about the book? It has, perhaps, a tendency to see the world mainly in competitive terms - *"People who are not aggressively and continuously upgrading their knowledge and skills are not staying in the same place, they are falling behind"*. Again, the justifications in the book for some subjects and intelligences are often given in instrumental terms, that is, that the experience of the subject is seen as a means-to-an-end. The arguments being presented would have gained depth if, in addition, there had been some consideration of the subjects as being worthwhile in themselves. In the discussion of Higher Education the Government's intention *"for 60 to 70 percent of students to enter University"* is quoted, although the necessary funding is not available. The solution suggested is for degree courses to be completed in two years instead of three, and there is no discussion of possible ways of providing continuing advanced education other than the traditional front-loaded models.

But these reservations are not intended to, and do not, mask the fact that this is an exciting book. It explores ideas that could transform much of the educational practice that we see around us. It introduces us to the potential that is waiting to be tapped in the field of teaching and learning. All of us, teachers and learners at whatever stage, can benefit from reading it, and the likelihood is that we shall become better teachers and learners for doing so.

Glyn Yeomans

Chairman of the Governors of a Primary School and former Senior Lecturer, University of Nottingham School of Education

Four Oaks Cluster Community Learning Centre

I have a dream that somewhere along the line schools will transform themselves into all age community learning centres. My current mission is to work within the maintained sector to blur the boundaries and to challenge for educational change from within.

The Four Oaks Cluster Community Learning Centre has just been established on the site of Mere Green Primary School in Sutton Coldfield, to the north of Birmingham.

It is a remarkable beginning for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is a joint venture by 11 closely linked schools, 1 secondary and 10 primary phase grouped into The Four Oaks Cluster. The schools are a self-selected and self-managed group who have been working together now for three years with the mutual aim of promoting educational opportunity for our community, professional development and support for our staff, and understanding/ working together by our students in co-operation rather than competition.

There are links at every level of our schools. All the co-ordinators for curriculum areas are networked as are Headteachers, administrative staff and Governors. The cluster is managed collectively by Headteachers and an umbrella group which includes Chairs of Governors. As such, this is a more democratic and grounded organisation than Local Education Authority Consortia of schools which are larger, more unwieldy and have fewer links. The cluster is co-ordinated by a part-time paid co-ordinator.

The range of activity the cluster has generated has been amazing. We jointly employ an Information Communications Technology Technician and some primary schools share a French teacher. Joint professional development has taken place in twilight sessions and on teacher days. Staff have also been released to work on specific projects such as local history work in conjunction with the local libraries and many more.

The children of all the schools work together on annual 'cluster days' when they move around to each other schools partaking in activities based around a particular theme. This year we had a multicultural day. There is a joint Four Oaks Orchestra and there have been joint musical concerts at Sutton Town Hall. This Christmas there will be a collective carol concert at Lichfield Cathedral.

The Four Oaks Cluster Community Learning Centre is a project which provides a quality environment for our meetings and training to take place in, and for partnership with a number of other organisations to develop teaching and learning direct to staff students and community. It will also provide a base for certain shared 'Cluster' resources. The costs of refurbishment of an empty outside classroom have been borne by the schools and by voluntary work or donations by our school communities. We have just secured a grant from a local charity which will enable wiring-in of a network and network server, and will hope to have some 25 to 30 laptops shortly to develop some of our learning and training aspirations.

The Cluster have become very interested in improving our understanding of the learning processes and how to enhance learning. This is fuelled by the belief that our roles as educators must increasingly depend on this knowledge, and not on any age old reliance on content. A strong link has been made with *Mind Kind Education* who promote learning to learn understanding, accelerated learning, and practical strategies and techniques for enhancing learning. All staff in the cluster have had 'toe dip' training and two or three staff in each school in 'depth training'.

Within the next six months we hope to have a fully operational *Mind Kind Learning Centre* offering courses and programmes to support staff, children and the wider community.

We shall be seeking to extend other community courses already running within Cluster Schools. At Mere Green we already run in conjunction with a local FE College ICT and First Aid Courses. These are proving very successful in bringing back many of our parents and community members back into learning, often for the first time in many years. There is already a proven demand.

We are very keen to mesh in with the National Grid For Learning via the Birmingham Grid for Learning and feel we are already established as a natural learning community. We have excellent inter-school links, strong connections with the local library and Community Centre.

The Learning Centre will also provide a venue for many other educational and community groupings. The Development Education Centre (DEC) is a world renowned group working in the field of development education and publishing educational materials. It is based to the south of Birmingham and very difficult for schools and community to access in the north of the city. The DEC will use the centre as an outpost for viewing publications and a venue for its work.

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Full House for November Conferences

On the 7th, the conference '*Home-based Education, Past, Present and Future*', run by The Open University Creativity in Education Community in London, was filled to capacity. The three speakers, Roland Meighan, Sarah Guthrie and Susannah Sheffer, covering the three phases of past, present and future, provoked considerable interest and lively debate. A range of workshops enabled participants to engage in discussion on a variety of topics relating to home-education, and finally the day

ended with a panel of young adults responding to questions about their home education. The quality of their analysis and reflection on their experiences emphasised the joys of education at home - an appropriate ending to a stimulating day.

The Lighthouse Learning Centre in Brighton was the venue for the second 'Full House' on the 14th. This newly opened Centre, based in a splendid house, offers facilities to support families who are home educating. Its philosophy incorporates the values of *Education Now*, and the children who attend for a variable number of sessions per week are encouraged to develop their own personalised learning plans. Roland led the discussion in the morning on the theme of '*The Next Learning System*', and the afternoon was taken up with supportive, informative 'conversation' groups.

Both conferences enjoyed the joys of good weather - blue sky and sunshine - which seemed to add to the spirit of open minds, support and co-operation which pervaded these two events.

Ten signs that you need ... an alternative education

1. Do your children say they hate school? If so, something is probably wrong with the school, because children are natural learners. When they're young you can hardly stop them from learning. If your children say they hate school, listen to them.
2. Do your children find it difficult to look an adult in the eye, or to interact with children younger or older than they are? If so, they may have become 'socialised' to that very narrow group that many children ordinarily interact with in most schools, and may be losing the ability to communicate with a broader group of children and adults.
3. Do your children seem fixated on designer labels and trendy clothes for school? This is a symptom of the shallowness of the traditional schools' approach, causing children to rely on external means of comparison and acceptance, rather than deeper values.
4. Do your children come home from school tired and cranky? This is a sign that their educational experiences are not energising, but are actually debilitating.
5. Do your children come home complaining about conflicts that they've had in school and unfair situations that they have been exposed to? This is a sign that your school does not have a proper process for conflict resolution and communication.
6. Have your children lost interest in creative expression through art, music, and dance? These things are generally not encouraged in the traditional system today and are not highly

valued. They're considered secondary to the 'academic' areas. In some cases, courses are not even offered in these areas any more. This tends to extinguish these natural talents and abilities in children.

7. Have your children stopped reading for fun, or reading or writing for pleasure? Are your children doing just the minimum for homework and going off for some escapist activity? This is a sign that these spontaneous activities are not being valued in their school and another sign that people are losing their creativity.
8. Do your children procrastinate until the last minute to do homework? This is a sign that the homework is not very interesting, is not really meeting their needs, and is tending to extinguish their natural curiosity.
9. Do your children come home talking about anything exciting that happened in school that day? If not, maybe nothing exciting is happening for your children in school. Would you want to keep working if your job was like that?
10. Did the school nurse or guidance counsellor suggest that your children have some strange, three-lettered disease like ADD, and that they should now be given Ritalin or some other drug? I suggest that it is more that the school has the disease EDD - Educational Deficit Disorder, and it's time to get your children out of that situation.

If your children have exhibited several of these characteristics, you should start looking for an alternative ... 30 states have now enacted legislation that allows groups of parents and teachers to create charter schools, schools that are not stuck with having to fulfil the myriad of state regulations but can create their own individualised approach. Four years ago there were only five of these charter schools in the country. By the end of this year there will be 1000 of them. Also there are 4500 magnet schools ... public schools that specialise in an area of expertise and draw students from a wider area... There are over 4500 Montessori schools. There are hundreds of independent alternative schools, many emphasising participant control with parents and students taking responsibility for their own educations.

Parents of over a million children in this country have checked off **none** of the above alternatives and decided **to teach their children at home ...**

Jerry Mintz ... in AERO-GRAMME 25, Fall 1998

Jerry Mintz is the director of the *Alternative Education Resource Organisation* (AERO) USA and editor-in-chief of the *Almanac of Educational Choices* which lists over 6,000 educational alternatives in USA by State.

AERO web site is <http://www.edrev.org>

Comment:

Sadly, UK retains a primitive education system, made more backward recently by re-adopting the ideas of the early 1900's. (see book on *Edmond Holmes: The Tragedy of Education*, Educational Heretics Press, who was Chief Inspector of Schools in the early 1900's, on why these ideas were anti-educational and unchristian - another case of 'what we learn from history is, that we do not learn from history'.)

Education Now *News and Review* had an article on Alternative Education (or the lack of it) Issue number 16, Summer 1997. This edition also carried this quote:

"... 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

This is, in effect, an admission that we are fobbing off the present generation with a primitive system when we know we can do much better. Perhaps your MP needs a letter asking why this is so?

Changemakers

Changemakers is a model of Active Learning in the Community: learning through community action which puts young people in the driving seat. Young Changemakers:

1. define what community means to them - it could be their school, a geographical area, or an intellectual community (maybe an interest group, national or international cause)
2. identify the needs of that community
3. design and manage their own project to address those needs
4. reflect upon the learning gained through this process - the key and personal skills, and their transferability to adult and working life
5. celebrate their learning, with appropriate accreditation

Young Changemakers' recycling scheme at Dartmouth High School

Young Changemakers have generated an immense amount of positive change in their chosen communities. Here are just a few of their achievements last year:

- Broadcast a Radio Roadshow at South Beach Blyth
- Set up a recycling scheme in school
- Produced a recipe book from teachers' recipes
- Held a charity fashion show - local firms lent outfits
- Persuaded local council to install a skateboard pipe
- Organised Bring and Buy sales in aid of charity
- Renovated an area of waste ground
- Young People's Forum - a conference by young people for young people
- Artistic projects in local community
- Ran a concert for Land Mines Appeal
- How we could combat the drug problem
- Big Sister mentoring scheme

Anti-bullying project set up by pupils, Gillbrook Technology College

Changemakers works with young people aged 11-25, mainly through schools and youth groups. Our support package for facilitators includes induction, networking and a resource pack, The Changemakers File, which is relevant to facilitators of any young person led project activity.

Changemakers is currently working with around 70 schools and youth groups to create good practice sites. We also work in partnership with local education authorities and education business partnerships, who lead groups of Changemakers in schools and youth groups locally. Our aim is to demonstrate the power of this model of working with young people, and to work for its inclusion in mainstream education.

The model has been implemented in many different ways by the different participants - our only requirement is that the five key steps above are followed. The range of ways schools and youth groups have implemented *Changemakers* is highlighted in our book of case studies, *Young People Shaping their Future*. This publication also summarises the types of activity and reflects upon links to policy.

Changemakers is supported by a number of national charities, including CSV Education, Directory of Social Change, National Youth Agency and Students Partnership Worldwide. We work in partnership (regionally and nationally) with others, including The Prince's Trust, Industry in Education, Keyfund Federation and the National Federation of Youth Action Agencies.

Lynne Allison

Further information about *Changemakers* from Lynne Allison, Operations Manager, *Changemakers*, 45 Somers Road, Welham Green, Herts AL9 7PT, tel 01707 263080, fax 01707 270183.

Partnerships, required of local authorities by the new Labour Government, and their implications are not included (perhaps because the book went to press before most of this unfolded). This means that while tutors can use the text to provoke discussion about the Desirable Outcomes (SCAA 1996) and the National Curriculum, and about the relevance of developmental psychology to early childhood education, they will need to ensure participants also know of documents such as Excellence in Schools (DfEE 1997) and their implications for the under fives' curriculum.

The following chapters are also written in a highly readable style and provide back-up research citations (although sadly a number of these have then been omitted from the reference section). Topics covered include: Integrating care and education; Planning the curriculum; Curriculum content and practice; Cross-curricular issues; Parent Involvement and children's learning. An unfortunate omission from these chapters is the Quality in Diversity curriculum framework project (Early Childhood Education Forum 1998), which has been in process throughout the country and involved educators from all types of early childhood settings across the age ranges birth to five for the last four years.

It is, however, perhaps greedy to expect what is clearly intended to be an introductory text to go into too many areas of debate and, to be fair, a host of issues can be picked out from the economical presentation of facts, ideas and examples for practice. Indeed, there are so many of these it is difficult to single out one theme as more important than others in this respect, but the chapter on parent involvement, with its inclusion of research evidence, discussions of ethos, partnership, the heterogeneous nature of parental opinions and cultural origins, exemplifies both the tightness of the writing and the usefulness of the content.

An Introduction to Curriculum for 3 to 5 year-olds will act as an excellent starting point and course text for colleagues who are experienced practitioners but who have not engaged in formal study for a number of years, and for new entrants to courses leading to qualifications in the early years professions.

References

DfEE (1997) *Excellence in Schools*, London: DfEE

Early Childhood Education Forum (1998) *Quality in Diversity*, London: NCB

School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (1996) *Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning on Entering Compulsory Education*, London: SCAA

Professor Tricia David
Canterbury Christ Church University College

Book Review

An Introduction to Curriculum for 3 to 5 Year-olds

by Viv Moriarty and Iram Siraj-Blatchford
Education Now Books, Nottingham
ISBN 1 871526 38 8 122 pages £10-95

This book is a very timely contribution to the available literature concerning the curriculum for children in nursery provision. It will be a useful text for tutors in further and higher education, and especially for those offering training for practitioners from a range of backgrounds under the Standards Fund, as part of the enhancement of educational provision for four-year-olds.

An Introduction to Curriculum for 3 to 5 year-olds opens by explaining very succinctly the context in which nursery education providers, from the private, voluntary and maintained sectors are currently working, although detail about the formation of Nursery

Life and death of a parent-run school

From September 1994 to May 1996 I helped start and run a small parent-run school in our house. It started in the spring of 1994, when five friends - three families - decided to create something different for our children's education. Of our three kids, Sophie, our daughter, had been a year at the local village school and had become more and more withdrawn; Liora had become actually school phobic and would wet herself if her mother forced her to go to school; Davina was happy, but her parents were not, with their village school.

Davina's father Mutahar became our first teacher. We paid him to teach mornings, and in the afternoons each parent took turns in 'teaching': I was science/nature, my husband, a musician taught music and dance; Liora's mum, an artist, taught clay work; Galiana took the kids in co-operative games, and on another afternoon they did swimming.

As other parents joined, the children were offered woodwork, French, origami, and the odd afternoon of aromatherapy, clowning skills or spinning, from various adult supporters in the village. Later the kids produced 25 weekly issues of a brilliant magazine all their own stuff

We lived in a big house then, and our big sunny room was converted to the classroom. At 'breaks' the kids had access to our gardens, orchard and field, which led to walks and many natural discoveries such as molehills, wild bees, a dying rabbit, apple picking and juice making. We had a lantern festival.

Mutunar was keen on 'open classroom' ideas and we set up the classroom with a small budget and lots of good materials. We had four areas in the room: English, maths, science/nature and art.

The term began and the unexpected problems began. Five carloads of bureaucrats turned up in the first week as a result of a front page local newspaper article about 'the DIY school': fire regulations; business tax; health and safety; the planners; the school inspectors. They all had their bones to pick. We spent the next five terms trying to meet their requirements.

We had grown by word of mouth and the new parents were getting really nervous about this experiment. We had tried to be as 'normal' as possible (hence calling it a school, etc) while trying to be clear about the quite different approach we were taking. Over time, many parents left because they were looking for a cheap private school for pushing their kids; later we became quite clear in our philosophy: that we take our cues from the individual child, while giving them plenty of opportunities to choose from,

Mutahar, though the kids adored him, was too loose and experimental. We got another teacher Denise who was the opposite. She was very teacher-directed, in the nicest possible way, but there was no choice on the children's part. She had to leave after two terms for personal reasons.

In the end we closed the school because we were refused planning permission. We had much support from local friends and the press, but we were blocked at every turn by the local bureaucrats. It was depressing because we had just found an excellent teacher.

It was all hard on the adults but the children seemed to thrive. The adults had an attitude of trusting the children to grow up to fine human beings and there was little need for punishments and the like beyond the rules of clearing up after lunch before going outside. Any conflicts were brought up at the daily circle meeting.

With the experience gained from this venture, we are considering starting another small school or learning centre in the next year or so in the Lewes area. It will stress learning more than teaching since we found that most kindly-raised children have the ability to motivate themselves given good materials and a sensitive adult to support them.

Adrienne Campbell

Iris: Tell me a little about your childhood.

Albert: I was born in Boston, Massachusetts and grew up across the river in Cambridge. My parents were high-flying economists at Harvard and MIT. Our home was always filled with many of their colleagues and interesting conversation. When I was four my father died of cancer, leaving me, my mother and my two older brothers to fend for ourselves. I started at the nearby Little Red School House. Though I loved the name I was not impressed with the school! At six I went to the local public school but I was unable to read until I was eight, and by then I intensely disliked school. At this point I was tutored at home by a different method, and I learned to read very quickly. My tutor was a truly lovely woman, and her different method was part of her beauty. My next school did better by me.

Iris: What did the school do?

Albert: Shady Hill was a rather progressive private school which had a very creative curriculum. At first I found it a great improvement. I was in John Holt's class for a time. They noticed that though I was reading on quite a high level and was good at drawing I had terrible spelling and handwriting. I could be taught a new word over and over and instantly forget it. I would do a very technically assured drawing and then sign my name like a baby. The teachers didn't know the word 'dyslexia'

In conversation with Albert Lamb

Albert Lamb is the Specialist Curator of the world's first collection of material connected with alternative and democratic education, which contains tapes, videos, papers, books, etc., part of the Environment Planned Therapy. This is based on the original work of Homer Lane. He is married to Popsy, his girlfriend from Summerhill. They live in Chalford, near Stroud.

at the time, but they saw me as having a 'mental block'. I kept bringing in books to demonstrate that the rules they said were important were ignored by writers who had written books

considered masterpieces. The teacher wanted me to 'get the basics' and I wanted to show him that when people got the basics they often ignored them. Eventually I was funnelled into a special school connected to a mental health clinic in Boston. They had more psychiatrists than teachers, and most of the kids had extreme mental and emotional problems. If it hadn't been for the cartoon and animation work I was doing at home, and all

the money I was making running a cinema in my basement at weekends, I think I might have become seriously demoralised.

Iris: Did anyone value your cartooning skills?

Albert: No. No-one showed any interest in them. Cartoons and cartooning had no status at the time, and all my teachers had ignored or discouraged my interest in them.

Iris: Where did you hear about Summerhill?

Albert: I had hated the Clinic school from the day I got there, and I spent the second half of the year running away. In the Spring I heard about Summerhill School in my Unitarian Sunday School. I made a deal with my mother that if she wrote to Neill and he said I could go to Summerhill I would go. If he said 'no', I would no longer truant or misbehave, and continue at the Clinic until I was 18 years old - the statutory obligation - but no longer.

Neill accepted me, and so this is how I went to Summerhill. From then on the pressure was off and I entered into one of the happiest times of my life. I never did learn spelling or handwriting at Summerhill. I eventually created a structure for training myself in my mid-twenties, but without the happy years spent growing up at Summerhill I would never have had the emotional strength to face those issues later.

Iris: And where did you go from Summerhill?

Albert: I went back to the States and took a degree at University. Then I worked in the film industry, but I hated the film world ethics and became a cartoonist. Before I could do this I had to conquer my problem spelling and short-term memory through strategies I devised and continue to use to this day. During this time I married, had three delightful children, and with the support of John Holt educated them out of school.

After my marriage broke up I left the States to become a Housemaster at Summerhill. I found my childhood sweetheart, and after we married came to live in Chalford. Summerhill then employed me as a consultant. This took me into researching the origins of the freeschool movement, and setting up archives.

John Holt on Albert Lamb and Summerhill

...Over the years many children have gone to Summerhill who were wholly defeated and demoralised by life locked in the desperate protective strategies of self defence and deliberate failings, filled with fear, suspicion, anger and hatred. I knew one such child myself. Only a year before he went to Summerhill he seemed not far from a complete breakdown. At Summerhill he got well.

(John Holt - 'Freedom and Beyond')

Iris Harrison

Flotsam and jetsam

AERO watch 1

The USA magazine of Alternative Education has an item commenting on President Clinton's assertion that *"the 21st century will be ruthless"*.

Nat Needle responds: *"... if the 21st century becomes the story of human beings around the world pitted against each other in a struggle for well-being, even survival, this will only be because we failed to imagine something better and insist on it for ourselves and our children."*

In contrast to the view that the victors in the 'strong versus weak' battle deserve our adulation for setting the pace for the rest of us, Needle reminds us of another view. It is that the strongest are those who devote themselves to strengthening the weak, to keeping the whole community afloat, to ploughing their gifts back into the common field through service to others. He concludes, *"I don't care to motivate my children by telling them that they will have to be strong to survive the ruthless competition. I'd rather tell them that the world needs their wisdom, their talents, and their kindness, so much so that the possibilities for a life of service are without limits of any kind. I'd like to share with them the open secret that this is the path to receiving what one needs in a lifetime, and to becoming strong."*

AERO watch 2

Jerry Mintz, editor of AERO, describes how the ingenuity of home-based educators can even overcome the problem of two working parents. *"We are working on organising a system here where maybe parents could homeschool even if they are both working. I once saw in France something called the Collectif Enfance-Parents, in which parents were the teachers and each parent only had to come in half a day a week and they took turns doing it. They covered the whole week that way; even working parents could do it - they only had to take half a day off."*

AERO watch 3

Jerry Mintz explains that the alternative school he ran in Vermont was a mini-democracy. *"It ran as a democracy so the kids knew every aspect of the school and they were very responsible for making decisions ... What happened is that as those kids got to be about 14 or 15 years old, when people would come and visit and talk to them, they would think they were talking to a very young-looking member of staff."*

To the response that children in the usual type of school just play the system and get through the day without learning anything if they can, Jerry replied, *"But I think they see themselves as sort of prisoners in an authoritarian system; I think you and I might do the same. On the other hand, if they felt it was their responsibility to make the decisions, to make the place run right, believe me, they would do it differently."*

Memory lane

Now that reminds me that when Philip Jackson concluded his study of school called *Life in Classrooms*, after thousands of hours of sitting in them as an observer, he observed:

"For all of the children some of the time, and for some of the children all of the time, the classroom resembles a cage from which there is no escape."

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

Thanks to Julie Webb who has written in to inform us that this item in the last edition of *News and Review* featured the version written by Roy Bailey, folk singer and ex-professor of sociology at the University of Sheffield.

The art of management

"... managers are not confronted with problems that are independent of each other, but with dynamic situations that consist of complex systems of changing problems that interact with one another. I call such situations MESSSES ... Managers do not solve problems: they manage messes."

(source forgotten, but I thought you might like it anyway)

Management expert on 'compulsion and schooling'

"We may get our way but we don't get their learning. They may have to comply but they won't change. We have pushed out their goals with ours and stolen their purposes. It is a pernicious form of theft which kills off the will to learn."

Charles Handy

Journal watch

The recent edition of *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, Vol 30, No. 5 has a piece entitled 'Erasmus, Gates, and the end of the curriculum' by William A. Reid suggesting that *"Curriculum - that nationally institutionalized form of education - is an ephemeral phenomenon, and we must suspect that at the end of the twentieth century it is pretty well played out."* Reid concludes that when governments such as the UK's are so confused that they continue to impose a National Curriculum which is a re-run of the 1904 model, whilst simultaneously setting up action zones and courting radical interventions from multi-nationals, it is a clear sign that the institution is doomed.

Young learner watch

Arthur Acton asked a group of 3 girls and 4 boys aged 9 at the local primary school, *"If there were no adults anymore, would you change school?"* The consensus of replies agreed by the group was:

- We would only come to school if we wanted to.
- If we wanted school it would only be open until noon.
- We would learn at home and that would be best. We would choose what to learn.
- No adults, so no money! Swap and barter instead.

Teacher recruitment campaign

The Independent of 23rd September 1998 reported on the Teacher Training Agency's multi-million pound campaign and its *'You never forget a good teacher'* adverts shown on TV and in cinemas. There are apparently huge guffaws when the advert is shown in cinemas - probably from the teachers, the report speculates.

School at four cuts children's chances

The Observer carried a report with the above title, 4th October, linking early formal schooling with alienation, truancy and crime. David Weikhart of the High Scope Project was quoted as saying *"Formal education for children under six is a negative experience and I cannot possibly recommend it."* But the government is pressing on anyway. After all Weikhart has only been doing his longitudinal studies for over 30 years, so what would he know about it?

Join the Learning Technology web site debate

Paul Ardern, author of last *News and Review's* front page on *'Power to the Learner'*, and the Learning Technology Project co-director Rod Paley, invite you to join the debate on the project web site at: [http : // www. ithaca. org](http://www.ithaca.org)

Educational Beachcomber

Book Review

Strengths of Their Own: home schoolers across

America by Brian D. Ray

National Home Education Research Institute publications, Salem, 1997, ISBN 0-9657554-0-1

In a mere 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 nationwide 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 now 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 various States, some think it may peak at 10%. But good news is infectious, and others now predict that 50% of all children within a generation, will be learning in home-based education, for a significant portion, probably 50 %, 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 personalised, 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. The purposive conversation 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 social contact 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 they 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 draw 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 is 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.

Finally, there is the intriguing indication that 'the family that learns together, stays together'; home-educating families show signs of being more stable, with their members more fulfilled and happy as a result.

Roland Meighan

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Academic Schooling - the End Game

Nowadays, when I propose that mass schooling is obsolete, I find that there is less and less opposition. The response tends to be, *"we now realise that, but what do we put in its place?"* The insert in the last *Education Now News and Review No. 12* (*The Next Learning System*) gave some answers to that question.

There is more shock, however, at the proposal that the **academic curriculum is also obsolete**. Many parents are busy stoking up the expectations of their children that pursuing grammar school type curriculum will get them jobs. They are misreading the signs. The sign is beginning to say, in Monopoly Board game style, 'Go straight to obsolescence, Do not pass Go, Do not collect a job.'

An Army of Clerks

The point of academic schooling has been to produce an army of clerks. Those who left at 16 with their GCE's and later, GCSE's would go to work as bank clerks - as I did myself for a few years. Alternatively, they would become insurance clerks, or building society clerks, or something similar.

Those who left after the sixth form with 'A' levels, would go on to slightly better paid jobs in accountancy, or local government, or the like. Those who went on further and obtained a degree became top paid clerks in the civil service, law and elsewhere.

These former safe paths into jobs are now treacherous. Every time a bank, building society or insurance company announces its annual profits, it also announces the dismissal of more clerks. Thus, banking has now less than half the workforce of clerks than it did a few years ago. Moreover, the 'new' clerks in direct banking by telephone are **not** recruited for their examination prowess, but for their personal confidence and verbal, telephone skills. Indeed, such success is often seen as a **negative** indicator that the prized independence and conversational skills may have withered.

Next, law firms are amongst the leading customers for voice recognition technology which enables them to dispense with the services of ... clerks. Case preparation software means that law firms can choose to manage with half the number of lawyers.

If further indication is needed, the recent survey by the St Mungo Association of the homeless, and mostly workless, adults in its hostels, shows that 50% have academic qualifications, and 10% have a degree.

The End of Work

For those who find enjoyment and satisfaction in the academic curriculum, it should, of course, be available as part of the catalogue curriculum. It is now becoming a lie, however, to claim that it will guarantee jobs. Indeed, the US economist and advisor to the US government, Jeremy Rifkin warns us in his book, *The End Of Work*, that it is likely that only a minority of the generation currently in the early stages of its school journey, can have **any** kind of job at any given time.

John Holt saw some of this coming. He noted the growing obsolescence in 1971 even before computers really got to work on wholesale clerk-job demolition:

"The case for traditional education seems to me to be much weaker than it has been, and is getting ever weaker, and the case for an education which will give a child primarily not knowledge and certainty but resourcefulness, flexibility, curiosity, skill in learning, readiness to unlearn - the case grows ever stronger." (The Underachieving School, p.31)

An Obsolete Methodology

The clerk mentality is produced most effectively by the whole class teaching approach. The method has a low efficiency rate as regards learning. All the studies I have read show that the short-term recall of material taught this way is usually in the region of 5 to 10%. For long-term recall the figure is halved. By increasing the technical skill of the instructor, it is possible to get the figure for short-term recall up to 20%.

I refused to believe this as a young teacher and threw myself into getting better results than this. The pre-testing and post-testing showed that the research was correct and I could not refute it in my own practice.

The illusion that whole class teaching is more efficient than the evidence shows, is sustained by two factors. One is that the most effective way to learn material is to teach it. The teacher remembers as much as 90% of the lesson! Because the teacher remembers it so well, he or she can easily slip into the illusion that the students do too. They do not.

The second factor is that the method is **shored-up by homework**. The recent studies from the Pacific Rim countries extolling the virtues of whole class teaching also show that two hours homework before school and two hours afterwards are common.

Lethal Side-effects

Whole class teaching is not only inefficient, it has *lethal side effects*. It produces the gridlock mentality - dependent learners addicted to the right answers provided by authority. Those of us who have had to teach undergraduates and graduates from the Pacific Rim countries have often encountered the 'gridlocked' mind set, the clerk mentality, at its fiercest. The rigid mind-set of many British undergraduates, however, can be a close rival.

Our home-based curriculum tried to avoid the lethal side-effects of the poison and narrowness of an over-academic approach.

Russian educators have also expressed concern at this mentality.

"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). 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 want to follow the British reforms of the last few years, for they see them as totally misguided and counter-productive.

Alice Miller sees this mind-set as the product of the '*poisonous pedagogy*' and tries to make us face up to its lethal side effects. Chris Shute in his book, *Alice Miller: The Unkind Society, Parenting and Schooling*, (1994, Educational Heretics Press) reminds us that she found that among all the leading figures of the Third Reich, she was not able to find a single one who did not have the schooling and the strict and rigid upbringing that produced the gridlocked, detached and ultimately inhumane mentality. Carl Rogers added a further warning:

"People who cannot think, are ripe for dictatorships"...

as well ... as for obsolescence.

Roland Meighan

From Education Now (No13, p8)

"O.K. You're certified," said the friendly twelve year-old boy. Throughout 25 years of advocating the democratisation of schools I have often feared these words yet when they were finally delivered the context was delightful. I was visiting the Sudbury Valley School in Framingham, Massachusetts.

The introductory tour took us to the music room. As a one-time jazz musician I have a compulsion to try out musical instruments. On opening the grand piano our guide politely asked *"Are you certified to do that? I don't want to have to bring you up!"*. He explained that every specialist area of the school was managed by a 'corporation' of students and staff who had a particular expertise and interest in that area. I needed a member of the music corporation to certify me on the piano before I was free to play it. I asked who could do this.

"I can," he said. *"Play me something you love."*

Eight bars of Satin Doll later - *"That's real pretty. O.K. You're certified"*. He added my name to the list of the certified and in those few moments I learned a great deal about this truly and remarkably democratic school.

Had I not been certified I would have been brought up before the J.C. - Judicial Committee - for breaking one of the many school rules, all of which are agreed by the school meeting or the specialist corporation on a strictly one person one vote basis, and all of which can be changed democratically. The J.C. consists of students representing different age groups and a staff member, the business being conducted by two elected clerks who are always older students.

The first thing to strike a visitor to Sudbury Valley School is that there are a lot of people around. The school is currently full with 210 students aged from 4-19 and for the first time since its foundation in 1968 is oversubscribed with plans for extensions to the buildings. Yet although there is no overt adult supervision of anything, the facilities are well looked after, the extensive library is in good shape, computers work and normally rooms are reasonably tidy though everything is in constant use.

David Gribble of Sands School had told me that *"It will feel like break (recess) when you arrive"*. He was right - and it went on feeling like break for the whole 4 days of our visit! There are no teacher organised lessons the curriculum being totally generated by the students. The many rooms of varying sizes do not feel like classrooms. Individuals, small and not so small groups of students are everywhere. Occasionally they are with a staff member (not often referred to as teachers) working at anything from algebra to apple pie making. These tutorials/seminars are always at the request of students - either individual or group (often of mixed ages) - and will continue for as long as the students feel they need them. If after two sessions student interest fades no pressure at all will be exerted by staff for the course' or 'project' to be completed to the satisfaction of the adults.

The USA is mercifully free of national examinations. Each

O. K. - You're certified!

a pedagogy of hope and a pedagogy of betrayal

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

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

Education without faith leads to formalism and stiffness which

"Is it going to be possible to adjust traditional school education to satisfy the pupils - or should we think about replacing it with something altogether different?"

"The true learning society we all seek will require a new breed of teachers - more like guides than instructors, more part-time than full-time, more philosophers than pedagogues."

Sir Christopher Ball, Director of Learning, Royal Society of Arts, in RSA Journal, December 1995.

* * * * *

are connected to dryness of heart and consequently result in the endorsement of power. Those who are not able to love are drawn by the lure of power over another. If this happens to teachers they become the advocates of the **chase pedagogy** where the child's mistakes and weaknesses, drawbacks and faults, ignorance and laziness are pointed out on every occasion. This destroys any sense of dignity and leaves only fear, guilt, suspiciousness and disillusionment. The school of betrayal is dominated by chase pedagogics and is an institution of rigidity, monologue and force.

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

Derry Hannam describes a school that runs rather like our home-based education did in the past.

state accredited school can devise its own school leaving graduation. At Sudbury Valley this consists of a defended thesis, delivered to a full school assembly of students, staff, governors and parents, justifying that the student is ready to leave school and cope in the big wide world.

Of Ofsted's Assessment, Recording and Reporting there is no sign. There is no formal assessment of student's work. No records of achievement or progress are kept and no reports given to parents. There are currently ten staff but many are part-time. Their contracts are reviewed annually and by secret ballot students decide whose will be renewed and for how many days per week. Although fees are low by US or UK standards the school is in good financial shape. Co-operation with the local Framingham School Board is close and supportive. Roughly half the students are 'lifers' who have been at the school from early choice. The other half are 'refugees' from the region's public (state) schools.

The support for the school of all the students I spoke to was total but especially impressive were the comments of some of the refugees. Bullying was mentioned by several as their reason for transferring to Sudbury Valley. *"Does it happen here?"* I asked.

"It's just not possible", was the reply. *"The bullies would be brought up at J.C. and it would stop. If it didn't the case would go to trial before the school meeting and if it still didn't stop they would be thrown out of school."*

"When was the last trial of a bully?" I asked. Nobody could remember. Several J.C. cases that we observed concerned what might be the first stage of bullying - they were all settled amicably but firmly after very fair exploration of both sides.

The first teacher that I met from the school was Mimsy Sadofsky. I asked the obvious literacy questions. *"They learn to read in their own time and when they feel the need,"* she said. *"Nobody ever leaves the school unable to read though we have had quite a few who did not learn until they were nine or ten. Even though statistically we must have had our 10% of potential dyslexics there has never been a dyslexic student at Sudbury Valley."*

I pressed Danny Greenberg, a founder staff member and philosopher of the school, about what becomes of ex-SVS students after they leave. He directed me to *Legacy of Trust* - the most recent and extensive of two longitudinal studies of ex-students going back to the original intake in 1968. Virtually all

When we visited Poland we met people who believed in the pedagogy of hope indicated in the last few items we have selected

have made a success of their lives in their own terms and look back to SVS as a time that truly belonged to them rather than some thing that was done to them by teachers or a national curriculum! It makes exciting reading.

Derry

Hannam

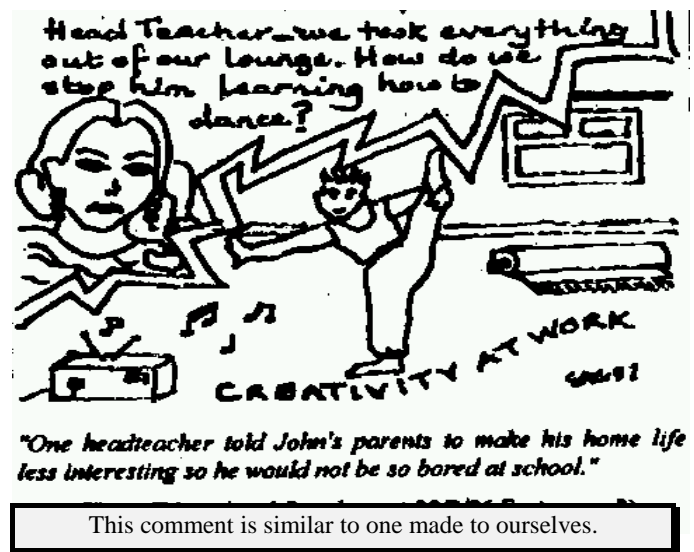
From O.K.- You're certified! Education Now (No.11, p.1)

From Poland with Love ...

Here are some suggestions for a good school:

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

Michał Józef Kawecki, Civic Educational Association, Szczecin
From Poland with Love (No 14/ p4)



In conversation with ... Peter Humphreys

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

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

We would love to have read this 20 odd years ago.

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

All Year-Round Schooling

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

The idea is not new since versions of it can be found in 1904, and before that in 1870 and even before that in 1840. Schools were open all year, with students attending on a flexi-time basis. One of the most noted calendar options was devised by William Wirt, a superintendent who began the programme in Bluffton. The scheme ran from 1907 to 1937, 50 weeks a year, 12 hours a day, six days per week. In some variations, activities were also available on the seventh day too. The Second World War marked a pause in these arrangements and they were not revived until Dr. White's work in 1969.

All Year-Round Education

The first move to re-establish year-round schooling was economic, to save money and land. The second wave of concern was to create a flexible concept of year-round education:

- **Continuous learning**
The concept that schools, like hospitals, are helping institutions and should never close, is a central idea in year-round education. Students should be able to learn in any of the twelve months at will. Some of this learning will be on site and some in other locations in the community on a flexi-time and flexi-schooling basis.
- **Employment realities**
Flexible employment patterns are now the norm for more and more people and families involved in year-round education have grown to value the flexibility of choosing periods of school attendance and periods of vacation throughout the year to suit their circumstances.
- **Lifestyle diversities**
Families can be offered four short breaks in a year, or one long one, or other combinations. Those who like travel, or winter sports or summer breaks can all be accommodated at will.
- **Curriculum facilities**
Pressure on facilities is reduced if computer suites, art studios, drama studios, sports facilities are all available all year, and another result can be smaller classes and less crowding in schools.

As a home-educating family ourselves, we would have really appreciated an open, flexible learning centre as described here.

- **Community enhancements**

All Year-Round Education

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

Flexible attendance has effects on traffic congestion, on use of community facilities, on volunteering, on staff morale and on student motivation. The culture of the school is changed from compulsory uniformity to invitational variety.

- **Personal choices**

Year-round education allows real choice for families. Those who particularly like the present calendar, can still have it whilst others can select the pattern that meets their needs in a particular year.

All Year-Round Education has not yet been considered as a possible innovation in UK, yet it has the same potential as in the USA. It pleases the accountants because it saves money by using facilities more efficiently, and it facilitates a more flexible and personalised approach to learning which begins to liberate students, teachers and families from the present gridlocked system

From Education Now (No16 p5)