

... a subtle pernicious trend ...

A couple of weeks ago education dominated the front page of the News of the World. There was an exclusive about Chris Woodhead: "*Sex row schools inspector bedded ex-pupil*". It was located just below the logo which has been appearing on the front of the Sun and News of the World since the New Year "*books for schools tokens*".

Both symbolise so much that is wrong with the government's education policy. First, there is the transfer of control to Ministers who then give it away to people like Woodhead, individuals apparently unrestrained by either a sense of modesty or duty, who uninhibitedly pronounce on anything and everything. They loath consultation, distrust democracy and seem only happy when belittling the teachers they ought to be serving. In addition, they trim their beliefs to match those of whoever employs them.

The second is less widely noted, but probably more dangerous in the long-run, because it represents a subtle pernicious trend which is being encouraged by the government without debate or discussion - the **growing commercialisation of education** - a willingness to replace blackboards with sandwich boards, to transform teachers into hucksters, selling everything from newspapers to designer gear, soft drinks to financial services.

The News International scheme is the one I find the most nauseating, but it is not the only, or even the most successful example of a company worming its way into schools. Previously, we had TESCO pressurising schools to pressurise children to pressurise parents to shop with them in order to get computer equipment for the school. Then, the Co-op followed suit, but this time the lure was musical instruments.

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Now, it is the turn of News International. Thankfully, sales of the Sun, and the like, have been falling for sometime. To reverse this trend, however, new young readers must be captured - and where better to recruit them than schools? The offensive began with the reading enrichment programme sponsored by News International in 1997. Lucky young participants were obliged to wear T-shirts and caps bearing the names of Murdoch's papers. By a 'total coincidence' the programme received Prime Ministerial endorsement, and fulsome praise from the education correspondent of the Sun. Those children who might have wanted to see their picture in the Sun would have found it opposite a gigantic topless pin-up. On the front-page they could have used their enriched reading skills by looking beneath the picture of Diana and Dodi on a jet-ski, at the headline 'Di's legover'.

This programme has now been followed by the 'Free Books For Schools Scheme'. By collecting tokens in the Sun, schools can

now get free books. Not **choose** books, just have the surplus stock clogging up the warehouses of, yes you guessed it, News International. Everyday the scheme operates you can encounter pictures of smiling children, shameless teachers and Sun reading parents holding up their tokens above gushing text from teachers and others in praise of the scheme.

Multi-national companies and local rivals increasingly target schools. The aim is no longer to ensure the production of 'perfect' workers, now they want compliant 'dumb-downed' consumers. Teachers are being bribed to create marketing opportunities for firms, to help capture customers while they are of an impressionable age. Sponsorship is offered and 'helpful' teaching packs supplied, which fit the National Curriculum, and incidentally push a particular product.

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Always the aim is the same - to secure the tacit endorsement of the school and teachers in the battle to gain brand loyalty from the students. Some schools also sell their pupils as marketing and photo-opportunities. In return for often pathetic amounts they allow children to be shown receiving money, materials or certificates of dubious worth. Already in the United States, in return for cash, hundreds of schools have installed televisions tuned to a pre-determined station in classrooms, corridors and canteens. During set times, they supply news and educational programmes. Predominately they pump out advertisements and promotional material aimed at young people. They are neither free to choose an alternative programme, or switch the set off. Nor, because attendance is compulsory, can they avoid them.

In the nineteenth century, a compliant government encouraged religious organisations to corrupt the educational process. It allowed them to close down debate in order to secure affiliation to a particular sect. Today, equally supine politicians encourage business organisations to do the same. Whereas their predecessors usually had the excuse that they sincerely believed they were saving the souls of the young, nowadays, greed alone provides the motive. Today, a craven desire to cut public spending is the political justification. As Norman Mailer put it, "*money leeches out every other value*". It will if you let it, is the obvious reposte.

Tony Jeffs

Tony Jeffs lectures at the University of Durham

Tony Jeffs is collecting material on sponsorship, advertising directed at schools and any attempts to secure the endorsement of products by schools and teachers. He would be delighted to hear from you if you have examples, materials or information. The address is:

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East Midlands Flexi College Visit.

This visit was made as part of my role as a trustee of the *Centre For Personalised Education*. The trustees hope to make visits and receive reports from all affiliated organisations. I must admit, however, it was also fuelled by more than a passing personal interest. I just love visiting places of learning!

I arrived first thing in the morning, on the last day of term. The younger students were already purposefully sorting and organising their portfolios of work. They were more than happy to discuss their outcomes with the natural keenness and interest so characteristic of children of this age, who are comfortable and happy in their learning environments.

This in itself was an achievement, for, as Philip and Annabel, explained many of these learners had been desperately unhappy in their state primaries.

At the time of my visit, *Flexi College* had some 20 students guided by four staff (only two full-time). Philip considered that some thirty per cent of these learners could be bracketed as having severe special needs.

Rather than finding dependent, demoralised learners I discovered a self supporting community, more than empowered to manage their own time and learning paths.

The day began as usual with an open, democratic circle meeting with everyone discussing the curriculum. Lists of ideas for the day were generated and ideas put to the vote. All learners took an active part and made notes in their jotters. The discussions illustrated how the students were very much involved in all matters - one relating how she had provisionally booked speakers to come and speak to the group. The meeting closed with financial matters, and again showed how the students were totally involved, even down to the keeping of petty cash records.

There was some apprehension about the main feature of the day, which involved all the students giving presentations of their work to the others. These certainly were the highlight of the morning for me. They represented a tremendous amount of work and commitment. The older students began with poetry. There was a high standard of content and performance and the audience was genuine in its respect and appreciation. After each presentation there was an excellent range, high order, open discussion and follow through of ideas. Some poems were discussed in terms of extending into a film or video production. The younger primary age learners were next. I was impressed by their confidence, the quality and the range of their topics - Canada, martial arts, millennium tower and millennium home, myths and legends.

The morning finished all too quickly but I had been privileged to share in the work of a self-directed and motivated learning community. One senses the continual organic growth. There is nothing stale or rigid, there is a strong sense of the present, of valuing each moment, yet of a creative approach to the future. All this is achieved on a shoestring compared to state

maintained provisions, but then few of the latter can muster the mission, relationships and personal commitment of the staff and students of *Flexi College*. I eagerly await my next visit.

Peter Humphreys.
Head of Mere Green Combined School

Flexi College is affiliated to the *Centre For Personalised Education* and is staffed by Philip and Annabel Toogood, Richard Terry and Janine Burrell in Burton on Trent.

'Plan, do and review' your own GCSE

Over the years we have done lots of experimenting at home and we have had fun using a microscope which is on loan from a friend. I have always enjoyed finding out about plants and animals, so a while ago I decided that I wanted to take GCSE Biology. We bought a good textbook called '*IGCSE Biology*' by D.O.McKean and we sent for the syllabus. The IGCSE Biology syllabus seemed to be the most suitable for me as there is a choice of either a practical test or an extra paper instead of coursework. I didn't use a correspondence course or a tutor. I counted up the number of weeks to the exam (allowing about six weeks for revision) and divided up the topics on the syllabus so that I had a certain amount of work to do each week. I made notes and diagrams as I studied each topic.

We sent for past papers, 'Standards' booklets and subject reports. The 'Standards' booklets give examples of answers to exam questions which were awarded different grades, and these help you to see what the examiners are looking for. The subject reports are published after each exam and they give detailed comments on the answers to each question. They also list the correct answers for all the multiple choice questions. I did lots of past papers as part of my revision and the subject reports were very useful for checking my answers. I noticed that some questions come up quite often, and when I came to the exam I found that there were some that I had already done at home!

I entered for the exam at the Cambridge Open Centre as our local College did not accept private candidates. My first visit was on Tuesday 3rd November to take the first of four papers. The Open Centre is a library in Lady Margaret House which the IGCSE Board borrows for the purpose. There were four candidates; two young people, both home educated, a mature student, and myself. One of the candidates had come a long way and he had stayed overnight in Cambridge.

There were about thirty desks as there are often several different exams happening at the same time. The invigilator was a friendly lady who explained that someone would be using a computer while we were taking our exam. "*But it's all right*", she said, "*It's a very quiet computer!*" So we did our exam with the sound of the keyboard rattling furiously in our ears, but I was too busy thinking about the questions to notice it a lot.

The first paper was the 'Alternative to Practical' paper. It tested the skills that are important in doing practical work by giving the results which might be obtained from an experiment, and asking questions which required you to analyse and interpret the results. Among other things, we had to draw a graph, make accurate measurements of some photographs of seedlings and draw a picture of one of them, stating the magnification of the drawing.

I went to Cambridge again for Papers 1 and 2, and Paper 3 (the hardest one) is next week. I have really enjoyed the experience so far as I don't feel under pressure and the atmosphere at the

Open Centre is friendly, relaxed and peaceful. The only disadvantage we have found is that private candidates have to pay entry fees which are quite high, but we had plenty of time to save up. You have to pay a Centre fee and an entry fee for each subject, so it is cheaper if you enter for several subjects at the same time. I am really looking forward to going again next year!

Helen Lowe
Home educated student

Update: Helen achieved a B grade

Which planet did you come from? An experience of education at home and otherwise.

For me, the main concept of home education is that education never stops. At various times when embarking upon different certified studies I have been told things such as: "*You will now have to take more responsibility for your learning than ever before*" or: "*This is the only time in your life when you can ask why and find out just for the love of it*". Neither of these predictions proved to be true. The first was when starting at a further education college I found the system far more rigid and artificial than my curiosity led, home-based learning, whereas it might have been true for the majority of those enrolling. The second was also not true because what I found in my doctoral studies was that although the education system was finally allowing me to go back to what I had been doing for years before I ever officially joined it - exploring ideas and concepts - here too there were strictures.

My whole understanding of exploration or research is to use whatever is relevant - a fully holistic approach - rather than whatever I could convince my supervisors, and sometimes fellow students, was relevant. It was as if I had journeyed to an alien place where parallel patterns could only be explored if that was the specific thing one was investigating. My manner of approach could appear disorganised to someone used to compartmentalising knowledge, since I would see similarities in some things usually considered as unrelated. Much of the time, it seemed to me, that the greatest part of my research was spent in finding the linguistic means of translating from what seemed obvious, into a manner which was acceptable and understandable to my listeners.

I have become very wary about the idea of syllabi because these seem to be more exclusive than inclusive. Syllabi determine what it is that someone following a particular course should know. The sole reason for this seems to be the quantification of knowledge. Therefore, the more in tune with the marker one is, the better the result, and thus the whole becomes a game of conforming, rather than an honest exploration and relating of ideas and experience. The root of my suspicion is that the requirement of external testing means the setting of boundaries of exploration. This also means that certificates, regarded by many as the 'kite-mark' of knowledge, are little more than acknowledgement that on a particular day at a particular time

one was capable of performing the necessary circus tricks required. Unfortunately, society is obsessed with quantification and this concept squirms its way into other aspects of life, such as the continual debate about what is 'quality' in music. Implicit in such terms are hidden agendas of what is good, what is necessary, and who may determine such questions.

What really worried me when I was teaching in higher education, was the fact the students demanded such a system. They required closed questions for essays (rather than, "*here are ideas but you can make up your own essay title if you wish*") and very tight marking guides. In truth, most looked first at the marks and then read the comments (if these got read at all). Some of the students also displayed the 'little pitcher' model of learning in which they were free of responsibility in the learning process. For them, the teacher had to know everything and convey it in the best terms to enable regurgitation at the appropriate time, usually in an essay.

Upon reflection, I have come to believe that I do come from another planet as far as my educational experience and understanding are concerned. It is my hope that others will also come from this other planet, where the similarities across what are commonly termed 'subjects', are as much to be studied as the subject contents. Where the problem is not one of 'what to do', but one of 'what shall be left undone for today'. In this planet there is no problem of 'nothing left to explore' and here, study is not done in a silent, solitary garret but occurs wherever two or more gather to dialogue, to test, to stretch their experience and creative explanations, using words only where necessary. This is a planet where children are not treated differently from adults, in their methods of learning, and a peer group has to do with interest, respect and enthusiasm rather than age.

Elizabeth Theobald

(Home educated from birth with further and higher education institution experience, now aged 30, and the holder of a doctorate.)

One for the quotations scrapbook ...

"I learnt most, not from those who taught me, but from those who talked with me." St Augustine

quoted in 'Learning Makes Sense', John Abbott,
Education 2000, 1994

Even old Joe Stalin wasn't as prescriptive as this...

(The Guardian, 20.2.99)

Nigel de Gruchy (General Secretary NASUWT), was driven to making the above comment following the publication of **pre-school targets for three-to five-year-olds** by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. He went on to say that, "*the targets would do many young children more harm than good*".

This view would be shared by most of the parents who contact the *Education Now* office in despair about the reactionary policies affecting early childhood education, which are killing off their children's enthusiasm for learning.

Information technology and the new practitioner

"The role of the teacher in the classroom could also be transformed through IT. They would still take a pivotal role in the education process, but move away from

traditional 'chalk and talk' methodology to being facilitators of learning. Teachers would be the coach and the conscience of self-paced learners, using a full range of resources to suit pupils of all abilities. We are moving into an era where education will not be limited by the hours of the school day, the walls of classroom or by the confines of a student's home."

Mark East, Education Group Manager, Microsoft Ltd,
in *Parliamentary Brief*, May 1998.

Economic collapse has led many in the Far East to question their education systems. (TES 26.6.98).

It should not surprise us that some of the countries of the Pacific Rim are asking whether their education systems are producing young people with the qualities needed in our rapidly changing and mobile societies. Writing in 1997 Professor Shimahara said that: "What the educational experience of post-war Japan reveals is that uniform standards for school programmes fail to address and realise the diverse needs and values of students." In the summer of 1997 Professor Mary James spent some time visiting schools in Japan, and she became aware of the "vigorous educational debate in that country about the goals of education, and the kind of curriculum that will promote these goals". Moreover, the debate clarified the sorts of qualities that they wanted to develop in their young people - "the ability to identify problems for oneself, to learn by oneself, to think for oneself, to make independent judgements", and to be able to work in "co-operation with others".

At the same time as there was pride in Japan at the high achievement of their students in the Third International Maths and Science Study, concern was being expressed at the lack of flexibility being shown by the young people who had passed through the education system. Mary James wrote that; "Unless my observations are distorted one reason why Japanese students score highly on TIMS tests must be attributed to the fact that their test-taking skills are finely honed".

And so we have a situation in which countries like Japan are looking for ways to move beyond the methods of teaching and classroom organisation that have served them during their recent decades of economic boom. The irony is that so many of the approaches currently being adopted in England reflect those that the Pacific Rim countries are wishing to move beyond. Professor Shimahara wrote that: "A peculiar and perverse result is that school reform initiatives in Japan on the one hand, and in Britain on the other, appear to be moving in opposite directions". He concludes his paper with an appeal for balance: "The Japanese experience suggests that a critical policy issue for Britain is how to create a more appropriate balance between some common standards and the accommodation of diversity..."

Mary James, when discussing the 1995 thinking of the Japanese Ministry of Education regarding a new model for education, said that they "were motivated by an urgent need to confront problems associated with lack of creativity". Reference was also made to the "excessive competitiveness in the examination system". At a recent conference in Singapore it was stated that in that country: "The whole school ethos must change to bring about creative thinking". Closer to home Christopher Price has written that "An assumption has grown up that 'standards' of achievement matter more than the development of creativity."

The repeated reference to creativity is interesting. In the early 1960s a book was published in America (*Creativity and Intelligence* by Getzels and Jackson) that focused much educational debate at the time. The main question it raised was whether an educational system that concentrated upon developing young people's ability to score highly on tests largely requiring recall of information, and problem solving of a convergent kind, was the best system to help them move confidently and

productively into a rapidly changing society. The debate was given further impetus in Britain by the publication in 1968 of Liam Hudson's *Frames of Mind*, which raised similar questions but was based on research in Britain.

Out of this debate emerged a number of questions about the 'backwash effect' that testing closely linked to pre-specified objectives might have on the teaching taking place in schools. In addition, questions were being asked about the validity of much of the testing. Banesh Hofmann, a Nobel Prize winning theoretical physicist, was particularly well known through the popularity of his book *The Strange Story of the Quantum*, and he described his difficulty in completing a Multiple Choice Test in physics designed for high school students. In response to a statement, he had to choose the **one** correct from five suggested answers. His difficulty was that in his judgement a number of the answers would be feasible in appropriate conditions. His question was a simple one. Is there a danger of discriminating against the highly imaginative and innovative thinker who can see possibilities in a situation that the majority might miss?

And so we ask whether the ideas explored in the context of creativity shed any light on the plans and aspirations for our own education system. T.S.Kuhn argued that "something like 'convergent' thinking is just as essential to scientific advance as is 'divergent' thinking", so there is no suggestion that conventional problem solving and convergent thinking should be jettisoned. A number of indicators do emerge, however, that we shall have to take seriously if we are committed to developing creativity.

First, we should avoid an over-competitive system (between individuals and between schools), especially if success is measured almost exclusively by performance on pencil-and-paper tests. Professor Paul Black wrote that schools have "to concentrate on drilling pupils to do well in sets of short items. The impetus to develop in pupils the skills of problem-solving, or of applying their learning to complex tasks, is being removed."

Second, while recognising the importance of evaluation and assessment in schools, there should be concern at their close linkage to a mechanistic industrial model of education. Christopher Price wrote that those concerned with creativity should have "confidence in the knowledge that the spirit of the age is on their side and obsessions with testing are on the wane". In his book *Learning Beyond the Classroom*, Tom Bentley refers to the 'Factory Metaphor' of education, "which is most easily explained by the idea that education is the process by which raw materials are transferred into a product which meets standardised quantity and quality requirements...(the model is)...increasingly inappropriate to the needs and goals of a twenty-first-century education system".

Third, we should take much more account of what is known about young people's development in all its richness and fullness. At the very least this should include taking Howard Gardner's ideas of Multiple Intelligence seriously.

Fourth, we all - particularly young people - need time and space to explore ideas and feelings. Christopher Price wrote that, "Just as too much undergrowth strangles a garden, subject incrementalism strangles a creative curriculum". Or as Chris Watkins wrote, "We also have to get away from the idea that more means better...of the idea that time plus school equals learning".

Fifth, there needs to be an encouraging climate. Self-esteem is important. Psychological defensiveness inhibits creativity. Carl Rogers talked of having the freedom "to toy with ideas and concepts". Charles Handy said that, "Getting it wrong is part of getting it right".

It will be interesting to see what answers we, and the countries of the Far East, produce to the questions that are being asked of our education systems. In what ways will the calls to develop creativity that are being heard influence the decisions that will be made? - decisions that will be of crucial importance for all of us, and particularly so for our young people.

Glyn Yeoman

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

Book Review

Margaret McMillan:

'I learn, to succour the helpless'

by Viv Moriarty, Educational Heretics Press, 1998, £7-95

It is unlikely that, at least since the sixties, young students have been offered much more than a passing historical reference to Margaret McMillan, and it is Viv Moriarty's book that could serve as an ideal introduction to ideas and practice which gave a kick-start to the nursery school movement in this country. It is its beautiful accessibility which makes this book so appealing.

At root, McMillan was a Marxist, but was also influenced by the socialist ideas of Beatrice and Sidney Webb, William Morris and Bernard Shaw. As Moriarty points out, McMillan shared with them their concern that everyone should be able to have 'honourable' work, and be able to live in decent and attractive surroundings; and that change was to be brought about not by bloody revolution, but through co-operation and discussion based on the notion that the common good should take precedence over individual ends.

It was also a time when many children under the age of thirteen were working in factories for half a day, and in school for the other half, and it was not until 1930, a year before McMillan's death, that legislation was passed decreeing that children under 14 should be in school for most of the day.

The notion that women were the inferior of men, and largely fit only for domestic work, was still very widespread, and McMillan was determined to change that perception and show, mainly through adult education, that women were as capable as men in virtually every sphere of life. At the same time, the importance of the school working together with the family was established. She was helped in these endeavours by the suffragette movement which led to women over 30 being able to vote for the first time, and also by the emergence of psychology as a discipline. This had started mainly with Freud's work, and people like Susan Isaacs were beginning to apply it to development in early childhood, and to emphasise, for example, the importance of observing and studying children. McMillan's Open Air Nursery School and the establishment of the Rachel McMillan Teacher Training College were much influenced and supported by these psychological insights.

Moriarty's main *raison d'être* is to show how our present concerns in early childhood are rooted in those of Margaret McMillan's time, and were raised by her in her attempts to persuade the State that putting money and resources into the early years pays off in personal and societal benefits, both in the short and long term. How slow the world has been in learning this!

McMillan was adamant that young children need well-trained and qualified teachers who are skilled in catering for all aspects of child development. This meant that not only were cognitive aspects important, but the children's emotional and spiritual development were as crucial. This latter is now being stressed much more than in the recent past, and the work of people like Daniel Goleman (1998) and Ferre Laevers (1996) are emphasising the need for more attention to be paid to children's emotional well-being. In 1919, when McMillan established the Rachel McMillan Teacher Training College in Deptford, she devised courses which had the

study of child development at their core - something which many of us would like to see re-instated today.

There were many other matters which concerned McMillan: the importance and role of Nature and the natural environment in people's lives; the crucial role of play in children's all round development (based on the ideas of Froebel and Isaacs); the notion that educating the child also included caring for it; the importance of careful, planned observation, and the development of individual profiles which was incorporated into student training programmes. Well, where are we now? There is more emphasis at present on the merging of education and care, and a push for combined Early Childhood Centres, where parent and family involvement is incorporated; the importance of observation on both children and adults, and how to learn from it, is being more strongly stressed. The importance of play in children's learning remains, according to Moriarty, "*common currency within the early childhood education and care field*". But a visit to most reception classes, with their mix of 4 and 5 year-olds, reveals a lack of sand, water, 'home corners' etc., and too much stress on 'formal teaching'. This is, of course, not usually the choice of the staff, but has to do with the pressures for 'literacy hours' and the like, and the anxiety of parents for their children to 'get on', which bedevil infant teaching. Moreover, the fact that there are so many 4 year-olds catapulted from their nursery provision into reception classes of 30+ would have made McMillan's hair stand on end. As early as 1919 she resisted the idea that the child should even leave the nursery school at five, saying, "*to drive him forth is to send him out untimely*".

Perhaps the most profound change to come from those early pioneers like McMillan, is the status of women. It has changed beyond recognition, and no doubt both McMillan and the Pankhursts would jump for joy at the sight of so many women gracing the House of Commons. What McMillan said then, when women over 30 had gained the right to vote, still applies - "*The life opening now before the eyes of young womanhood is big with new powers, opportunities, interests, risks and potencies ... They are here, then no more to be protected, but to protect, to cherish, and the whole fate and future of vast armies of human beings lies to a greater degree in the hands that yesterday were believed to be fully and righteously occupied in fine embroidery and the practice of scales*" (1927).

Moriarty's book is an absorbing read, and I recommend it to you.

Jenefer Joseph, Consultant in Early Childhood

Vision 1966

Tomorrow's school will be a school without walls - a school built of doors which opened to the entire community. Tomorrow's school will reach out to the places that enrich the human spirit - to the museums, the theatres, the art galleries, to the parks and rivers and mountains. It will ally itself with the city, its busy streets and factories, its assembly lines and laboratories - so that the world of work does not seem an alien place for the student.

Tomorrow's school will be the centre of community life, for grown-ups as well as children - "*a shopping centre of human services.*" It might have a community health clinic or a public library, and theatre and recreation facilities. It will provide formal education for all citizens - and it would not close its doors any more at three o'clock. It will

employ its buildings round the clock and its teachers round the year.

Former US President, Lyndon Johnson, 1966

(Quotation supplied by Don Glines, Educational Futures Projects, who has helped develop the All Year-round Education movement in USA. More than 40 States have gone over to this system, and a later edition of *News and Review* will carry an insert describing this development)

The Galloway Small School - one year on

The kids became the cooks, the waiters, the floor show, the interior design team and the decorating squad when *The Galloway Small School* celebrated its first birthday with a culinary flourish and an afternoon of fun on the lawn. No enterprise could have had a more eventful first year. We began by sharing premises with The Barcaple Christian Outdoor Pursuits Centre in September 1997 whilst planning for a move to one unused village school that turned into another unused village school, that suddenly was not going to be ready on time. Our prospective landlords said they would "fix something", which turned out to be nine weeks in the shadow of Drumlanrig Castle (which must rate as the strangest location for a small school), while they dealt with dry rot in the building and asbestos in the ceiling tiles, and we scraped and painted and scrubbed our new premises before finally unpacking our belongings for the last time. How happy we were to say farewell to those cardboard boxes! So it was, on March 19th this year, *The Galloway Small School* moved into the school at Carronbridge.

Within weeks the 'learning support' equipment was installed (courtesy of the National Lottery), the kitchen was providing home cooked lunch everyday, the classroom walls were covered with kids' work, and the workshop was full of shavings and whir of hand tools as the school relaxed into its own place at last. There were nine kids at the start which has turned into twelve now, with enquiries being dealt with all the time. We have kept our Japanese kids by working out a hospitality scheme with members of staff and our local social services, and we look forward to having more long-distance pupils, for one of our main priorities is the establishment of a boarding facility.

In June we had our registration inspection, a friendly and supportive group of HMIs, who deeply appreciated our efforts (indeed our very survival), and pointed out where they feel we should be heading. We have the task of meeting their demands, where we accept them, and negotiating where we have strong views that differ from theirs. It appears to be difficult to quantify some aspects of an holistic approach to education, which is a challenge to all concerned. They will be back in March 1999 to continue the debate.

In the classrooms we are teaching Maths, English, Craft & Design, Art & Design, Sports Theory, Environmental Studies, Spanish, Music, Drama, Sport, Computer & Model-making, and amongst

the community we are teaching co-operation, tolerance, self-awareness and everything else you learn by working together and making decisions by consensus at the weekly meeting. At best we manage to integrate these vital aspects of education. The meetings are always sparky and a privilege to share. We, the adults, are constantly reminded that if you ask children what they think they will most certainly tell you, and our task is to genuinely listen to them. We are successfully integrating kids who have been out of school for a variety of reasons into our friendly and welcoming community, sharing the sense of relief their parents experience as anxiety leaves them.

Our task for the coming year is to consolidate our promising beginning, and a recent spate of enquiries from parents of primary age children has led us to host an exploratory meeting to test the viability of such an expansion. We have plans too to establish a Science room (maybe a Portakabin), and a major scheme for the future which involves examining the possibility creating a purpose-built school in S.W. Scotland in the countryside.

In this first year of *The Galloway Small School* we have all learnt so much about ourselves, child and adult. We have discovered grit and determination unbounded, capacities for discomfort and hard work, humour in the dark moments. We even took exams. We have made so many friends with people who saw what we were trying to do and gave time, encouragement and money to help. We have made our contribution to the debate about education by our very existence. We plan to continue.

Richard Jones (Head teacher)

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Book Review

Let's ask the children: feelings education

by Robert McKechnie

First and Best in Education Ltd ISBN 1 86083 457 4

Who needs classes in self-development more, schoolchildren, the guardians of our earthly future, or their teachers? Person-centred rather than system-centred education will always take longer than blanket provision of pre-digested pellets of impersonal information requiring standardised responses. The result, according to this author's research, is 'unsatisfied children'. But far less so, he claims convincingly, when they experience skilfully led Personal and Social Education (PSE) classes with as few as 16 pupils. Robert McKechnie further suggests that traditional class time lost, is time gained when pupils are given opportunities to develop more fully their unique potential and learn to appreciate their classmates' variegated differences.

This holistic exposition of emotional literacy by a self-confessed Christian teacher is refreshing as well as thorough. How many other books on education would show the word 'love' five times on one page without sounding insincere or patronising? He writes, "These precious young people, have been dreaming about life, Soul, purpose, good, matters which are left unexplained. They have a great need to let out these secret dreamings. They want to test their half-formed ideas and questions."

With compassion and insight, the author encourages an experiential approach to **feeling education**, backed up by his career in secondary schools, and enlivened by a fair sprinkling of anecdotes, to illustrate the effectiveness of the Socratic advice, **know thyself**. This 'Father of Education', centuries ahead of the 'Uncertainty Principle' of quantum physics, trusted his students with circuitous open-ended questions, not closed answers which are so often used by state servants to control people's minds. An undogmatic dialogue with Socrates is presented. In fact, this book suggests that the quickest way of enriched learning is to teach less and listen more, to follow rather than to lead! **'I know best about me'** might make a suitable motto for even an atheist Gnostic!

In this spiral-bound book with text only on one side of each of the 71 pages, we are treated to a wide range of controversial issues delicately handled as well as examples of good practice. Dissatisfaction amongst British schoolchildren is acknowledged throughout the twelve chapters. Helpful diagnosis presents not just the students' 'dis-ease' but, by way of a cure, convincing evidence is presented how by encouraging autonomy instead of the more usual uncaring compliance, our youngsters gain enough self-confidence to cope better. Learning without loving provides a bleak prospect for all. So with this heart-centred 'bible' to hand, a higher profile please for PSE!

Christopher Gilmore
Actor/author/teacher/learner

Flotsam and jetsam

Torpedo watch

Later this year, Falmer Press will be publishing a new book entitled *National Curriculum, National Disaster* based on several years field work. There are strong echoes here of the denunciation of the first national curriculum by Edmond Holmes, Chief Inspector of Schools at the time, i.e. 1911.

Anita watch 1

Anita Higham, principal of Banbury School, wrote in the *Times Educational Supplement* 13th November 1998:

"...there is a poverty in the vision of our present education provision... The complex effects of a fast-evolving technological and social revolution bring into sharp relief the anachronism of a school system's superficial and cosy realities... The system which the affluent parents of 10 percent of the student population purchase, because they seek to shore up the past, rather than face the future... We must leave the secure comfort of working in a bygone world and find the courage to remove the shackles of our outdated structures, so that we can design future learning systems."

Anita watch 2

Anita Roddick, *Body Shop* founder, at the *Human Scale Education* conference in Oxford:

"I see business as capable of alienating humanity in every way. I see corporate crimes in abundance, with the globe rapidly becoming a playground for those who can move capital and projects quickly from place to place. Corporations roam country to country, with no restrictions, in search of the lowest wages, the loosest environmental regulations, and the most docile and desperate workers. We hear much about increased rates of growth in production, but little about stronger communities or healthier children; we hear much about the march of progress, but little about people and cultures who are being trampled under foot... We need to measure progress by human development, not gross national product."

McLibel watch

Dateline Tuesday the 12 January 1999: the 'McLibel' case returns to the courts. Helen Steel and Dave Morris are contesting the decision of the original judge that they must pay McDonald's Restaurants £60,000 damages. Nick Cohen, in the *Observer* of 10th January 1999, wrote:

"Yet, although he backed the company on many points, some of the worst charges Steel and Morris made were upheld by the judge as correct in every detail... Mr Justice Bell added that the advertising men pretended McDonald's burgers were nutritious when the evidence showed that those who got more fast food 'several times a week will take the very real risk of heart disease'. He had no doubt that the Company paid its

workers low wages and was 'culpably responsible for cruel practices in the rearing and slaughter of some animals'."

British television has banned a documentary on the first hearing, but you can further your education with a copy of the video from: BM Oops, London WC1N 3XX (£12-99,) cheques payable to One-Off Productions. (Fast-soul food?)

School league table watch

"The same schools occupy the top 100 places today as when the first tables were published five years ago... We are building one of the most unequal and nastiest societies on earth..."

Will Hutton, *The Observer*, 6th September 1998

League table watch

A report by the European monitoring centre for drugs and drug addiction shows recorded drug abuse in Britain is up to five times higher among teenagers and young adults than in other European countries. (Question: Is this anything to do with having one of the most regressive schooling systems in Europe designed to drive you to drink, drugs or something?)

Down Memory Lane

In 1967, Bertrand Russell wrote one of his last messages: *"Consider for moment what our planet is, and what it might be. At present, for most, there is toil and hunger, constant danger, more hatred than love. There could be a happy world, where co-operation was more in evidence than competition, and monotonous work is done by machines, where what is lovely in nature is not destroyed to make room for hideous machines whose sole business is to kill, and where to promote joy is more respected than to produce mountains of corpses. Do not say this is impossible: it is not. It waits only for men to desire it more than the infliction of torture..."*

Smacking watch or 'Just say No'?

The smacking of children debate seems doomed to follow in the same tracks as the beating of prisoners, the right of husbands to beat wives, and the corporal punishment in schools debates. Some other countries seem to manage without smacking children. Claire Rayner comments: *"It is bad family politics. If you get really mad I would slap the table to express your outrage. It is even worse when they are very young... You should simply remove a child from the scene and say 'no!'"*

Confession time

"Every newspaper, publisher and TV station is an organised hypocrisy with chums it protects from the scrutiny it reflects on others." Nick Cohen, *Observer* journalist, in his column 20/9/98

Chief Inspector watch

When the Chief Inspector of Schools was given his new contract, he countered suggestions that this might go down badly with teachers by proclaiming that he had received 20 letters from head teachers saying how pleased they were. Ted Wragg in the *Times Educational Supplement* of November 13th 1998, dedicated his column to the 23,968 head teachers who did not write in.

Ofsted watch

A school inspector who bullied and intimidated teachers was yesterday taken off the official list of inspectors. (*Guardian* November 28th 1998) A colleague commented, *"one down, hundreds to go!"* Further Ofsted reports include: *"Inspections 'push standards down'"*, (*Times Educational Supplement* October 23rd 1998), and *"Head 'receiving psychiatric aid' after inspection"* (*Guardian*, 19th of November 1998).

Totalitarian watch

Families are being required to stop taking holiday breaks when it suits the family circumstances and budget because the guys in charge of schools do not like it. In contrast, 41 USA states have some form of 'All Year Round' provision that encourages families to engage flexibly with the learning system.

Calendar watch

Only 150 days or so to go to the Brecon Jazz Festival on August 13th 14th 15th 1999 for a spot of 'joy promotion'. (see above)

Educational Beachcomber

Book Review

Educating Children at Home

by Alan Thomas

London: Cassell 1998 ISBN 0-304-70180-7

This is a many-splendoured book which, in a perfect world, would be issued by the Government to all home-schooling families as an indispensable source of help. Dr. Thomas offers home-educators a piece of solid and extensive research into out-of-school child-rearing, which carries authority but is accessible to non-academic readers.

The book stems from an examination of 100 home-schooling families. If, as I suspect, it is isolation and a sense of personal inadequacy, rather than any deep-seated reluctance, which deters many families from home-schooling, the sheer weight of positive evidence which Dr. Thomas marshals, to show that children can thrive both intellectually and socially at home, could inspire many more families to take their children out of school. He shows very effectively that schools have no special, alchemical expertise at turning youngsters into adults, which non-teachers know nothing about. On the contrary, he gives ample evidence that when parents recognise their children's power to educate themselves, and co-operate with it, they sweep aside the formal structures of school teaching and move to a 'method' in which the seemingly transient interchanges of natural conversation predominate.

'Education through conversation', of which Dr. Thomas gives many vivid examples, would not, I imagine, appeal to the Chief Inspector of Schools as serious professional practice. Yet the parents and children whose words are recorded in this book speak of real success, of children learning accurately and deeply, over the space of many years, without any formal instruction. They read, talk about what they have read, discuss

problems with the adults who share their lives, and respond to the intellectual challenge of being a young learner with enthusiasm. Boredom and disaffection seem to happen mainly when parents try to run their home-education project like a facsimile of school.

Dr. Thomas avoids polemic. This is not a tract against schooling, though anyone who feels that children have a kind of semi-theological duty to go to school, whether it does them any bankable good or not, will be offended by the ease with which the author assumes they can be removed from it and educated at home. Rather, the style is on the impersonal side, letting the transcripts of the home-schooling families' testimony do the main work of celebrating real educational success, and allowing the children to comment on the positive benefits which they feel they have derived from their home-based education.

There are chapters on why parents choose to educate at home, methods and approaches to home teaching, teaching children individually, and becoming less formal. Dr. Thomas also devotes space to the elements of education which worry parents most: literacy and socialisation. He acknowledges that when compulsory schooling started it seemed to offer a way of drawing all children into a framework of formal instruction in literacy. Later, the idea became generally accepted that school was the 'only' place where a person could learn to read. This was not true. Even at the beginning of the nineteenth century it was estimated that 50% of males and 33% of females could read. The working classes contained more illiterates because they had fewer opportunities to pass on reading skills, but Dickens' stories were written for the masses and widely read by people from all estates, including the lowest. Clearly the ability to read, and to read difficult, rich texts such as George Eliot, the Brontës and Dickens wrote, was being effectively passed on throughout society by roughly the same mechanisms as was spoken language, long before schools got involved. Dr. Thomas affirms that 'untrained' people can still teach their children to read, or be the means by which youngsters acquire the ability to read, as successfully as their ancestors have been doing since reading began.

Home-educators' greatest long-term worry has always been that their children will become in some way 'socially inadequate' because they will not have had the intensive peer-group contact which school forces children to go through. The fact that socially inadequate people today have almost all been through school does not weaken parents' apprehension that they might be harming their children by 'depriving' them of the experience. The chapter on 'Social Aspects' goes a long way towards reassuring parents about their children's ability to become mature adults without passing through the social cauldron of schooling. He concludes, that children educated at home tend to be more versatile in their relationships, communicating freely and without embarrassment with people of all ages.

The whole book breathes sweet reasonableness, at the same time as it affirms that home education is not a second best to schooling, but potentially a far more effective, natural and life-enhancing means of bringing children into adult life without disabling their intellectual, emotional and social capacities and laying down a lifelong deposit of self-doubt.

Chris Shute

Reminder

Education Now
Meeting and Learning Exchange
Saturday 24 April at Flexi College, Burton on Trent

All members of *Education Now* are invited to this day's events (programme already circulated). **Rod Paley** and **Paul Ardern**, who are co-directors of the '*Learning Technology Project*', will lead the afternoon Learning Exchange with a presentation on **the role of technology in legitimising and mobilising self-directed learning, and how learning at home can 'put it all together'**. Details from Janet Meighan at the address below.

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