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If there is a lifelong learner award somewhere, then Annie Clegg would surely be a prime candidate. Aged 74, Annie has just been awarded her Ph.D for a study in the philosophy of autonomous education, entitled "*Children's rights to greater freedom and self-determination*" - the philosophy of learning control-freaks in our society detest.

Annie and husband Tony, who was a secondary school maths teacher and later teacher-trainer, elected to home-educate their family way back in 1960 in Accrington – about 17 years before the founding of *Education Otherwise*. It was about the time of the famous '*Children in Chancery*' case of Joy Baker, who fought a court case in Norfolk for the right to educate at home. The Clegg family watched the case with some apprehension but the Lancashire Local Education Authority was headed by Percy Lord, who had some sympathy for their chosen course of action.

The circumstances of the Joy Baker court hearings appeared to have affected the style of the Clegg's home-based education which stayed close to a school-at-home approach to keep the local advisers from becoming hostile. Annie ran a part-time school for young dancers which expanded as her children grew older, finally catering for over 3000 local children. Annie's three daughters became excellent dancers. The eldest obtained a teacher's certificate in Tap Dancing, and the younger two obtained high qualifications with the Royal Academy of Dancing.

Writing some children's stories and some pantomime scripts brought in some extra income. Then, Annie and Tony started a small business supplying dance clothing at prices the local families could afford. It now supplies dance schools all over Europe.

Why home-education? Annie and Tony noted that many children seemed to lose their spontaneity and creativity in expressing movement to music when they started school. Annie's view was confirmed when her eldest daughter attended infants school for a short time. After only a few weeks at school she was off sick with a bad cold only to find an Educational Welfare Officer at the door "*treating her as if she was an escaped convict*". She decided that the Victorian-style approach to learning was to be avoided.

Yet, Annie's seven grandchildren all attend school. Her own children, she feels, always found the 'trailblazer' role uncomfortable. Today's home-based educating families, however, have a thriving network of other families to support them and any 'identity crisis' is ameliorated. The idea of the current Home-educators week-long Festival in Dorset, with 1500 people, was unbelievable in the 1960s.

Flotsam and jetsam

A guinea-pig squeals ...

Danielle Walter, 17, began school in the year the national curriculum was introduced. Her verdict, after experiencing the latest AS-level experiments is, "We've been really over-tested all the way through our school life." *The Guardian*, July 12th 2001.

'The School That I'd Like' verdict

One of the competition judges concludes, "The incredibly huge response ... shows that teachers and pupils all over the country realised that the system is outdated, that it does not allow decent expression of the values of creativity and independent thought that are needed in the new post-industrial world." Entries have now been turned into a Children's Manifesto - see www.education.guardian.co.uk/schools/story.

No reading this week

"The hand-lettered sign on the door of my daughters North London classrooms said it all: 'We are assessing the children's literacy skills, so there will be no reading this week' Thanks to the rigidity of the national curriculum and a government that thinks standardised tests are synonymous with educational standards, a week that could have been spent telling stories or writing poems was wasted jumping through hoops." D.D.G.Gutenplan in *The Guardian* 4th July 2001.

Colonialisation watch

"I am pleased to have the responsibility of being President of the United States. As young Americans you also have an important responsibility, which is to become good citizens." President George W. Bush writing to a group of 11 year-old UK schoolchildren. In *The Observer*, 1st June 2001.

DFES and Devil Worship

"... when we searched the web for the DFES we got a series of pages about demonic possession: 'DFEs, or Dark Force Entities, are dark, arrogant, hostile, malevolent, disruptive, destructive entities which claim to be followers of the Great One,' one site helpfully explained.' In *Times Educational Supplement*, Diary, 22nd June 2001.

Off the rails

Talking of destructive entities, "I doubt if the reputation of businessmen has ever been lower than at present - which makes it all the more laughable the way Mr Brown and his colleagues seem determined to involve them more and more not only in education but hospitals, prisons, railways and all the public services." Richard Ingrams in 'Commerce in the classroom' *Observer* 24th June 2001.

Thou shalt not be found out ...

An experienced headteacher has resigned after revealing that she corrected mistakes in her pupils' answers to national maths and science SATs papers taken by 11 year-olds. John Heslop, regional official for the National Association of Head Teachers said Miss Quick had been suffering from a "lethal cocktail" of stress from examinations, league tables and Ofsted inspections. Others think that this case is just that tip of the iceberg. *The Guardian* July 12th 2001.

The haunted classroom

A headteacher and her deputy have been suspended pending and investigation into allegations that public money was obtained through a register of 'ghost' pupils - who are said to have inflated the school role by about 20. Increased school

income may be £50,000. *The Observer*, 15th July 2001.

Church schools and 'the mindless'

The recent violence in the Ardoyne, Belfast, flared up after a row outside the Catholic school. The key issues seem to have been the nature of 'Loyalist' placards outside the school and a Celtic T-shirt worn by Catholic parent. If there were no religious schools in Ireland, of course, none of this could have happened. In his keynote speech last week, the prime minister promised "significantly more faith schools". If only we in England and Wales could replace secular comprehensives with "faith schools", we might be able to aspire to a level of mindless faith, bigotry and sectarianism so prominent in the Ardoyne. Paul Foot in *The Guardian* June 26 2001.

Pupils sit wrong exam 1

Education chiefs began an inquiry after a mix-up at Penlan school, Swansea, South Wales, when pupils sat a GCSE exam on human biology instead of biology. Wrong codes were used to order the exam papers. *The Guardian* 20th June 2001.

Pupils sit wrong exam 2

26 pupils at King Edwards school, Bath, sat down to tackle A-level questions on Hamlet and scanned the paper with mounting anxiety. All they could see was lots of puzzling stuff about the Tempest. Some of the parents have paid up to £6,000 a year in fees to bring them to this moment. They were not well pleased that the school had made an error in selecting the wrong play for study. *The Guardian* 7th June 2001.

Marking time

The number of wrongly marked national curriculum test papers in English increased by nearly a third last year. The figures have been described as the tip of the iceberg by teachers, who say most schools do not bother to re-submit papers, even when they are suspicious of the results. One head teacher said every English script he had sent back had been upgraded - he wished that he had submitted the entire year group. *Times Educational Supplement*, 15th June 2001.

Mission impossible

Students who found the first question of their A-level physics exam impossible learnt yesterday that it really was impossible. A crucial figure, the radius of the moon, had been omitted from a question about calculating the forces on a lunar landing module orbiting the moon. *The Guardian* 16th June 2001.

Presidential league tables

The Lovenstein Institute of Scranton, Pennsylvania publishes an IQ appraisal for each new US President. Selected results are as follows: Bill Clinton 182, Jimmy Carter 175, J. F. Kennedy 174, Richard Nixon 155, Franklin D. Roosevelt 147. At the bargain basement end of the table are Ronald Reagan 105, George Bush Sr. 98, George W. Bush 91. The current president wants to raise standards by increased testing.

Sideline rage

More than 20 states favour tougher penalties against parents who attack officials. In some cases matches must be played in silence to combat 'sideline rage'. One father goes on trial shortly, accused of killing another father in a dispute at hockey practice. *The Guardian*, 8th May 2001.

Educational beachcomber

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Correction

For Wood, read Foot

At the end of Tony Brown's article, *The Pain and the Pride*, published in our *News and Review* 32, one of the authors of the book, *Let our children learn*, is wrongly identified as Michael Wood. It should be Michael Foot.

Sunday 23rd September

Learning Exchange

'Community responsibility for our children and equipping young people to meet the challenges of the 21st Century'

Speaker: John Abbott

Director of *The 21st Century Learning Initiative*

Plus the AGM and General Meeting

The next **Learning Exchange** will take place on **Sunday 23rd Sept** at **Burleigh Community College, Loughborough**. It will begin at **1.45** and will be preceded at **11am** by the **AGM/General Meeting and information exchanges** about members projects and current concerns

Members and friends of *Education Now* are invited to this event, which is **Free of Charge**. (A voluntary collection will offset cost of drinks and hire of room) Those planning to attend the morning sessions are asked to bring their own lunch.

(If you would like to attend contact Janet Meighan at 113 Arundel Drive, Bramcote Hills, Nottingham NG9 3FQ or on 0115 925 7261)

Book Review

Let our Children Learn,

by Michael Foot, Tony Brown and Peter Holt,

Nottingham, Education Now, 2001

ISBN 1-871526-49-3

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I don't keep many education books any more. I throw them away, usually after 'gutting' them for the one, two or three insights that I can note, or learn from. Most of them seem pretty turgid; some are written obscurely, in a language which tells you how clever the writer is. Those are usually the worst! I long to remind the writers that parsimony, elegance, poetry and not a little love need to go into texts for busy teachers. Few are inspiring.

This little one IS. You can read it in less than an hour, but it is like a breath of fresh spring air; or is it an echo of the heady days of Plowden and happy children? Or am I just getting old and battle-weary from the general tenor of things

'educational', national and important? This little book reminds one of the joy of learning. It conjures the shades of Schiller and Froebel, perhaps of Tanner and Nancy Catty, once more into the lists of those who fought on children's behalf.

The message is simple, not patronising, laced with familiar little quotes that sharpen the points, underpinned by a strongly Norwegian view of the importance and sanctity of childhood and by superb little illustrations of the children's work and ideas. All the time it is the children's creativity, wonder and excitement that comes bouncing through the pages. The teaching method is simple, as old as Socrates and much like Mark Twain's 'two on a log'.

Don't be misled, however. It is a downright piece of anarchy in the present climate of educational commodification, corporatism, competition and marketisation. There is not a test result to be seen. There is not even much of a nod to the core curriculum, or the belief that it is the **FUTURE** of children as 'social capital' that matters. This is about the fire that catches in the here and now; the belief that the world is sharp, interesting, etched in wondrous colours and our job is to help children see these and reach for them with autonomy, joy and choice. That is the second time I have used the word 'joy'.

Read this book; it will bring joy into your heart, joy that many teachers still love their charges, joy that they want to encourage them, help them, excite them. Moreover, it will remind you that this world is not just a dreary competition, but a marvellous voyage of discovery. It takes you back to seeing through children's eyes. It will remind you that the highest levels of quality are possible (there, I've used one of the dreaded 'in-words' of current jargon); and it will re-ignite your belief in autonomy, creativity, motivation and questioning as the basic purposes of education. Read it; **you won't throw it away!**

Philip Gammage

The Anti-Testing Movement USA

"*I am not a test-score!*" says one placard held up by a student. "*Stop killing kids love for learning*," says another. The threat of making testing compulsory throughout the country has been radicalising US students, parents and teachers.

These tests are called 'high-stakes' tests because they can be used to track both students and the schools, deciding whether individuals can move up a grade, and determining the future funding for the schools. Both lawmakers and the educational establishment have grown to love mandated tests because they let them exercise maximum control with minimal effort.

Some people respect tests because they **seem** to be scientific and **seem** to be fair. Unfortunately for everybody, these tests do not work. Teachers start to teach to the test and soon very little gets learned apart from the test content. Students forget most of it after the test and gradually lose any desire to learn.

The *Alliance for Childhood* recently issued a *Call to Action* on high-stakes testing. It said, "*we believe that this massive*

experiment, intended to raise educational achievement, is based on misconceptions about the nature and value of testing and about how children develop a true love of learning."

Test-driven education fails on many grounds. One-size-fits-all standardised exams assume that every child learns in the same way at the same time. But, young people have all kinds of minds. Some excel at academic work. Some have vocational or artistic talents the tests do not measure.

The companies that set and mark the tests cannot guarantee accuracy. Major errors have been reported all around country. In 1998, nearly 700 of the state's 8,500 schools got inaccurate test results. The test items themselves can sometimes be false.

In May this year, protests were held in a dozen states across the country to launch a month of protests against high-stakes testing. In New York, a third of the eighth graders in a Scarsdale public school class boycotted their science test. School officials told parents that they were required to administer the tests, but they did not personally support them.

Bill Wetzel, founder of *Power to the Youth*, plans to create a network for people against standardised testing, to be called *Students Against Testing (SAT)*. (see www.youthpower.net). Alfie Kohn, on his personal website (www.alfiekohn.org) writes, "*a plague has been sweeping through American schools wiping out the most innovative instruction and beating down some of the best teachers and administrators. Ironically, that plague has been unleashed in the name of improving schools. Invoking such terms as 'tougher standards,' 'accountability,' and 'raising the bar,' people with little understanding of how children learn have imposed a heavy-handed, top-down, test-driven version of school reform that is lowering the quality of education in this country.*

"It has taken some educators and parents a while to realise that the rhetoric of 'standards' is turning schools into giant test-prep centres, effectively closing off intellectual inquiry and undermining enthusiasm for learning (and teaching). It is taking even longer to realise that this is not a fact of life, like the weather - that is, a reality to be coped with - but rather a political movement that must be opposed."

Abstracted from an article by Albert Lamb in *The Education Revolution*, 32, Spring/Summer, 2001.