

Einsteinonline is an online learning service aimed at children aged 4 to 11. It provides daily tests and exercises in six curriculum areas: times-tables, mental arithmetic, spelling, literacy, numeracy and science. The answers provided by the children are automatically marked and the results are provided the next day. Exercises in spellings and times-tables are re-tested to reinforce learning, and new content is transmitted to the child each day. *Einsteinonline* has the facility to provide detailed reports on each child if required, and the flexibility to adjust the level settings in each subject, thereby allowing the parent and child to tailor the service to meet a child's particular needs. There is also a personal e-mail service for the child to use, which only operates within the confines of the site.

Home-educating Mr and Mrs J. discovered *Einsteinonline* via an advert in a daily newspaper, and decided to buy the service as a supplement to their own input into their daughter's education, and as a means of giving her a good grounding in the core subjects. The family has been using the service since November 2001. This case study follows an in-depth discussion with the family and provides an example of how the service is used in practice, together with the benefits seen by the parents and the child.

Mr and Mrs J live in County Durham. The father is in full-time employment, the mother is a housewife. They have two children, who, for the purpose of this case study, shall be named Linda and Carol. The eldest, Linda, is 6 years old and is using our service at Year 1 level. Their younger daughter, Carol, although registered with the service at reception level, is not yet old enough to use it. The family is subscribers to *Education Otherwise* and browse home education web-sites and web-rings for information on new services, publications, and events several times a week. They are also in contact with other home educators who provide them with additional advice and information when required.

They recognise the fact that following a structured learning programme is not the preferred route for many home educators but it works for them. "Are you guided by Linda, or do you guide her?" we asked, "It depends," Mrs J replied, "I am encouraging her to be an independent learner. I attempt to tailor Linda's education to suit her".

Linda uses the service almost every day, either first thing in the morning (07.30), or early evening (after 6 p.m.). Each session takes approximately 20 - 30 minutes. In general, she is left to do the activities on her own. "I often watch from a distance to see how she is doing," said Mrs J.

Linda finds that learning with *Einsteinonline* is fun. She likes the Einstein character and the animations, and is now making use of the personalised e-mail service. The parents like the reporting facility as they are interested in seeing how Linda is progressing, and have already taken advantage of the 'Personalised Curriculum' by adjusting the level settings on times-tables and spellings. When they first started using *Einsteinonline*, Linda found the level settings on these two subjects too easy, as she had already covered them thoroughly with her mother. Mrs J adjusted the level settings, raising her daughter to year 2 in spellings and times-tables. This process can also work in reverse. If a child is finding a particular level too difficult, the setting can be lowered to a more suitable level that increases

confidence and motivates the child to succeed, rather than demoralising that child and restricting progress. The *Einsteinonline* service is refreshed daily, and the activities increase in difficulty as the year continues.

When asked what she thought of the service, Mrs J replied, "I had been looking for an affordable programme, which covered the core subjects. I am pleased that I stumbled on Einstein". She went on to say, "Some home educators feel that close adherence to the National Curriculum kills creativity, and the desire to learn. I do agree with them on some issues. However, I personally feel that some subjects must be learnt systematically. This programme ensures that I have taught her the core subjects properly, and that I have not missed vital areas. I have not entered home education 'blindly', but have researched the best ways of teaching her".

Linda has achieved good results since starting with *Einsteinonline*. According to Mrs J, Linda has "improved greatly" in mental arithmetic, and enjoys literacy (especially the drag and drop activities). Although her daughter likes science, Mrs J prefers 'hands on' science as it is more fun to do practical experiments. Linda's computer skills have also improved while using the service.

This case study has demonstrated that *Einsteinonline* can be a very effective resource for the full-time home educator. It can provide an excellent grounding in the core subjects, and can be used either as a stand-alone product or as a supplement to the home educator's own programme. It has been demonstrated that *Einsteinonline* can instil confidence in a parent who is relatively new to home educating by ensuring that core subjects are covered.

When asked what she thought of the service overall, Mrs J said, "*Einstein* is an affordable programme for home educators who are following the semi-structured approach to education, and perhaps people who have just started out in home education and want the reassurance that they are covering core subjects".

Einsteinonline costs £9-99 per month. There is a fourteen day trial period allowing a family to test the service. It was demonstrated at HESFES, the annual Home-educators festival at Charmouth in May. It is not limited to full-time home-based educators, of course, and since everyone is a part-time home-based educators out of school hours, it is of interest to all families.

Books received

Roland Meighan

Worldwide Guide to Homeschooling by Brian Ray,

Broadman and Holman, 2002, price \$9-99

“Investigates the practical and philosophical issues surrounding home education, particularly in America”

One to One: a practical guide to learning at home age 0-11

by Martin Williams, Nezert Books, 2002, price £9-95

“It provides practical suggestions on what to do after school, at weekends, and in the holidays, in addition to outlining a comprehensive programme of education that can take the place of school.”

Summer of Hope by Ian Cotton,

Simon and Schuster, 2002, price (hardback) £16-99

“Camp Mohawk is a Scout camp unique in the world. Each summer, autistic children are dropped off by their parents for a holiday at a camp in Berkshire where they are welcomed and looked after by young scouts from London’s East End. *Summer of Hope* is the story of the remarkable interaction that develops between these autistic children and their young Scout carers.” (An account featured in an earlier edition of *News and Review*)

Educational Alternatives for Everyone by Don Glines,

International Association for Learning Alternatives, 2002, (see website www.alt-ed.com)

“The philosophical vision of options dictates that every programme is ‘regular programme’. Every programme is also one of multiple diverse ‘alternatives’. There can no longer be a ‘regular programme’ designed for the many, and an ‘alternative programme’ for the few. The term alternatives should not be used in the singular but always in the plural – with an ‘s’.

This book is an amazing collection of material indicating just how far thinking in UK official circles is stuck in still trying to make the discredited ideas of yesterday work.

Book Review

Educating Your Child at Home

by Jane Lowe and Alan Thomas,

2002, London; Continuum, £14-99

ISBN 0-8264-5227-2

People starting out on home-based education now have several books available including *Getting Started in Home Education*, *Free-range Education*, *One-to-One*, and *Doing It Their Way* as well as various booklets from *Education Otherwise*. This book by Jane Lowe and Alan Thomas is a welcome addition to the club, but means that there is now a danger of ‘choice paralysis’ – which one do you go for? It now requires quite a bit of reading and research to decide. This is a far cry from the late 1970s and 1980s when *Education Otherwise* and other groups provided printed sheets of advice, booklets and eventually packs.

As you would expect from the credentials and experience of these two writers, the book contains sound advice and useful insights. My only carp is that the reading list at the end misses out several books on home-based education now available in UK, thus limiting the awareness of those who use this book. I am told that the US Amazon website lists 200 books about home-based education, but whilst the UK list is still modest, there is a case for trying to include most of them.

Education Now Schools are damaging our children: Feature the problem of compulsory mis-education

Supplement. Damage limitation – ‘learn your lines or stay a victim?’

“Schools have transformed learning from one of the most rewarding of all human activities into a painful, boring, dull, fragmenting, mind-shrinking, soul-shrivelling experience.”
E. T. Hall

“One answer to the question ‘What is wrong with schools?’ is **291**. This was the number of discrete criticisms Nigel Wright indexed in his research on radical ideas in education – and that was before the re-invention of the National Curriculum, the obscenity of School League Tables and all the other apparatus of the return to regressive schooling, from 1988 onwards.”
Roland Meighan

“For all 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.”
Philip Jackson

“No teacher ever said: ‘Don’t value uncertainty and tentativeness, don’t question questions, above all don’t think!’ The message is communicated quietly, insidiously, relentlessly and efficiently through the structure of the classroom: through the role of the teacher, the role of the student, ... the ‘doings’ that are praised or censured.”
Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner

“Much of our expenditure on teachers and plant is wasted by attempting to teach people what they do not want to learn in a situation that they would rather not be involved in.”
Colin Ward

“Schools have not necessarily much to do with education ... they are mainly institutions of control where certain basic habits must be instilled in the young. Education is quite different and has little place in school.”
Winston Churchill

“It’s not that I feel that school is a good idea gone wrong, but a wrong idea from the word go. It’s a nutty notion that we can have a place where nothing but learning happens, cut off from the rest of life.”
John Holt

“It is not possible to spend any prolonged period visiting public school classrooms without being appalled by the mutilation visible everywhere - mutilation of spontaneity, of joy in learning, or pleasure in creating, or sense of self ... Because adults take the schools so much for granted, they fail to appreciate what grim, joyless places most American schools are (they are much the same in most countries), how oppressive and petty are the rules by which they are governed, how intellectually sterile and aesthetically barren the atmosphere, what an appalling lack of civility obtains on the part of teachers and principals, what contempt they unconsciously display for students as students.”
Charles Siberman

“Trying to get more learning out of the current system is like trying to get the Pony Express to compete with the telegraph by breeding faster ponies.”
Edward Fiske

“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.”
W. B. Yeats

“Is a damage limitation policy really necessary? And does every parent using schools need one? John Stuart Mill in *On Liberty* (1859, p177) observed that:
‘A general State Education is a mere contrivance for moulding people to be exactly like one another, and as the mould in which it casts them is that which pleases the dominant power in the government, whether this be a monarchy, an aristocracy, or a majority of the existing generation ... it establishes a despotism over the mind, leading by a natural tendency to one over the body.’
This seems to me to be (a) just as true now as in 1859 and just as anti-democratic, and (b) just the opposite of an ‘organic, toxin-free learning’ outcome.” *Roland Meighan*

“A majority want the schools to be even more rigid, threatening, and punitive than they are, and they will probably become so.”
John Holt

“In the 20th century, provision has come before clients. You designed the courses and then tried to find some students to fill them. It is the other way round in the future: find the clients, find out what they want and need and then design (or redesign) your provision.”
Sir Christopher Ball

“We are faced with the paradoxical fact that education has become one of the chief obstacles to intelligence and freedom of thought.”
Bertrand Russell

“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.”
John Holt

“The problems of mass, coercive schooling, are that, (a) it is mass not personalised, (b) it is coercive not invitational, and (c) it is schooling not education.”
Roland Meighan

“From my earliest memories of school (going back some 60 years) right up to the present, I am struck by how recurrent are the standard complaints and how little things change. Students are still locked into classrooms, still chained to desks, still herded through lessons that are far from reality and cruelly indifferent to individual differences in brains, background, talent and feelings.” *Gene Lehman*

“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

"My schooling not only failed to teach me what it professed to be teaching, but prevented me from being educated to an extent which infuriates me when I think of all I might have learned at home by myself." *George Bernard Shaw*

"Some true educational experiences are bound to occur in schools. They occur, however, despite and not because of school." *Everett Reimer*

As the New York prize-winning teacher, John Gatto put it, he was employed to teach bad habits. These ranged from bad intellectual habits, bad social habits, bad emotional habits, to bad moral and political habits. Neither the 'successful' pupils nor the 'unsuccessful' pupils escaped. For starters, he identified seven of these bad habits. John Taylor Gatto recognised that what he was really paid to teach was an unwritten curriculum made up of seven ideas. The first was **confusion**. He was required to teach disconnected facts not meaning, infinite fragmentation not cohesion. The second basic idea was **class position**. Children were to be taught to know their place by being forced into the rigged competition of schooling. A third lesson was that of **indifference**. He saw he was paid to teach children not to care too much about anything. The lesson of bells is that no work is worth finishing: students never have a complete experience for it is all on the instalment plan. The fourth lesson was that of **emotional dependency** for, by marks and grades, ticks and stars, smiles and frowns, he was required to teach children to surrender their wills to authority. The next idea to be passed on was that of **intellectual dependency**. They must learn that good people wait for an expert to tell them what to do and believe. The sixth idea is that of **provisional self-esteem**. Self-respect is determined by what others say about you in reports and grades; you are *told* what you are worth and self-evaluation is ignored. The final, seventh lesson is that **you cannot hide**. You are watched constantly and privacy is frowned upon.

"In nine schools out of ten, on nine days out of ten, in nine lessons out of ten, the teacher is engaged in laying thin films of information on the surface of the child's mind and then after a brief interval he is skimming these off in order to satisfy himself that they have been duly laid."

Edmond Holmes. (Chief Inspector of schools, 1910, who spent 30 years trying to make the first UK National Curriculum work.)

"School is the Army for kids. Adults make them go there, and when they get there, adults tell them what to do, bribe and threaten them into doing it, and punish them when they don't."

John Holt

"Students do not participate in choosing the goals, the curriculum, or the manner of working. These things are chosen for the students. Students have no part in the choice of teaching personnel, nor any voice in educational policy. Likewise the teachers often have no choice in choosing their administrative officers ... All this is in striking contrast to all the teaching about the virtues of democracy, the importance of the 'free world,' and the like. The political practices of the school stand in the most striking contrast to what is taught. While being taught that freedom and responsibility are the glorious features of our democracy, students are experiencing

powerlessness, and as having almost no opportunity to exercise choice or carry responsibility." *Carl Rogers*

"I was an A-level junkie" writes Giles Foden in the *Guardian* 22/8/95 (he sat and got six) "All those grades. Could A stand for alienation, B for boredom and C for control?" he asks.

"They work to pass, not to know: and outraged science takes her revenge. They do pass and they don't know."

Thomas Huxley

"Nobody grew taller by being measured." *Philip Gammage*

"What we want to see is the child in pursuit of knowledge, and not knowledge in pursuit of the child."

George Bernard Shaw

"It is the great triumph of compulsory government monopoly mass school-ing that among even the best of my fellow teachers, and among even the best of my students' parents, only a small number can imagine a different way to do things."

John Taylor Gatto

"When I was teaching in school, a man came to a parents' meeting and complained about the extraordinary amount of testing we were doing. His words went right to the heart of the matter: 'You're like a gardener who constantly pulls his plants up by the roots to see if they're growing'." *John Holt*

"We can no more ordain learning by order, coercion and commandment than we can produce love by rape or threat."

Peter Jones

"American kids like watching violence on TV and in the movies because violence is being done to them, both at school and at home. It builds up a tremendous amount of anger ... The problem is not violence on TV. That's a symptom ... The real problem is the violence of anti-life, unaffectionate, and punitive homes, and disempowering, deadening compulsory schooling, all presented with an uncomprehending smile."

Jerry Mintz

"The prevention of free inquiry is unavoidable so long as the purpose of education is to produce belief rather than thought, to compel the young to hold positive opinions on doubtful matters rather than let them see the doubtfulness and be encouraged to independence of mind. Education ought to foster the wish for the truth, not the conviction that some particular creed is the truth."

Bertrand Russell

"Thousands of caring, humane people work in schools, as teachers, and aides and administrators, but the abstract logic of the institution overwhelms their individual contributions. Although teachers do care and do work very, very hard, the institution is psychopathic; it has no conscience. It rings a bell and the young man in the middle of writing a poem must close his notebook and move to a different cell ..."

John Taylor Gatto

"There is nothing on earth intended for innocent people so horrible as a school. To begin with, it is a prison. But in some respects more cruel than a prison. In a prison, for instance, you are not forced to read books written by the prison warders and the governor."

George Bernard Shaw

"There must be in the world many parents who, like the present author, have young children whom they are anxious to

educate as well as possible, but reluctant to expose to the evils of existing educational institutions.” *Bertrand Russell*

“The schools this country needs today must be institutions which abandon any and all attempts to limit the free pursuit of knowledge that every child, and every adult, engages in naturally, without any outside goading.” *Daniel Greenberg*

“The spontaneous wish to learn, which every normal child possesses, as shown in its efforts to walk and talk, should be the driving force in education.” *Bertrand Russell*

“Using school as a sorting mechanism, we appear to be on the way to creating a caste system, complete with untouchables who wander through subway trains begging and who sleep upon the streets.” *John Taylor Gatto*

“To learn to know oneself, and to find a life worth living and work worth doing, is problem and challenge enough, without having to waste time on the fake and unworthy challenges of school - pleasing the teacher, staying out of trouble, fitting in with the gang, being popular, doing what everyone else does.”
John Holt

“Most criticism of the old education, and the old concepts it conserves and transmits, from Paul Goodman to John Gardner, makes the point that the students who endure it come out as passive, acquiescent, dogmatic, intolerant, authoritarian, inflexible, conservative personalities who desperately need to resist change in an effort to keep their illusion of certainty intact.”

Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner

“The new education has as its purpose the development of a new kind of person, one who - as a result of internalising a different set of concepts - is an active, inquiring, flexible, creative, innovative, tolerant, liberal personality, who can face uncertainty and ambiguity without disorientation, who can formulate viable new meanings to meet changes in the environment which threaten individual and mutual survival. The new education, in sum, is new because it consists of having students use the concepts most appropriate to the world in which we all must live. All of these concepts constitute the dynamics of the question-questioning, meaning-making process that can be called 'learning how to learn'.”

Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner

“If personal quality is to be preserved, definite teaching must be reduced to a minimum, and criticism must never be carried to such lengths as to produce timidity in self-expression. But these maxims are not likely to lead to work that will be pleasing to an inspector.” *Bertrand Russell*

“My grandmother wanted me to have an education so she kept me out of school.”
Margaret Mead

“The only real object of education is to leave a man in the condition of continually asking questions.” *Tolstoy*

“People must be educated once more to know their place.”
UK Department of Education official responsible for National Curriculum planning.

“A school, like a fascist state, is about the business of compelling people to conform to a pattern of behaviour and a way of thinking decided by the few who hold power over them.”
Chris Shute

“Fundamentally, there is no right education except growing up into a worthwhile world. Indeed, our excessive concern with problems of education at present simply means that the grown-ups do not have such a world.”

Paul Goodman

“Either what is offered for learning must be experienced by the adolescents as illuminating, as informing their own life purposes, or it will be, at best, tolerated, and at worst, rejected.”
James Hemming

“School is necessary to produce the habits and expectations of the managed consumer society.” *Ivan Illich*

“When we put together in one scheme such elements as a prescribed curriculum, similar assignments for all students, lecturing as almost the only mode of instruction, standard texts by which all students are externally evaluated, and instructor-chosen grades as the measure of learning, then we can almost guarantee that meaningful learning will be at an absolute minimum.”
Carl Rogers

“Assessment, more than religion, has become the opiate of the people.”
Patricia Broadfoot

“The disappearance of a sense of responsibility is the most far-reaching consequence of submission to authority.”
Stanley Milgram

“School has become the replacement for church in our secular society, and like church it requires that its teachings must be taken on faith.”
John Taylor Gatto

“I have never allowed schooling to interfere with my education.”
Mark Twain

“Education with inert ideas is not only useless; it is above all things harmful.”
Alfred North Whitehead

“It follows logically from the banking notion of consciousness that the educator's role is to regulate the way the world 'enters into' the students. His task is to organise a process which already happens spontaneously, to 'fill' the students by making deposits of information which he considers constitute true knowledge. And since men 'receive' the world as passive entities, education should make them more passive still, and adapt them to the world. The educated man is the adapted man, because he is more 'fit' for the world. Translated into practice, this concept is well suited to the purpose of the oppressors, whose tranquillity rests on how well men fit the world the oppressors have created, and how little they question it.”
Paulo Friere

“The hard task of education is to liberate and strengthen a youth's initiative and at the same time to see to it that he knows what is necessary to cope with the ongoing activities and culture of society, so that his initiative can be relevant. It is absurd to think that this task can be accomplished by so much sitting in a box facing front, manipulating symbols at the direction of distant administrators. This is rather a way to regiment and brainwash.”
Paul Goodman

“It is an iron law of education that rigid systems produce rigid people, and flexible systems produce flexible people.”
Roland Meighan

"It is absurd and anti-life to move from cell to cell at the sound of a gong for every day of your natural youth in an institution that allows you no privacy and even follows you into the sanctuary of your home demanding that you do its 'homework'."

John Taylor Gatto

"People who can't think are ripe for dictatorships."

Carl Rogers

"What good fortune for those in power that people do not think."

Adolf Hitler

"If a curriculum is to be effective ... it must contain different ways of activating children, different ways of presenting sequences, different opportunities ... A curriculum, in short, must contain many tracks leading to the same general goal."

Jerome Bruner

"I deeply believe that traditional teaching is an almost completely futile, wasteful, overrated function in today's changing world. It is successful mostly in giving children who can't grasp the material, a sense of failure."

Carl Rogers

"The wish to preserve the past rather than the hope of creating the future dominates the minds of those who control the teaching of the young."

Bertrand Russell

"True education does not quiet things down, it stirs them up. It awakens consciousness. It destroys myth. It empowers people."

John Holt

"Education ... has produced a vast population able to read but unable to distinguish what is worth reading."

George Macaulay Trevelyan

"Happiness in childhood is absolutely necessary to the production of the best type of human being."

Bertrand Russell

"That children do not come to school by choice is another terrible indictment of our whole educational system."

John Kirkbride

"There is no point ... in learning the 'answers' for very soon there will be different answers."

Paul Goodman

"All my own work as a teacher and learner has led me to believe ... that teaching is a very strong medicine, which like all strong medicines can quickly and easily turn into a poison. At the right time (i.e. when the student has asked for it) and in very small doses, it can indeed help learning. But at the wrong times, or in too large doses, it will slow down learning or prevent it altogether."

John Holt

"A boy will toil uphill with a toboggan for the sake of a few brief moments of bliss during the descent; no one has to urge him to be industrious, and however he may puff and pant he is still happy."

Bertrand Russell

"I remember spending the greater part of my childhood wondering about adults. Were they ever children? From their behaviour toward children it seemed to me quite clearly that they could never have possibly been children."

Ashley Montague

"I owe more to my ability to fantasise than to any knowledge I've ever acquired."

Albert Einstein

"Whilst my photocopying was being completed I saw a notice on the wall of the Kall Kwik Print shop. It said: '*Customised: we listen, we understand, we find the solution that's right for you*'. I thought this would make a splendid slogan for the next learning system to replace the present learning system of compulsory, coercive schooling followed by the dreary steeplechase of university courses. Its slogan appears to be: '*Standardised: you listen, we only understand coercion and dominance, you accept the solution we decide*'. The slogan in the shop, on the other hand, assumes that people deserve a personalised service, not a standardised one."

Roland Meighan

Natural Parent, July/Aug 2001

"Children who are lectured to, learn how to lecture; if they are admonished, they learn how to admonish; if scolded, they learn how to scold; if ridiculed, they learn how to ridicule; if humiliated, they learn how to humiliate; if their psyche is killed, they will learn how to kill - the only question is who will be killed: oneself, others or both."

Alice Miller

"What the world now needs is not competition but organisation and co-operation; all belief in the utility of competition has become an anachronism. ... the emotions connected with it are the emotions of hostility and ruthlessness. The conception of society as an organic whole is very difficult for those whose minds have been steeped in competitive ideas. Ethically, therefore, no less than economically, it is undesirable to teach the young to be competitive."

Bertrand Russell

"They know enough who know how to learn."

Henry Adams

"It is very difficult for people to believe the simple fact that every persecutor was once a victim. Yet it should be very obvious that someone who was allowed to feel free and strong from childhood does not have the need to humiliate another person."

Alice Miller

"What we can learn best from good teachers is how to teach ourselves better."

John Holt

"When I look back at all the crap I learned in high school, it's a wonder I can think at all."

Paul Simon

"Schools learned long ago that the way to keep children from thinking is to keep them busy."

Everett Reimer

"It is in fact nothing short of a miracle that the modern methods of instruction have not entirely strangled the holy curiosity of inquiry; for this delicate little plant, aside from stimulation, stands mainly in need of freedom; without this it goes to wrack and ruin without fail."

Albert Einstein

"... the school institution 'schools' very well, though it does not 'educate'; that's inherent in the design of the thing. It's not the fault of bad teachers or too little money spent. It's just impossible for education and schooling ever to be the same thing."

John Taylor Gatto

"We need to scrap schools and replace them with something more educational. Schools are (a) obsolete in what is now an information rich society, (b) counter-productive in producing the wrong kind of person with the wrong habits, (c) an abuse of three and sometimes four basic human rights."

"One head teacher told John's parents to make his home life less interesting so that he would not be so bored at school."
in Times Educational Supplement, 20/9/96, Features, p.3

Final thoughts:

"Deep in my bones I remain convinced that ultimately it will be the deschoolers who are proved right, and that far in the future our descendants will view the whole concept of the school with mirth and disbelief." *Gerald Haigh*

"Meanwhile, education - compulsory schooling, compulsory learning - is a tyranny and a crime against the human mind and spirit. Let all those escape it who can, any way they can." *John Holt*

CUTS

"We are just miserable rule-followers ...". This is the verdict of a teacher in South Africa, reported by Clive Harber in *State of Transition*, London: Symposium Books, 2001. But it could be anywhere in the world, given Edward de Bono's verdict that **all the schooling systems he has encountered in the world are a disgrace**. I have to agree, for all the ones I have encountered are also a disgrace, although some are larger disasters and some are smaller ones. Only a few are trying to be more democratic and are generally less constipated in their approach, having a just a few echoes of natural learning. Not surprisingly, the '*miserable rule-followers*' are currently leaving teaching in droves and in disgust, and many who stay explain that they would leave if they could.

Roland Meighan, *Ed. Now News & Review*, 35, 2002

When you take the free will out of education, that turns it into schooling
John Taylor Gatto

I believe that the computer presence will enable us to so modify the learning environment outside the classroom that much, if not all, the knowledge schools presently try to teach with such pain and expense and such limited success will be learned, as the child learns to walk, painlessly, successfully, and without organised instruction. This obviously implies that schools, as we know them today, will have no place in the future. But it is an open question whether they will adapt by transforming themselves into some-thing new or whither away and be replaced. Seymour Papert

It used to worry me that, as a teacher, I was engaged in what was essentially microscopic fascism.
Chris Shute

Whatever crushes individuality is despotism, by whatever name it be called. John Stuart Mill
School is a twelve-year jail sentence where bad habits are the only curriculum truly learned. I teach school and win awards doing it. I should know. John Taylor Gatto

In examinations the foolish ask questions that the wise cannot answer. Oscar Wilde

Shakespeare did not write with a view to boring school-children; he wrote to with a view to delighting his audiences. If he does not give you delight, you had better ignore him.
Bertrand Russell

The authority of those who teach is very often a hindrance to those who wish to learn. Cicero

Break their wills betimes; begin this great work before they can run alone, before they can speak plain, or perhaps speak at all. Let him have nothing he cries for, absolutely nothing, great or small. Make him do as he is bid, if you whip him ten times running to effect it. Break his will now and his soul will live, and he will bless you to all eternity.

John Wesley

The education of today is nothing more than drill ... children must become accustomed to obey, to believe, to think according to the social dogmas which govern us. Francisco Ferrer

Nothing in education is so astonishing as the amount of ignorance it accumulates in the form of inert facts.

Henry Adams

The skilled teacher, when a pupil is entrusted to his care, will first of all seek to discover his ability and natural disposition and will next observe how the mind of his pupil is to be handled ... for in this respect there is an unbelievable variety, and types of mind are no less numerous than types of body.
Quintillian on Roman Education

All sorts of intellectual systems - Christianity, Socialism, Patriotism etc., - are ready, like orphan asylums, to give safety in return for servitude. A free mental life cannot be as warm and comfortable and sociable as a life enveloped in a creed.
Bertrand Russell

Among all the leading figures of the Third Reich, I have not been able to find a single one who did not have a strict and rigid upbringing. Shouldn't that give us a great deal of food for thought?
Alice Miller

... there can be no agreement between those who regard education as a means of instilling certain definite beliefs, and those who think that it should produce the power of independent judgement.
Bertrand Russell

Congratulations!

**To Annabel Toogood, B.A.Hons
Degree in Illustration, University of Derby**

After many years commitment to first Dame Catherine's School, Ticknall and then Flexi College, Burton on Trent, Annabel became a student herself at the University of Derby, successfully qualifying for her B.A.Hons degree this summer. Those of us who have admired Annabel's enthusiasm and high level of application to whatever she undertakes, are delighted with her well-deserved success. She is already employed helping design book covers for Educational Heretics Press - the new book on Bertrand Russell and the revised edition of the book on John Holt, as well as other commissioned work.

Sunday 22nd September 2002

Learning Exchange and A.G.M.

'Citischool: school without walls'

The next **Learning Exchange** and AGM will take place on **Sunday 22nd September** at **Burleigh Community College, Loughborough**. The event will begin at **11.30 with the AGM**. This will be followed by the **Learning Exchange at 12.00**. A lunch break will be taken prior to the afternoon discussion.

We are delighted to have as our speaker Tom Bulman, one of our members, who is *Citischool* Project Director. *Citischool*, inspired by New York *City-As-School*, provides full-time education for disaffected 15-16 year-olds through work experience and core Employability, Health and Citizenship sessions. It has been developed by Countec, Milton Keynes Education Business Partnership

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) Members and friends are asked to bring their own lunches, although drinks will be provided.

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

Health Authority and the Local Authority has led to the creation of the post of Arts Into Health Facilitator funded from the HAZ. So far there has been over half a million pounds worth of work in the past two years and the current projection for this year will see over £200,000 of Arts Into Health projects initiated with local people in Health Action Zones, all very different in nature, but designed to specifically meet the needs identified in the local area by local people.

Walsall Arts into Health uses the Arts as a tool to raise and explore health issues, enabling people to voice their own opinions and experiences in a creative way.

Arts into Health Projects...

- are planned in partnership with local people and local Service providers.
- are designed to meet and consult with people about specific health needs
- actively engage people through arts activities; building confidence and having fun
- celebrate local people and local skills
- communicate information in a lively, informal and participative way
- make creative connections to tackle difficult health issues.

One example is in the east area of the Borough, where the East Health Action Zone have recognised that not only are men very bad at looking after themselves, but they also find it very difficult to talk about their own health or to take positive steps to improve it.

The *Private Parts* project combining men's health checks and arts workshops has seen arts workers working with community nurses

Health for Art's Sake

Nestling between motorway underpasses and in the shadow of gas works' storage tanks and factory chimneys; Walsall is a place that has always had a problem with its image. Whichever league table Walsall happens to find itself in with regard to health indicators it always near the bottom, or indeed the top, depending on how you look at it. High teenage pregnancy rates, catastrophic levels of smoking related cancer's, higher than average levels of coronary heart disease, very low household income. The smelting shop of the industrial revolution, its jobs have ebbed away over the last 25 years and it has seen its levels of industrial related disease replaced by illnesses associated with poverty.

No one would call Walsall a healthy place and yet, despite its problems, it is also a place full of gritty determined people, who do things and get things done, who innovate and create. It has more self-help groups and voluntary associations than almost any other comparable conurbation - Walsall Borough is made up of six towns with a total of 270,000 inhabitants - people get together to campaign, to help each other, to have fun, to talk, or just socialise. Through its district and local committees local people plan local services, and through its four area based Health Action Zone (HAZ) steering groups local people are now involved in spending budgets to meet the health needs of the people living in their own communities.

The granting of Health Action Zone status to Walsall in 1999 has meant a whole sea change in the way that people address health issues. This central government initiative has been specifically designed to impact on the way services are delivered, with the long term aim of tackling inequalities in health and changing the way people perceive their own health and access services.

The Community Arts Team in Walsall have been involved in the project right from the start. An innovative partnership between the

and health visitors, in pubs and working men's clubs across the whole east area of the Borough. The culmination of the project saw local men themselves working with the Theatre company *Round Midnight* to put together their own comedy performances around health issues for productions in their own venues.

What makes the work special in Walsall is that all the projects are based on needs in local areas as identified by local people. Funding is agreed in local accountable forums called HAZ steering groups and each project has a steering group made up of local agencies and local people. This for example has seen projects focusing on a wide variety of needs tailored to each individual area or interest group. Arts into Health projects have included work, in one neighbourhood, with women who work as prostitutes and local residents around the issues of safety. Another was a project around women's health specifically aimed at encouraging local Asian women to take up breast screening opportunities. In the west area of the borough arts workers have been working in over eight different neighbourhoods to consult with young people on their priorities for health with a view to setting up a Young HAZ Steering Group.

Many of the projects have already attracted interest nationally, and Walsall Health Action Zone and Walsall Health Authority are enthusiastically backing the Arts as an important tool to improve Walsall people's health.

Arts into Health Projects have had a tremendous knock-on effect in how health practitioners see their role. Practice and Community nurses in Walsall now regularly run sessions in pubs, health professionals are now looking at more creative ways of doing health needs assessments, health service providers regularly use the Arts to consult with young people using the Arts to effect long term change in their services. Participation brings its own rewards for local people too. People are learning new things in new ways and involvement

brings confidence. A new confidence that things can change and **that it is possible to take control of our own lives.**

All this in a Borough where the Education Service has been taken from the Local Authority and given to the private sector to run. A Borough full of 'failing schools' and teacher vacancies, where people have lost faith in the traditional Education system and the traditional ways of doing things. Walsall's experience is a very graphic illustration of how the last place you should look for learning is within the Education system.

And do the Health providers of Walsall feel threatened by all this participation? Of course they do, but they have had the courage to see that a nation's health is far too important to leave in the hands of the professionals. We should take our hats off to them.

Perhaps the last word, however, should be left to one of the local health providers, Michael Evans, the outgoing Chief Executive of Walsall Health Authority who has already identified the impact that the Arts can have.

"Clearly what we need for any health programme to succeed with members of the public is to get it across and deliver it in such a way that people take notice. And that, it appears, is exactly what the Arts can facilitate".

Mark Webster

Mark Webster worked as Arts Into Health Co-ordinator for Walsall Community Arts Team until April 2002. For more information about the work of the team visit the Team web site at www.communityartswalsall.org or write to Mark at markweb@appleonline.net.

The revised edition of *Finding Voices Making Choices* will be published this Autumn by Educational Heretics Press. Edited by Mark Webster, it will explore how Community Arts in its various

The Whistleblowers: John Holt

When my first partner came home from her school clutching a copy of *How Children Fail*, in 1965, as I recall, I was not to know where this incident would lead. Shirley was an Infants teacher at one of the few Primary schools in the Midlands ever to try to take the Plowden Report ideas at all seriously, much to the incredulity of the other schools in the area. Wherever the 'Plowden revolution' was later alleged to have taken place, I can report with some confidence that it was not in the Midlands since I and my colleagues were in and out of the region's primary schools with our students on a regular basis. Indeed, the research such as the ORACLE project from the University of Leicester, indicates that **it hardly took place anywhere**, despite the assertions of mis-informed tabloid journalists based on a few anecdotes - some rare but true, others rare and only partly true, and others invented.

The head teacher had asked all the teachers on the staff to read *How Children Fail* in preparation for a staff meeting to reflect on the work of the school in the light of John Holt's ideas. So Shirley read it and then I read it and then we faced up to it: what Holt had to say squared uncomfortably with our experience.

The central message was stark: **most children fail in school and indeed, the model on which we set up school, could hardly do anything else.** Most fail in the school and society defined tasks of first learning the imposed curriculum and then passing the tests derived from it. That was a grim verdict in itself, although not a new one. John Holt went further and pointed to a deeper sense of failure:

"... they fail to develop more than a tiny part of the tremendous capacity for learning, understanding, and creating with which they were born and of which they made full use during the first two or three years of their lives." (How Children Fail, p.9)

John Holt died in 1985. He had written ten books many of them destined to become acknowledged classic works in education. His work was translated into many languages. In John Holt's ten books there are just a few biographical asides, but for the most part he stays with the task of developing ideas about education. He mentions two sisters, Jane Pitcher and Susan Bontecou. We learn that he did not marry but he says that this was not of his choosing - things just did not work out for him that way. He was born in 1923 in New York City and died of cancer in September 1985 in Boston. The British Press did not note his death or his contribution to education because the regressive, domination-tendency in education that John Holt described as on the march in USA, was already in fashion amongst politicians, civil servants and the media in England.

He spent a few years in the navy, where he says he learnt a great deal about co-operation in the confined spaces of submarines. Later he worked in Europe in the world government movement. Later in USA, he took up work as a teacher in private schools. It was, therefore, amongst the wealthy and 'successful', that he began to develop his ideas about how children fail and how schooling destroys both the intelligence and spirit of children.

At the Small Press Fair in London in 1993, a passer-by saw a copy of a John Holt book on the Education Now stall. "I see that John Holt is still at work," he said. I corrected him: "Sadly, he died in 1985." "I know," the passer-by said. He picked up the book for me to see. "But he is still at work!"

When he first began to teach, John Holt was content with schools and teaching:

"I had no quarrel with traditional education. If someone had said to me much of what I have said in this book, my answer would have been, 'Balony!' I agreed without question that students should be made to learn ..."

John Holt found, as many of us have found, that formal teaching did not work very well. Perhaps it was a technical problem. You just needed to perform the method more efficiently. He threw himself into lesson planning, visual aids, the devices for motivating children and careful evaluations. There was some improvement, but not all that much. He decided to study the children and he began to see the classroom from their point of view. It led to his first book **How Children Fail** where schools had:

"... an exaggerated concern with getting right answers and avoiding mistakes; they drive them (i.e. the learners) into defensive strategies of learning and behaviour that choke off their intellectual powers and make real learning all but impossible."

But his discovery that it was schooling itself that held children back was only the beginning of his analytical journey. John Holt never tried to pretend that he had not been part of the problem before trying to become part of the solution:

"I myself, for many or most of the years I was a teacher, did almost all of the bad things I have talked about. Indeed, I think I did most harm when my intentions were the best. Later, when I stopped trying to play God in the classroom and became more modest, I became less harmful ... even useful."

His was a long, complicated journey but, he was to end up declaring:

"I don't believe in the curriculum, I don't believe in grades, I don't believe in teacher-judged learning. I believe in children learning with our assistance and encouragement the things they want to learn, when they want to learn them, how they want to learn them, why they want to learn them. This is what, it seems to me, education must now be about."

In the last phase of his life, he abandoned schools to set up Holt Associates to support the development of the home-schooling movement in USA by founding the *Growing Without Schooling* magazine and support group:

"Meanwhile, education - compulsory schooling, compulsory learning - is a tyranny and a crime against the human mind and spirit. Let all those escape it who can, any way they can." (Instead of Education p. 226)

When I first read these words, I thought John might have gone too far. I grew to think otherwise and to conclude that mass coercive schooling is (a) obsolete, (b) counter-productive, and (c) an abuse of three and sometimes four human rights. 'Best

to scrap schools altogether and do something more intelligent with the money and resources', as John might have said..