Understanding School Exclusion

This is a timely, important and engaging book: timely because it explores the misunderstood subject of school exclusion just before the government made the decision to provide full-time education from September 2002 for all pupils permanently excluded from schools; important because in its exploration of issues connected with exclusion it skillfully analyses our education system; and engaging because it is the many voices of pupils, parents, teachers and support workers which form the heart of the book and provide it with an unusual authenticity.

In structure the book is like a sandwich, indeed a tasty one! The wrapping or bread, Chapters 1,2,7 and 8, are full of information and fascinating analyses of the relationship between education, society and exclusion. The filling, Chapters 3,4,5 and 6, provides the taste, the usually unheard views of those who have been affected by education policies and their relationship to exclusion.

Chapter One, *Researching School Exclusion*, succinctly provides details of background, research aims and methodology. Charlie Cooper explains that the research aimed to build on existing studies by exploring the nature of school exclusion in a major British city from the perspective of eight excluded pupils, aged 11 - 16. It uses a sociological perspective of their 'lived realities'. The research examined qualitative issues with four of the eight pupils which informed the design of a schedule of questions used to explore in greater depth the perceptions not only of the eight pupils and their parents and carers but also teachers and support workers.

Chapter 2, *Education: the legacy of the New Right and New Labour*, begins with a brief and useful history of the ideas which informed early state education and is followed by an insightful and chilling analysis of the Conservatives' education reforms of the eighties and nineties which led, among other unfortunate consequences of their years in power, to the temporary exclusion from school of 100,000 pupils and the permanent exclusion of 13,000. Charlie Cooper concludes the chapter with an analysis of Labour's education policy since gaining power in 1997 explaining how the party has, for the most part, continued and even further developed the Conservatives' education reforms. Most importantly, for the purpose of this book, he explains clearly how Labour's policy of social inclusion in relation to schools is at odds with its adherence to and advocacy of Conservative education policies.

Chapters 3,4,5 and 6 are devoted to the voices of excluded pupils, parents and carers, teachers and support workers respectively. Each chapter is usefully arranged under sub headings relevant to the concerns of each group. For example, for *The Perceptions of Parents/Carers* there are sections on 'Perceptions on their child's permanent exclusion', 'Perceptions on the exclusion process', 'Experiences following exclusion', 'Perceptions on the effectiveness of exclusion', 'Perceptions on schools and teachers', 'Perceptions on neighbourhood' and 'Future aspirations'. Each chapter ends with a section summarising the findings.

I refer to the voices in these chapters because I experienced when reading a sense of listening and responding to the people being interviewed. I was engaged by the feelings, concerns and frustrations expressed, and impressed by the respondents' perceptions and insights into the education system generally and the exclusion process specifically. Charlie Cooper states in the first chapter that it was his aim to conduct this study in the spirit of the 1989 Children Act which requires children to be offered the opportunity to participate in decision making processes which affect their lives, and Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by the British Government, supporting the rights of children to participate in society. His aim has certainly been achieved in this piece of research and supports what I understand to be his implied assertion that there needs to be more educational dialogue to employ the collected insights and wisdom of all parties involved with education rather than the current government monologue.

In Chapter 7, *Findings and Policy Implications*, Charlie Cooper identifies an encouraging number of common themes which emerge from the interviews with implications for social policy and goes on to suggest some refreshingly fundamental policy initiatives as a way forward for our education system.

The excellent final chapter draws on the work of Michel Foucault and his observations on the utility of the education system for maintaining dominant power relationships. Foucault studied what he termed *"projects of docility"*, ventures in creating bodies that could be *"subjected, used, transformed and improved"*. Using Foucault's framework Charlie Cooper argues convincingly, using quotes from the interviews, that **the main purpose of the British education system is the production of docile bodies that will comply and sustain dominant socio-economic and political power relationships and that large numbers of pupil exclusions are one of the results of this**. The sting in the tail of the book left me with much upon which to reflect.

Charlie Cooper's fine book was written at a time when provision for excluded pupils across the country was patchy and incoherent. Since then the government has decided to provide full-time education for excluded pupils in pupil referral centres from September 2002. Innovation needs to be allowed to flourish in the new centres but, given that the conditions the book describes still remain, it is more likely that they will be subject to the rigid structures of teaching and assessment which apply to mainstream schools and will be, at best, marginally more enlightened than their mainstream neighbours. This would create provision which would be consistent and coherent but for the wrong reasons.

Josh Gifford

Understanding School Exclusion: challenging processes of docility
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Summary by Roland Meighan

Research Report

Homeschooling is currently the choice *of "100 times more American families than 20 years ago".* This study, *Factors that influence parents to homeschool in southern California,* is by June Hetzel, Michael Long and Michelle Jackson. It sets out to find out what it is that drives parents out of the schooling system and what it is that attracts them to the home-school alternative. The report appears in *Home School Researcher*, Volume 14, number 4, 2001.

The sampling procedure was not random but an attempt to survey the whole population enrolled in the Community Home Education Programme (CHEP) of Orange County Department of Education. When families came onto campuses for a mid-year conference, they waited in lobbies where the survey documents were available on a table. About 40% of the 871 families took the opportunity to provide feedback. There were 332 written responses, then over 100 subsequent interviews.

The top four 'push' factors that emerged as driving families away from schooling were: **negative peer influence (drugs, gangs bullying etc.), class size too large, poor moral climate, and children not learning enough.**

Other factors were dissatisfaction with the curriculum, and disagreement with the values being taught. These results support the view from surveys and Gallup polls that there is falling public confidence in the schooling on offer.

The 'pull' factors that attracted families to home-based education were: **one-to-one instruction, upholding family values, and consistent moral climate**.

The curriculum factors were more highly rated that the values factors in this population of this Southern California urban community. The top ten curriculum factors were, firstly, one-to-one learning and teaching, and then **curriculum variety and responsiveness**. The latter included: 'I can insure my child is learning what he or she needs to learn', 'choice in the curriculum', 'can teach around the child's interests', 'can fill in learning gaps', 'can use above grade level materials', 'I can give immediate feedback on assignments'.

The researchers found that there appeared to be a growing minority group of homeschoolers with 'special needs'. These ranged from those with disabilities to those with high achieving children.

Lower socio-economic families rated a safe learning environment as most important whereas higher socio-economic families went for 'disagreement with the values taught' and 'the schedule does not fit family needs'.

For half the sample, home-based education is their first choice. One third said they would have chosen a private school if they could find a suitable one and they could afford it. The others liked the ISP (Independent Study Programme) provided for home schoolers by a Charter School.

The researchers conclude that:*"The 332 parents who responded to this survey believe that their children will receive better instruction in morals, values and academics, in a safer environment, if they are homeschooled".*

Centre for Personalised Education

New Lanark Conference

At the third conference funded by the National Lottery Charity Board, members enjoyed the excellent facilities at Robert Owen's Mill and Village, World Heritage Site in New Lanark. This comprises the houses built for the mill workers, the shop run on cooperative lines, a museum and his pioneering school for young children, together with a Youth Hostel and Hotel.

The conference brought together members from home education and alternative education communities from areas as distant as Brighton and the Highlands of Scotland. Discussions covered topics such as the appropriate forms of monitoring and review for a personalised education curriculum, guidelines for establishing learning centres/clubs/groups, and the CPE home-based education research project.

This large-scale research proposal, drawn up by Jan and Mike Fortune-Wood, gained unanimous support. An appeal for funding is now underway. See the enclosed leaflet and also the dedicated website:

http/www.homeeducationresearch.org.

Citischool

- a school without walls where young people are citizens and citizens are teachers

Report of the Education Now Learning Exchange 22 September 2002

Members and friends enjoyed a stimulating presentation by Tom Bulman, Project Director, of this innovative initiative, which provides full-time education for disaffected 15-16 year-olds through work experience and core sessions on employability, health and citizenship.

Citischool, based on *City as School* USA and the earlier *Parkway Project* of Philadelphia, is a facility for young people who learn best when working in the wider community. Instead of moving from class to class within one building, students move from workplace to workplace. Learning takes place at a range of locations across the city and involves a range of adults, all experts on the world of work, life and learning. It recognises that what matters most in learning is motivation, how learners feel about themselves and those around them. The students learn individually and cooperatively with the guidance of a personal advisor. We heard how this works in practice and of the successes in its first year, some of which were revealed in a video of the students evaluating their experience of *Citischool.*

"Citischool is not like an ordinary school. It is about hands on learning and that's good". (Student, March 2002)

*Citischoo*l is a striking example of a virtual school. It has no buildings of its own. It points the way to a more learner-friendly, personalised, flexible and relevant curriculum.

The Learning Exchange also marked the launch of Charlie Cooper's new book *Understanding School Exclusion.* (See review on front page.) The negative findings of his research contrasted strongly with the positive Citischool initiative.

(*Citischool* has been developed by Countec, Milton Keynes Education Business Partnership and the development is funded by the Learning

Skills Council for Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshite. Further information can be found on the website: www.countec.org/citischool.)

School for Individual Development - Poland

If you are familiar with central European state education systems you would know that a school without compulsory attendance, bells or marks and in which students create their own path through their educational development is very different from the norm. *ASSA* – an abbreviation of *Autorska Szkoła Samorozwoju* (the School for Individual Development) means it is run on the pedagogical vision of the school's 'author' who must provide a detailed vision and plan for the project.

The school, based in Wrocław, was founded by Daniel Manelski and Darek Luczak in 1990. Daniel Manelski is a passionate defender of an individual's right to realise their own potential, he is a distinguished visionary on the Polish alternative educational scene. Now in his seventies, his is a colourful life story which includes a spell in prison and a period of several years self-imposed solitude in the Beskid mountains of southern Poland.

As head teacher of a Wroclaw grammar school Manelski had been bending or breaking the accepted rules for running schools in Poland, doing away with the bell between lessons and with the system of marks – a major source of anxiety for all school children. After lessons Manelski and Luczak (then a student at the school) would meet to work out their ideas for the foundation of a radically new school. It was to be based on the experience they had gained from being part of a school which respected the pupils and honoured their individuality and freedom of choice, against the backdrop of a public education system which denied them.

When Manelski was still a teacher he began to see that school is not, in fact, necessary; that it is a system which humiliates, deprives students of their dignity, coerces and incapacitates them. He began to doubt whether the only way was state-run compulsion. Later, when working as a grammar school headmaster he began to identify the main principles of the system and then began doing away with them. The main principle he found was the system of rewards and punishments, in other words; behaviourism. After some time he completely did away with authoritarianism in his school. Students could come and go as they wanted, testing was abandoned. Nobody failed a year, everybody took the school-leaving exams. And suddenly it was as if school had disappeared

The school Manelski and Luczak conceived was due to open in December 1981. The day after having received official approval from the Polish Ministry of Education, however the State of Martial Law was announced in Poland, the backlash to the freedoms that the Solidarity trade union had wrested from the Communist government. Daniel Manelski found himself arrested and then imprisoned for several months. He had to wait almost a decade before the opportunity to open the school arose again. It was officially opened in 1990 and has Ministry of Education accreditation to award the Polish secondary school leaving certificate.

I visited *ASSA* in June 2002, on graduation day (it's a 16-19 secondary school). The school is housed in a low building with wheel-chair access – rare in Poland. Inside, classrooms open off both sides of a corridor which runs through the whole building. On the numerous notice boards lining the walls there are announcements of extra-curricular activities and information about when teachers will be available to examine students wanting to gain credits for subjects. The graduation ceremony was quite different from what I'd seen at other Polish schools. Instead of formal blouses and skirts or suits the students were dressed in a whole variety of styles, including combat clothes and basketball gear (as well as one of two students in the traditional black and white).

The absence of uniformity at this school – literally and metaphorically – impressed itself on me. Students can attempt to be credited for a subject as many times as they wish. The humiliating procedure of being kept back to repeat a year does not exist in *ASSA*. Students can join the school at any time during the school year. The school has a number of physically disabled students

The head teacher, Ula Krzewska-Horbowy, told me that new students often go through the same process after a few months of being at the school. After weeks and months of spending more time at home than at *ASSA* and being relatively passive it begins to dawn on them that nothing is going to happen unless they make it happen themselves. They see responsibility for their future (educational and otherwise) lies in their hands. This fundamental psychological realisation transforms into the motivation that starts to drive them positively towards their own development. During my conversation with Ula she had to leave the room briefly to talk to a student who had just graduated. She explained afterwards that he had been fighting to overcome a drug habit during his final year and hoped he would manage to keep up the fight after leaving the school.

According to Darek Luczak three types of students attend the school: 'failures', 'emigrants' and 'mariners'. The first category are young people who have achieved little or no success in any other schools they've been to, people with very low self-esteem, passive, with learned helplessness. For them *ASSA* is the last chance. Coming to the school is not a positive choice, but rather the end of the road. The next group comprises those students who were unable to feel comfortable in school, to find their place, as it were. They looked for a school that they would fit into but only found an unbending, autocratic system. The final group, by far the smallest, but in a sense the group for which the school was founded according to Manelski's original conception, are those who know precisely what they want from life at that particular stage of their intellectual and personal development. They choose *ASSA* consciously as the place that will best help them to realise their own personal goals.

ASSA is linked closely to the *Towarzystwo Działań dla Samorozwoju* (the Association for Individual Development), where educators, academics and people sympathetic to the philosophy of *ASSA* take part in workshops and publish books and other informational materials about the school. Yet I was surprised to discover that few people come to see how *ASSA* functions and learn about its ways. I had expected it to be like other radical alternatives to state schools like Summerhill or Sudbury Valley, with a steady stream of visitors through its doors, but no. In fact *ASSA* doesn't have a good reputation in Wroclaw. People know it as a school which attracts students with a record of failure or an inability to adapt in the state system.

As I write this I've just completed my first week teaching English in a Polish middle school. I just wanted to describe two incidents that typify what you can see every day in most Polish schools and what *ASSA* works against. A teacher had pinned a list of names on a public notice board giving scores from a placement test that the new first-years had just written. Then there was a student in my class taking the same placement test. I knew her from her last school and also knew that she would be sure to get one of the highest scores without too much trouble. Nevertheless she was visibly stressed and anxiously asked me how many points she would need to get into the top stream, worried that she might not make the grade and end up in the weaker group. In *ASSA*, Daniel Manelski and Darek Luczak aimed to create an environment where students wouldn't have to go through this type of humiliating experience and where competition between students, and the stress that goes with it, has no place.

I have been immensely impressed by what I saw at *ASSA* and what I've read about the school. It's a place which doesn't turn anyone away, a school where an individual won't be humiliated or pushed around by an inflexible, inhumane system. Students can make choices and take control of their own education.

"Without compulsory attendance at lessons, no marks or end-of-term classification, you start to develop a sense of responsibility for

yourself and others; the awareness of the need for individual development and the skills of decision-making, planning and independent learning."

"At ASSA you aren't left to yourself – you choose a teacher or tutor who you trust, who you like and who you can rely on in any situation, not just in school." (*ASSA*'s promotional literature)

David French

Exams – why they are a waste of time

The increasing amount of time that young people have been made to spend in school over the past half century has been matched by the increased importance placed on examination results. This is no coincidence. Schools do not teach useful skills or provide useful knowledge; they are no longer able to justify their own existence except through the agency of a criterion that is itself meaningless. Everyone who has studied the theory of examinations agrees on one point: the only thing measured by exams is the ability to do well in exams.

Some people go on to suggest that perhaps this skill correlates with an ability to do well in other areas of life but this is not provable and it is not logical. Examinations are always one step removed from the thing itself: a certificate in brick-laying can never be as valid a qualification as having built a house; a certificate in medicine can never be as convincing as the testimony of satisfied patients. The same applies for everything that lies in between.

Because examinations exist in a make-believe world that need not bear any relation at all to what is really happening, it is possible for teachers and administrators to pass and fail students on the basis of any whim that takes their fancy. School pupils can be kept on the hop for years on end, having to pass one examination after another, without anybody noticing that nothing useful has been achieved.

The history of examinations

History sheds a great deal of light on the idea of using examinations as a means of assessing peoples' abilities. The only previous time that examinations have been made use of extensively was in China, during the time of the emperors. The imperial government of China routinely used examinations to select candidates for the civil service. This system *did* manage to select students who could read and write Chinese and who were knowledgeable about the philosophy of government, but it invariably led to the creation of an overwhelming, self-serving, self-perpetuating bureaucracy that crippled the country through its lack of initiative, its timidity and its greed. This system of government repeatedly drove China into a state of paralysis, corruption and poverty, from which it only escaped through revolution or invasion. Even in China, however, examinations were only used to select civil servants – they were not used to select cooks, gardeners, builders, engineers, physicians, shopkeepers and farmers. Never have so many people have been made to sit examinations and there really is no sense or justification behind it.

Why has it worked for so long?

The amazing thing about our examination system is that something so devoid of any sense should seem to have survived and prospered for so long. In fact, it hasn't been going for *very* long. Fifty years ago most people in the UK left school with a leaving certificate that simply demonstrated that they could read and write. Examinations have only come into their own with the rise of compulsory secondary education and one explanation of the fact that they have managed to survive thus far is that they are operating in much the same way as a pyramid selling scam, or a financial bubble. While in short supply, people who had been to university had a cachet which could see them through life in certain professions in which real skills were hardly needed - banking, insurance, the civil service, publishing, politics etc. School children and university students were told that they could only cash in on this easy lifestyle if they cooperated and spent twenty years or so of their lives studying for a series of examinations.

More and more people have been persuaded to 'invest' their lives in this scheme which, in its turn, has created thousands more jobs for lecturers, professors, teachers, school inspectors, examination markers etc., and this has kept everything going for a while longer. At some point, though, the bubble will burst – people will realise that for real jobs you need people with real skills and to solve real problems you need people with real initiative. The first signs of this are already in evidence; i.e. it is now common for people without qualifications to be much more successful than people who do have them.

The disadvantages of being qualified

University graduates are able to find work when the people running established businesses and bureaucracies also went to University (everyone tends to employ people with a similar background to themselves) but they find it difficult to succeed in areas that are subject to rapid change. This is a repeat of what happened during the Industrial Revolution: Public School graduates from Oxford and Cambridge proved to be no match for the working-class men who exploited the new technologies of canals, railways, machines for spinning and weaving, etc. to build up vast new business empires.

The same process can be seen to be happening today with the internet, new technology, the media and the entertainment industry. It is also happening in those areas that call for a certain degree of moral character. Organic farming was pioneered by ordinary people who wanted decent food; all forms of alternative medicine were shunned by the medical establishment but have been embraced by people who have a genuine desire to help and to heal; environmental issues are driven by people with no qualifications and no financial resources, but who are prepared to pit common sense against the combined weight of the scientific lobby, big business and government.

The only thing measured by exams is the ability to do well in exams.

Modern life is being changed for the better by people who have no qualifications, or who have transcended their qualifications in order to start acting like human beings. Regrettably, children are shunted off down the dead-end street of examination work before they have a chance to realise what sort of contribution they are able to make to society or to their own sense of fulfilment.

Contrary to popular belief, it is a lack of qualifications that might now provide the best start in life. Unencumbered by other peoples' expectations and not weighed down by the habit of continually trying to please teachers and professors, a young person is better placed to recognise and to accept new challenges, and to deal with the world as it really is.

Gareth Lewis

This article is taken from ***Freedom-in-Education*** *due to be published in 2003.* Gareth Lewis is the author of **One-to-One: a practical guide to learning at home age 0-11** available to *Education Now* readers at the special price of £9.95 p.& p. incl. From Nezert Books, Le Nezert, 22160

following which was printed on the box of one of the products of a major supplier of educational materials: 'Transform Your Students Into Problem Solvers & Scientists!' Try telling that to James William Porter - and his grandfather

Michael Foot

From Our Grandfather Correspondent

Last year I contributed to *News and Review* a piece *'On Becoming A Grandfather'* A few people were kind enough to ask about the possibility of further bulletins from the grandfather front. Since my early retirement from primary headship a little over seven years ago, I have kept a journal as a means of 'fixing', of making sense of, and often of celebrating, experience. What follows is my journal entry of Tuesday 2 July 2002 - following a visit to our home in Norfolk by James William, who was by then aged one year and nearly one month.

James and I were together in the sunken garden for about fifteen minutes. This part of our garden is roughly square in shape, its sides being about twelve feet long. I sat on a wooden bench seat on one side of the square. James sat close to my feet on the stone chippings which are spread across the area. Near to him was one of the nine stepping stones, each of them about one foot square, which are distributed haphazardly on top of the chippings. During our time together, I said very little. James paid scarcely any attention to me.

He spent the time absorbed in four activities, moving in no apparent order from one to any one of the others. The four activities were:

- Picking up handfuls of stone chippings and putting them down in a different position.
- Reaching up with handfuls of stone chippings and putting them on the bench seat next to me, and watching as some remained on the slats of the seat and some fell between the slats.
- Picking up handfuls of stone chippings and 'throwing' them or letting them drop onto the square stepping stone which was closest to him; these chippings made a different sound when they landed compared to those that fell onto the main bed of stone chippings.
- Picking up handfuls of stone chippings and letting them fall from his hand onto the main bed of chippings; usually a few chippings had to be persuaded from his hand because they had become caught between his fingers or because they had become stuck to his moist fingers.

And as I watched him engaged in these activities, I was watching a wonderer, an investigator, a discoverer, a marveller. I was watching a learner, owning his own learning, and having the time to wonder, to investigate, to discover, to marvel, to learn.

Since when I have thought about our fifteen minutes together in the context of the way in which too much schooling is arranged - too often without enough ownership, without enough time to wonder, to investigate, to discover, to marvel, to learn.

And today the whole misguided nature of too much schooling became even more frighteningly clear when I came upon the

Towards a Community of Enquiry

Tuckswood Community First School

Tuckswood Community First School has 130 children on roll and serves an area of socio-economic deprivation with a Free School Meals percentage of 37, and currently 47% of children on the 'Specific Needs' register. The school is physically and socially at the heart of the community, the children delightful, well-behaved and engaging and the majority of the parents extremely supportive.

It was not always so! Backtracking to examine the first steps we took towards the development work at Tuckswood, towards the ***Community of Enquiry*** that is our vision, has been fascinating. We began from necessity! I became Head of Tuckswood seven years ago. The school had undergone a long period of poor management, which had resulted in staff feeling undermined and children having inappropriate amounts of power but very little self-esteem or sense of community. We needed to take action to show the children a different way.

Some of the Year 3 children had lived with the distressing atmosphere that had prevailed for all their school life. They were exhibiting not only non-compliant but also some dangerous behaviours. Together with a group from Years 2 and 3, we identified 18 children, all of whom were boys.

Twice a week my Deputy Head and I worked with this group. We used activities such as *Philosophy for Children*, poetry and drama work, *Soft War* and *Co-operative Games*. The sessions were exciting but really challenging for us and were full of tensions. Gradually the group became more involved in their work, developed at least some sense of belonging to the school community, including the responsibilities that go along with that, and had a more positive self-image.

Nothing happens in a vacuum, and the success and excitement of learning and teaching that happened in this group had impact on the work in the rest of the school. There was great interest in *Philosophy for Children* and in providing activities that would serve the children's needs as life-long learners and reflective, critical and creative thinkers. At the very heart of our work in those first years was high quality professional development. We worked hard, exploring our own questioning, our teaching and learning styles, positive behaviour strategies, children's secular spiritual development and Personal, Social Moral and Health Education. All staff had training in *Brain Basics*, the neuro-scientific research concerning how the brain works and effective learning, also in *Inquiry Curriculum*, Context/Enquiry Drama, and teaching basic skills.

We have always involved the children in the life of the school but there came a point when we felt they were ready to take a more active and formalised role in decision-making through the School and Class Councils. In the early days *Philosophy for Children* had enabled them to discuss issues in a mature fashion, but they found it hard to reach any decisions. This was easily resolved by giving them strategies such as De Bono

P.M.I format. The Council is now a strong part of our *Community of Enquiry* and is inclusive to all at Tuckswood.

During the seven years there have been important periods of consolidating and exploring new avenues to enhance the learning of both ourselves and the children. We have not been afraid to integrate new ideas in the interests of the *Community of Enquiry*. Although working within the framework of the National Curriculum **we only do what we believe in – we have found that it is possible to innovate within this context**.

The Whistleblowers: Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986)

Sue Eagle (www.tuckswoodfirst.norfolk.sch.uk)

It is almost half a century now since the great Indian spiritual philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti (colloquially known as 'K') published his wonderfully wise little book *Education and the Significance of Life*; and it is a depressing commentary on the hegemonic ascendancy of a soulless 'modernity' that mainstream education today is in many ways just as limited and limiting of human consciousness development as it was when K was at the height of his powers, tirelessly travelling the world and spreading his message to the countless thousands of people who went to hear him speak.

K, then, in common with many spiritual seers, had much to say about education, and the way in which a one-sidedly intellectual, technique-fixated, over-prescribed educational environment profoundly damages the developing psyche of the child. Mass schooling systems were totally an athema to K, with their dysfunctional institutionalising tendencies, and their commonly surreptitious agenda of mind-less conditioning, cultivating conformity to conventional but deeply flawed societal, materialistic values whose uncritical reproduction cannot but lead to further human suffering, conflict and destructiveness. For K, the institutions which claim to educate do the opposite: for by over-emphasising the intellect, they are actively *prevent* the awakening of true intelligence.

K believed the essential factor in education to be the relationship between teacher and pupil, which it is impossible to prescribe by following any programmatic method – with pupil and teacher being equal partners in an open dialogue. His radical individualism lays great emphasis on the deep and radical psychological change of the individual, which can only ever be a uniquely individual process and experience.

Thus, for K, education and learning should be far more about *process* than about *content*; and he repeatedly emphasises the importance of *inner space* for deep reflection and experiencing – something which utilitarian, content-obsessed educational environments systematically neglect. Personal and spiritual maturity and, above all, *consciousness evolution* therefore lie at the core of K's educational philosophy: *"The self is made up of a series of defensive and expansive reactions, and its fulfilment is always in its own projections and gratifying identification"*; and education should therefore set about freeing children from *"the ways of the self"*, which cause so much suffering, enabling them *"to be free and to flower in love and goodness"*.

For K, there should be no system of punishment and reward-seeking and no imposition of ideology within educational environments. The Krishnamurti schools, he said, *"are to be concerned with the cultivation of the total human being. These centres of education must help the student and the educator to flower naturally ... not merely a mechanical process oriented to a career"*. And he writes of *"a free inquiry into ourselves without the barrier of one who knows and the one who doesn't"* - K was, of course, quite dismissive of hierarchy and authority as principles of learning, relating and being.

For K, then, it was a fundamental error for the educational process uncritically to embrace current 'old-paradigm', materialistic values and organizational principles: he asked, *"Is this what education is meant for, that you should willingly or unwillingly fit into this mad structure called society?"*. For K (as for Rudolf Steiner with his notion of the 'Three-fold Social

Order'), schools should be small and, above all, *independent of any centralised authority structures*; for if freedom and independence were missing in a school, it would inevitably become an institution for the perpetuation of the cultural conditioning of which he was so critical.

Above all, then, K was concerned to provide the basis for human growth and transformation, but without imposing any detailed system of beliefs or behaviours. And he could hardly have been clearer about the damaging and constraining nature of old-paradigm, over-intellectual, de-spiritualized orientations to life: *"We have been educated in a most absurd way.... A lot of information is poured into our heads and we develop a very small part of the brain which will help us to earn a livelihood. The rest of the brain is neglected".*

Compared with the globally burgeoning Steiner Waldorf education movement (with which they possess some significant commonalities), the Krishnamurti schools are still very small in number (Brockwood Park in Hampshire is the only school in the UK) – which might well be as K himself would have wanted; for he would probably not have wished any educational 'movement' to take his name, as, for him, any and every human 'institution' is saturated and distorted by dysfunctional power relations. There is certainly a wealth of insight and wisdom in K's educational writings; and when, in the future, our current toxic educational malaise is transformed into a spiritually mature, truly human(e) approach to creating healthy learning environments for our children, K's educational writings will offer a rich mine of insight, sense and vision for us to draw upon.

Quotations

- The learned man is stupid when he relies on books, on knowledge and on authority to give him understanding… To understand *ourselves* is both the beginning and the end of education.
- Any form of education that concerns itself with a part and not with the whole of man inevitably leads to increasing conflict and suffering.
- Our whole upbringing and education have made us afraid to think contrary to the established pattern of society, falsely respectful of authority and tradition.
- If we lay all our emphasis on 'career' and 'profession', the freedom to flower will gradually wither. We have laid far too much emphasis on examinations and getting good degrees.
- These [Krishnamurti] schools have come into being not to turn out mere careerists but to bring about the excellence of spirit.

Richard House

K's Educational Works

Education and the Significance of Life, Gollancz, 1955
The Awakening of Intelligence, Harper & Row, 1973
Krishnamurti on Education, Krishnamurti Foundation India, Chennai, 1974
Beginnings of Learning, Gollancz, 1975
A Flame of Learning: Krishnamurti with Teachers, Mirananda, Den Haag, 1993
On Learning and Knowledge, Harper, San Francisco, 1994

Book Review

What's It All About? by Jill Clough, Irene Dalton and Bernard Trafford, SHA Pubs, Leicester. 2002. Pbk, £10.00.

In this short book published by the Secondary Heads Association, three authors - headteachers of dissimilar secondary schools - raise fundamental questions about current school-based education. They examine what is being done, how it is being done, and why it is being done. As Bernard Trafford writes (page 75) they are *"calIing above all for a pause for thought about what we are trying to achieve in education and the direction we should be taking to get there".*

While some might think it strange that after 132 years of state-run schooling we are still unsure of where we are and what we are doing, these writers give - partly from the headteachers' perspective - their views on what is deeply amiss in schools. One of their main concerns is central government control. From that comes - almost inevitably - the prescription of what is taught, with the testing of pupils and inspection of teachers to see that it is taught. This policy is set against common 'standards' and 'target levels', all imposed by politicians desperately seeking the numerate, literate and computer-competent workforce supposed to be demanded by employers.

While some might think it strange that after 132 years of state-run schooling we are still unsure of where we are and what we are doing, these writers give - partly from the headteachers' perspective - their views on what is deeply amiss in schools

Consequences are that the wealth of human experience residing in our centuries-old heritage of literature, music and art is downgraded, as is the richly creative and personalised upbringing it could provide. The emotional development of children is of marginal importance because it cannot be readily tested and assessed. Similarly, the mass of intricate and varied skills possessed by teachers, and their ability to match those skills to the personal needs of children, is underused.

One of the finest teachers I had in my grammar school days was a kind, gentle, elderly clergyman who sat on a pupil's desk, propped his feet on its chair, swirled his tatty gown round his knees, and read with enthusiasm and feeling passages from novels he loved. *Under the Greenwood Tree* is one I remember and still prize fifty years later. He talked *with us* about the books' characters and the human behaviour built into them and then related it skilfully and unobtrusively to what we, as adolescents, were beginning to experience in our own lives. The value of that gifted teacher's work was immeasurable. But what would today's inspectors have made of him? Would they have worried about his lack of lesson plans and targets, his unorthodox teaching style, his failure to test and record what pupils had 'learned', and his careless disregard for someone else's externally imposed syllabus? Might they even have 'failed' him or sent him on a refresher course? Who knows! But if you like my story, read - at least twice - Jill Clough's second contribution *Studies Serve to Delight.* It's all there.

What isn't 'all there' in this book is how we move from our aging school-based system of education to something better: it can't be 'all there' in 88 pages, although Bernard Trafford does see 'with a glimmer of hope' some initiatives that are planned or under way - such as the latest *Green Paper.* But he says, too: *"Optimistic though some of these signs appear, I always seem to find a cause for dismay hidden in such stories."* That is understandable. Scrutiny shows that few radical ideas are being put forward and publicised which would make possible these authors' desires for **a future curriculum that *"should be an identified, developmental series of skills, which might be learnt and assessed in a variety of ways, and an incremental approach to the acquisition of emotional and intellectual maturity, which can again be stimulated by a whole range of learning activities, without young people being required to follow any prescribed combination of subject courses or even pursue a uniform set of qualifications."*** (page81).

In terms of identifyng areas of disquiet, suggesting possible causes, and setting out what could be done, this book is valuable. But it should not be left to stand on its own. It needs a sequel, which has the space to explore the range of obstacles facing those who seek the radical reform of *the system* that is essential if these authors' ideals are to be realised. Those obstacles are substantial. A principal one is the lack of power possessed by teachers. They are divided among themselves and do not, through a single, strong trade union, protest with one voice against anti-educational policies that damage children's future and drive colleagues from the profession. Teachers tolerate an externally imposed hierarchical staffing structure in schools and management teams' whose elevated presence gives wrong signals regarding what matters in any school: the professional relationship between teacher and pupil. Teachers accept too readily a working environment that prohibits them from giving adequate time to the fundamentals raised in this appositely titled book, *What's It All About?*

So why not accept, as this thought-provoking book seems to suggest, that the present school-based system of children's education is outdated and that it *can* be replaced by something preferable?

If teachers are not prepared, via one powerful teachers' union, to construct something better, nobody else will. Vested interests will ensure that schools continue for another century with their basic composition unchanged since 1870. That is where I question Bernard Trafford when he writes (page 87): *"While the radically different model for the future is undoubtedly attractive, we still have millions of children who are in the school system and will have to continue through it. Our efforts thus have to be focused on the school of the present, but with an eye to the future."*

I query that view. It is too reminiscent of the arguments that persuaded unions to accept the decades of pathetic pay settlements and the increasing political interference in professional work that led, insidiously, to teachers' present lowly status. 'Whatever you do', was the cry, 'don't harm the children!' But in the long run, and no doubt with the best of intentions, that is precisely what those teachers did. By concentrating too much on the generation of that time they jeopardised the well being of many generations to come. So why not accept, as this thought-provoking book seems to suggest, that the present school-based system of children's education is outdated and that it *can* be replaced by something preferable? Why not say instead*: "We have to keep an eye on the school of the present and focus our efforts on the future."* That, at least, would be a start.

John Adcock

Flotsam and Jetsam

The killing of joy

"I never go swimming. I hate it. Swimming twice a day for half my life has put me off." Olympic gold swimmer Adrian Moorhouse. *The Observer*, 18th August 2002

Another setback for ageism

A six-year-old became the youngest girl to pass a GCSE when she secured a C grade yesterday in her information technology paper. *The Independent* 23rd August 2002

Flip a coin - you know it makes sense ...

Exam results are so unreliable as indicators of student ability and performance that universities would almost be better off flipping a coin to choose between candidates according to a study published today. *The Guardian* 14th August 2002

How to avoid the real world

"We learn best by integrating what we hear and observe from others in our surroundings and in our daily lives. By removing our children from the living environment of home and placing them into the artificial environment of the school, we are asking them to memorise facts that have very little relation to their everyday lives. These artificial environments require forced memorising, not learning, and then judge our children (by testing) on how well they memorise meaningless facts. With all this forced memorising and then being told they do not meet the grade, no wonder there is war. We are filling our children with rage.*"*

Learning Cooperatives Quarterly,vol.1,no.1

The 'killing of joy', again

"What has happened to the idea of education as a place of creativity, experimentation, and, dare I say it, pure enjoyment?" Melissa Benn in *Red Pepper*, November 2002

(Answer: it is alive and well in home-based education.)

Bored by the board

A recent MORI poll involving 2,500 eleven to sixteen-year olds, ask them to rate the activities that they felt they did most in class. At the top, at 56% was *'copy from the board or book'. 'Listen to the teacher talk for long time',* came in at number two, with 37%.

Bill Lucas in *RSA Journal* October 2002, p.52

The killing of originality

"I was inpatient to grow up and be my own master. School days were something to be got through. I've never quite recovered from the psychological impact of the comment on one report from Mr Gibbs, *'This boy shows great originality, which must be curbed at all costs'*."

Peter Ustinov in *Times Educational Supp.* 11th Oct. 2002

Hypocrisy watch

One of our members living in a small Lancashire village has told us that the only school available in the village is run by the Church of England. He does not want his daughter to be educated in a religious school, but the council will not subsidise the transport to the nearest non-religious community school. This is despite the fact that they will subsidise local Catholic children to get to the nearest Catholic school.

In the *Freethinker* October 2002

Box ticking in 1877

"I have to complain that Mr Parson's class do not hold their reading books rightly. The Infants class was somewhat backward, they should be able to use their slates for working sums." Sedberg National School Report, 1877

Box ticking in 2002

Children in nurseries, play groups and reception classes are to be assessed in aix areas of development. It requires the ticking of 117 boxes. *"Can't they just throw the 117 boxes in the bin, enjoy books, explore the world, play together, have a childhood?"* asks Ted Wragg in *Guardian Education* 8th October 2002.

Howard Gardner watch

The logical outcome of believing that everyone has a different set of intelligences is an individualised education system, he argues... As he lays out his vision, it becomes clear how very different its direction is from the fact-laden, centralised education policies current in the US and the UK.

Times Educational Supplement 20th September 2002

Human rights watch

The United Nations warned UK ministers yesterday that their refusal to ban smacking in the home was a serious violation of the international convention to protect the rights of children.

In the *Guardian*, 5th October 2002

Why schools are giving up uniforms

"It was nuts. It became a huge distraction. It increased friction, it increased discipline problems, having to worry about who was wearing what. It wasn't worth the fight." Beth Shedd at Sierra Vista Junior High, California explains why her school has joined a wave of US schools giving up on uniform policies that were adopted in the 1990s.

New York Times, 13 Sept 2002

The ties that bind

"When the Vikings sacked coastal towns, they often made enslaved residents wear a length of rope around their neck to remind them of the dismissal procedures in case of opposition. The habit of wearing something around the neck as a sign of respect for your betters persists in the nooses (the ties uniform for men) men wear today."

Maarten van Dam, letter in the *Guardian*, 26th October 2002

Happy Birthday - library of the people is 150

Britain's first public lending library opened in Manchester 150 years ago this month, an event so significant for literacy and democracy that Charles Dickens felt compelled to make the trip north. *"This is an institution knowing no sect, no party, and no distinction, nothing but the public want and the public good,"* he said in a speech at the formal inauguration.

In the *Guardian,* 17th September 2002

Why not phase out schools altogether and …

"Hand over all school buildings and staff to the Public Library Service, with the brief to augment their existing invitational reading and information services, to develop a comprehensive service of classes, courses and learning experiences in local community centres for personalised learning, responding to the requests and needs of the learners of all ages. The approach of the Public Library Service, after all, is already the customised one, which is why it is our most popular learning institution." Roland Meighan in *TES* 21st June 2002

Educational Beachcomber

Membership of *Education Now* costs £20 per year. In return

members receive four issues of *News and Review* and information about new books, *Learning Exchanges* etc.,

Printed by Mastaprint Plus

Introduction

John Holt in *Instead of Education* wrote to one young teacher who was asking how he could change the schools:

"You are going to have your hands full, just trying to find or make for yourself a spot in which you can do not too much harm, be reasonably honest with your students, help some of them cope a little better with the problems of school, and get some fun out of your work. To do even that little will not be easy." (p. 209)

Teachers who see themselves as radical rarely changed anything, Holt concluded, and they become frustrated by their failures to teach children to think. They are fooling themselves because they are coerced themselves into doing the business of the school.

It is not likely that a winner-loser society will be radically changed by the winners and as long as school remains compulsory, coercive and competitive, any changes teachers make will be short-lived, or not go very deep, or not spread very far.

Holt suggests that when more of us ask questions about why all adults should be taxed to provide a system of schools from which the children of the rich and affluent gain the most, and what **kind** of schools are we running where the poor children always seem to lose, reform may become possible. In the meantime, teachers can encourage children to have an active learning life outside school:

"All the children I have known who were coping best with school, doing well at it, and more or less happy in it, led the largest and most interesting and important parts of their lives outside of school. Children who do not like school and are not doing well there, but cannot escape it, need such an out-of-school life even more. And children who escape school must have some alternative, some interesting and pleasant (to them) way of spending the time that other children spend in school." (p. 215)

In addition the hidden curriculum of the school is best exposed by being honest with children about these matters and expressing healthier values in their own life and work. Often the best thing is to do nothing dramatic, but listen to their children sympathetically, because what a child may need most is what school generally denies them - a chance to tell their story to people who will listen and try to understand. This action by learner-friendly teachers shows that they take their feelings seriously, and this alone may be enough to help their children make the best of it.

Apart from that, teachers can help by showing their children some of the tricks that will help them play the school game better. The children can be helped to realise that the school game is as unreal and abstract as chess, but beating it requires the learning of the tricks. As one said to me, *"Now I know other people think it is senseless too, I can bear it"*. Useless though most of it is, there are the rewards of a kind for playing it well, those of college and university entrance and the job tickets.

Roland Meighan

Participation and democracy in school. And how I found that it always works

For 21 years, as a teacher at all levels of responsibility in state secondary schools, I involved students in as many decision-making processes as I could think of and get away with. I did this because I thought students had a right to have a say and because I thought they would learn more if they did. In fact, I thought they could **only** learn about some things such as justice and democracy in this way.

I watched my first integrated humanities class in a secondary modern school begin to recover from the wicked trauma of 11 plus 'failure' as they struggled to believe that their ideas and interests really mattered to their teacher. The head came into our room one day having heard about the class meetings and the class court. The students were working in shared interest groups on history projects of their own choosing for presentation to the whole class in any media that they thought appropriate. It must have looked pretty wild. He decided to test all ten first-year classes for motivation, general knowledge, and thinking skills with an instrument that I think was called the Bristol Achievement Test. My class scored way ahead of all the others. The head told me *"I instinctively liked what you were doing but I wanted to reassure myself that the kids were learning something as well as having fun."* **The methods always worked**. Whether I was head of department, head of house, GCSE or A level teacher, participation, choice and responsibility led to ownership, led to self-esteem, led to learning, led to intrinsic and external recognition, led to motivation to participate.

After early retirement I found myself running international seminars on these ideas for the Council of Europe. This led to me being a co-speaker with Bernard Crick at the 1998 Gordon Cook conference in Glasgow. In my talk I argued that citizenship education for democracy must be, at least in part, experiential if there was to be any hope of success. He asked me if I could suggest some examples of good practice in state schools. It was a treat to be able to give some recognition to some of the splendid examples that I had collected, which ended up as the 'pink boxes' in the report.

Later we were both speakers with David Blunkett at a conference in Sheffield. I had just come from visiting a school where the head had been giving very public extra resources to the borderline Grade D/C GCSE students to lift the league table position of the school. This had been so blatant that other students who wouldn't get these grades however hard they tried had told me *'this school doesn't want us'*. One girl had said *"I feel that I'm letting the school down because I can't get the grades they need."* **THEY NEED!** The minister expounded his belief in 'inclusion' apparently unaware of this pernicious effect of league tables. I argued that schools that seriously tried to involve all students in participative activities, seemed to have better than average attendance, fewer exclusions, and better than average GCSE results at 5 A*-G Grades - though not necessarily 5 A*-C. To my surprise, I was asked to carry out a pilot study. I found 12 'more than usually participative' secondary schools in all kinds of catchment areas. They did indeed have fewer exclusions and better 5 A*-G results than the average for 'similar schools' - they also had better results at 5 A*-C. Now I am no great devotee of the merits of the GCSE examination - in fact I'm sure much of the content of some courses had little interest or value to some of those students. But something was being learned that was better than *"this school doesn't want me"*. And actually visiting the schools and talking with the students, the self-esteem and ability to communicate with confidence shone through.

Something strange has happened recently. In many ways teaching has become more prescribed, testing has reached insane proportions, exams have become the purpose of education. And yet - **participation is now 'in'. 'Citizenship' has suddenly emerged.**

Derry Hannam

(The report to the minister can be found at www.csv.org.uk/csv/hannamreport.pdf)

Creating a more learner-friendly (or less learner-hostile) classroom regime

When I began the first of two maternity-leave cover full-time jobs in two different comprehensive schools, in October 2001, I had not taught in a state comprehensive since resigning from my second comprehensive headship in April 1983. I had spent the eighteen years after this in technical 'retirement'. Actually, I was teaching in various alternative education settings. When I retired in 1983 I did so because I thoroughly disagreed with the Thatcher proposals for secondary education and refused to have any part in the development of such a system. I could see this would lead to young people having an experience which would by and large reduce them to the role of those unfortunate French geese that are kept in captivity and fed a diet which qualifies them to be turned into pate de foie gras.

During those eighteen years I had been free to teach with regard to the emerging needs of my students, with respect for their burgeoning intelligences and personal differences, and according to a particular notion of my professional identity as a teacher. It was my job, I thought, to encourage and facilitate their learning so that it would be a transformative, challenging and creative experience. By and large the young people I taught understood our relationship in this sense and did not abuse or take advantage of their freedom to learn. The vast majority seemed to do well in their exams as a by-product of their hard work.

I returned to teaching in the comprehensive system in order to earn money to compensate for personal expenses I had made during the process of closing Flexi-College in July 2000. I also wanted to acquire a small nest-egg from which to hatch other projects in my retirement. Money was my motive and it remained so. In neither school, however, was I able to recapture that essence of learning which I had experienced in the previous eighteen years in alternative settings. I began to wonder why it was that we were so unable to assume that role as a teacher which I had been able to do for the previous eighteen years in alternative education – particularly since in both schools I concluded that both students, teachers and parents were evidently yearning for a system which could be more learner-friendly. As people, the teachers, students and parents of each school seemed to me to be wanting something which would really make for a positive and creative experience, but we all seemed incapable of doing much more than to sugar the pill as we went about stuffing the curriculum down their throats in short time-slots between compulsory 'homework'.

On reflection, I conclude that we were unable to make our classrooms more learner friendly because we and our students were part of a top-down system where others were in authority over us. We were employed to carry out their instructions. Each morning the staff sat in the staff-room at 8.25, to receive our daily briefing from the Head, Deputies and others in 'line management' over us. One memorable morning (in my first school) the Head came in and said, *"I want to cascade down to you my targets for the next few years. I went to my 'appraisal' meeting yesterday and I was told I had to achieve 42% A-Cs at GCSE in two years' time."* I was appalled by

- the use of the word 'I' (I recalled how in 1660 Louis XIV on his 21st birthday had called his advisers together and said, *"henceforth, messieurs, it is 'moi' who will make the decisions"*)
- the use of the words 'cascade down'
- the notion that *"'I' had to achieve 42%"*.

Who does he think actually does the work? (I said to myself) as I crept out of the staff-room in my charity shop dark suit to go to the staff toilet.

In both schools, I was told by my heads of department that I was to do things a certain way and should not innovate. I was, after all, only there while the regular teacher had a baby. If I succeeded in introducing a more learner friendly regime this would cause problems when she returned. If I failed it would cause immediate mayhem. So I arrived at 7.30 every morning, prepared my front of class lessons in minute detail and stood with my back to the door on Friday afternoons to prevent them getting out early in case one of them should have a road accident and the responsibility for their being 'loose' before time was traced back to me!

If I took a regular job now, however, I would try to do things differently within the 'system'. For five hours a day, young people are routed round teachers' specialist rooms arriving as late as they dare and leaving as soon as they can. I would try to engineer a situation where the variables of any learning situation are within the control of the students and myself.

These are to do with the organisation of time, territory, things, teamwork and thinking (planning and reviewing). The trouble is that schools are managed today so that all these tools are used *for* students rather than with them or by them.

This is what makes school so learner-hostile. The lesson times are prescribed and the short time during which they flash before an individual teacher in a group of 30 is devoted to 'delivery' by the teacher, usually from the front of the class. The classroom is laid out in an inflexible way, either in rows or a hollow square, so that it is suitable neither for lecturing, whole group discussion, small group interaction, or individual study. Computers usually have their own classrooms in banks of 30 or so and students are routed round these for an hour a week. The resources are carefully hoarded by the teacher in multiple sets which have to be given in at the end of the lesson. Students are usually told which books to use and what pages to refer to.

Usually a teacher teaches alone – maybe with a classroom assistant to sit by a person with special learning difficulties. There is little teamwork – how can there be when the whole organisation is prescribed so that one teacher faces one class for one hour? Planning is done by the teacher before the lesson and work is marked outside class time and given back in class in an atmosphere of simplistic congratulation, condemnation or suspension of judgement by the teacher. Whole class feedback is the norm and personalised reviewing of work is rare.

In spite of this, the fact remains that once the classroom door is shut and the thirty students are in, then the management of learning could be shared by the teacher with the students. This is only possible if the teacher has a professional relationship with the students which identifies the students as being the ones who are learning and doing the work and the teachers as being in support of this self-motivated process.

Philip Toogood

CUTS

and a small number who otherwise would have suffered great personal misery and a sense of failure and rejection, were enabled to grow into confident, critically aware people, capable of defining and facing up to themselves and being of use and service in the world around them.

during my first job for half a term in an 11 – 16 comprehensive in Burton upon Trent. During my second job for two terms in a Leicester Community College, I began to forget how much I was earning per minute
(as a means of motivating me to go in each morning) and in this second school I was able to enjoy the friendship of other teachers and take an interest in the young people I was teaching

Once, however, the role of the teacher is defined as 'delivering the curriculum' and the curriculum as 'that which is laid down to be received by the students from the teacher' the development of a professional relationship which is learner-friendly is increasingly difficult to achieve.

Derry cuts
Recently I have been looking for more evidence of associations between participation/democratic practice and positive outcomes. Not surprisingly this has involved visiting Scandinavia where there is a strong tradition of student participation. In Norway the Reforms of 1994/1997 have attempted to extend it. But the far-right, with its army of privatisers and bean-counters, is on the march. As some Norwegian and Danish colleagues said to me in Oslo last week -'...it really isn't a bad idea to have evidence to show that our drive for more democratic and participative school experiences actually enhances learning in measurable ways. We may have been rather naive in not realising this.'

I was not alone in thinking this way in the 70's and 80's - but Thatcher soon put a stop to all that.

One group had just set light to some model houses to demonstrate the great fire of London - quite safely but it had left a bit of smoke in the room

etc. etc. etc. - change the order to suit your preference. But it worked. So why the hell wasn't there more of it going on in schools? And why the hell wasn't teacher education built around these principles.

The option of escape and providing the one alternative of home-based education is, of course the subject of one of Holt's books, *Teach Your Own.* Starting a small school or organising a group of home-educating families in a co-operative learning scheme are other possibilities. Holt speculates that children learning out of school are likely to learn much faster and better than children in school. The evidence of home-based effectiveness research is now available to show that he was right. Holt ends this book in uncompromising fashion: *"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."* (p. 226)

Damage limitation:

teachers trying to make their classrooms and schools more learner-friendly places

Making schools more learner friendly

Evidence suggests that school for many pupils is an unhappy and meaningless experience (Hendry, in Figes 2002). Sociological explanations of why this is the case point to education's role in maintaining dominant power relationships in capitalist societies (Corrigan 1979; Foucault 1977), requiring it to suffocate prospects for more liberating, innovative, dialogical pedagogical processes, tolerant of difference and diversity (Cooper 2002). As a consequence, schools have an unhealthy tendency to focus on managerialist outcomes – delivering the national curriculum, improving attainment levels and rising up the league table – at the expense of any individual pupil's needs. Drawing on lessons from youth work practice in Britain, this short piece suggests the basis for a more learner-friendly school environment.

School lessons from Youth Work

There is much that schools could learn from traditional youth work practice. For example, one study asking young people what they wanted from their youth service highlighted four perceived needs – association (somewhere they wanted to go); activities (things which were interesting to do); autonomy (a place of their own); and advice (someone trusting who they could talk to) (Williamson et al. 1995). Young people value a place where they feel accepted, respected and listened to. A warm, safe environment within which to interact with peers and achieve a personal sense of identity and self-esteem (Robertson 2002). Schools, therefore, firstly need to reflect on how their own physical and cultural environments mirror these virtues.

Secondly, attention also needs to be given to the teacher-pupil interaction:

"Most of the adults that young people meet in their daily lives are authority figures, or are seen as such: teachers, parents, shopkeepers. Young people often expect adults to treat them in certain ways – i.e. as children – and are amazed to be treated as an adult and taken seriously". (Robertson 2002: 4)

Young people often have positive feelings about youth workers, largely because they feel treated by them as adults (Robertson 2002). Central to this is the opportunity for young people to genuinely participate in decision making. This in itself is not simply an important learning experience - requiring empathy with others, mutual respect, an ability to analyse and reflect, negotiating skills, and so forth – but places democracy at the core of the education process. Education should not simply be about developing intellect and life skills, but the values and virtues needed to engage critically in social and political activities. This requires schools to be open, and to hold less preconceived notions about outcomes and give greater attention to process. It also requires schools to organise their curriculum and the way this is delivered around the interests and enthusiasms of the pupils, identified through dialogue and consensus. The role of the teacher here is 'facilitator of learning' - a trusted adviser able to offer guidance based on her or his experience and theoretical understanding. Such an approach offers prospects for a more meaningful curriculum, delivered in imaginative ways deploying a range of techniques - exploiting the arts, leisure, community activities and so forth - in different locations; to learn, as Smith names it, 'in community' (Smith 2000: 4). Education becomes a 'process of fostering learning in life as it is lived' (Jeffs and Smith 1999: 7). This also requires accepting the unpredictability of learning – allowing things to be said and developed spontaneously, not in accord with some pre-designed lesson plan.

Finally, schools need more meaningful approaches to evaluating education. The managerialist performance criteria imposed on schools by OFSTED focus on measurable (and dubious) outcomes of success. These serve to impose conformity on schools in order to permit comparisons (in the name of quality enhancement) and open competition. In reality, some educators are fabricating school attainment figures (Smith 2000), making a mockery of claims to quality assurance and standards. Evaluation needs to be more dialogical – negotiated between the key stakeholders (teachers, parents/carers, pupils and so forth). It needs to focus on the quality of the learning experience and how this enhances well-being – qualitative indicators of success rather than merely measuring the measurable. Here schools can learn from youth work practice's emphasis on 'informal education' (Jeffs and Smith 1999), with a greater focus on evaluating the quality of teacher-pupil interactions. This might include asking such questions as:

- how were learners most effectively stimulated?
- were agreed aims achieved?
- were agreed outcomes achieved?
- what effect has the learning process had on the pupils' collective sense of well-being?

Conclusions

Since the post-war years, discourses of 'youth' – from the 'unruly teenagers' of the Beatnik era to the 'feral youth' of today - have problematised the behaviour and activities of young people. Whilst such constructions of the young can be explained as 'moral panics' (Cohen 1980) – the amplification of deviance to legitimate further coercive measures of state social control – should we not reverse this discourse and question the ability of our social system – including education - to equip our young adequately for adulthood? Much of the evidence suggests that the school system is failing to meet the social, emotional and psychological needs of our children (Figes 2002). Indeed, the crude and narrow performance regime imposed on schools is having brutal effects in terms of increased anxiety levels among children and undermined teacher moral (Smith 2000). At the same time, it is encouraging the massaging of school performance levels. The system is clearly in crisis, corrupt and humanly damaging, and we are all victims of its tyrannical practices. Education needs to be reclaimed as a liberalising, democratising and humanising force, one that fosters genuine notions of inclusion, tolerance and justice. To say that this cannot be done because central state control and surveillance precludes action, is not an acceptable excuse. The recommendations set out above are not particularly radical and certainly achievable. Moreover, as E.P. Thompson observed in *The Making of the English Working Class*, individuals and groups are conscious human agents. We have the ability to resist the oppressive practices of our existing education system. Apart from the damage it is doing to educators themselves, the abuse it is imposing on our children alone should provide the incentive. It is time to think the unthinkable!

Charlie Cooper

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Lost in space: disorientated children, disorientated learners

Ben Koralek

The huge, three-storey Victorian, gable-ended castle of a building in which I work is plagued by many of the typical problems of poor acoustics, glare (from unshaded, double-height windows) and cramped circulation conditions for its 450-strong child population. The same building's windows are stuck shut by layers of paint work, which, over the years, have **sealed** those elements of the school's architecture designed specifically to help regulate air quality, to provide smoke ventilation in case of fire and to prevent a build-up of warm, moist, stagnant air (ideal for the growth of infectious bacteria).

Whilst for some, this image of a sickly, antiquated monolith creaking with design and technical problems might serve as an analogy for the whole contemporary schooling 'machine', others would settle for a more-simple diagnosis of *'Sick Building Syndrome'*. Either way, we cannot escape the truth that the nature of a school's built environment can damage both a child's physical health *and* their learning.

Certainly we take for granted the idea that a *'class-room'* is the best space for teaching and learning. The classroom layout determines what learning activities are feasible with a class of thirty pupils, and means that children's learning is limited just as much by the confined space, as it is by the demands of the National Curriculum. Despite the success and insight of Multiple Intelligence (MI) research (www.pz.harvard.edu/sumit), far too few classroom learning opportunities are made available for those young people who are readily identifiable as predominantly suited to **bodily-kinesthetic**, **spatial, naturalist** or **musical core operations** (for example).

Even those class teachers prepared to adapt their current practice in accordance with Howard Gardner's MI theory find it difficult to modify their own classroom space in any meaningful way (Gardner, 1983). Whilst a colleague of mine has created a small, corner-space in her classroom for a few bodily-kinesthetic learners, it is not straightforward for teaching staff to deliver bespoke MI learning programmes in a range of organised spaces, for thirty individual pupils, in one room, at the same time ! Even the newest classroom designs struggle to accommodate such a range of learning styles (*Schools For The Future, Building Bulletin 95*, DfES 2002).

On the one hand we fail to provide appropriate spatial arrangements for children with a diverse range of educational needs and, on the other - whilst presenting them with a ready-made homogenised curriculum - we make unreasonable demands on their attention, energy and physical stamina. This combination of conditions damages children's self-esteem and for some, distorts their highly personal experience of learning.

Alongside this, whether sitting still or moving around the school building (or embarking on the repeated transitional 'journeys' from highly-regulated indoor spaces to much less-regulated external spaces and back again, for example), children's relationships with their school building can also be highly disorientating. Whilst some children manage to steer their way through these complexities, for others: *"To be disorientated in space, is the distinction between survival and sanity: To be disorientated in space is to be psychotic.''*
E Hall (quoted in *The New Learning Environments*, Dudek (2000)

If we are to minimise this kind of damaging experience for children and young people, we must give more time and consideration to the way we design, organise and animate learning environments within existing school buildings. Whilst we are yet to see a mainstream UK school commit itself to incorporating MI theory in the organisation of their learning environment/s and curriculum planning, one Scottish school has found a way to create a whole new kind of learning environment: a learning studio which pupils in years 6 and 7 are free to visit whenever they want (if their classwork is up to date).

As well as being a flexible working space in which **spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, intrapersonal** and **interpersonal** learners can flourish, 'Room 13' at Caol Primary School in Fort William is *"run by the children as an autonomous republic, independent of the school. It elects its own officials, keeps its own accounts and pays [artist-in-residence] Rob Fairley his salary"*; also suiting **linguistic** and **logical-mathetical** learners (source - John Crace, *The Guardian*, 18/6/2002).

We can't escape surveillance, but we can, at least, evade the thought police.

Language is like fire. Both are regarded as human inventions or as natural phenomena to be put to human purpose. Both are violent, in the sense used by Bourdieu, in that they produce change. Concepts are like atoms - they are the basis of the activity of fire and the activity of communication. With fire we can create warmth and we can create bombs. It is powerful and dangerous and alive. Concepts can be weapons and they can be empowering notions: powerful, dangerous and alive. Within communication they can be used against us, to limit us or to liberate us.

Every document I read that comes from a centralised agency and regulating authority contains the same core concepts: training, standards, levels, attainment, development and failure. This, as Foucault observed, is the mechanism of surveillance. How to be under surveillance and yet think and act as though you were free, that is the question. In the culture of the prison we seek to help young people (re)habilitate themselves for the world outside - except that there is no adult world outside. The adult world is inside this culture as well, so we train them for 'adult life'. A scary scenario. What can we do?

So far I have presented a picture of schooling based on a particular metaphor: surveillance or imprisonment. Concepts are always metaphorical in nature but they shape the social 'reality'. This concept is anti-educational if we regard education as something that should be liberating. But what if I translate these concepts into a different educational metaphor of 'liberation', which I want to spiritually and mentally inhabit? I am suggesting we can do this provided our energies are not already sufficiently drained. I can only make sense of and be energised by the idea of teaching if I do this.

When I read a piece of 'surveillance speak' (and here it relates to my specialist subject, religious education*): "Assessment of pupils' performance which is comparatively weak in most subjects, is a particular weakness in RE"*, I experience the concept of 'assessment' being aimed at me and the trigger is fired. We already anticipate the next inspection and the feelings engendered are depression and anxiety. Assessment is a brutal word: hard and unforgiving; cutting through the difference between the divisive poles of success and failure. But, let me translate. What do I want to do with young people? I want to engage them, challenge and support them, help them to own a sense of their own education and experience the satisfaction and empowerment in being able to express their understanding in their own way. I want them to gain their own voice. I cannot do this unless I ask them to express themselves, analyse, discuss and reflect. That is what I see as my job. 'Assessing' is what both they and I do in this process. If, at the fag end of it, I have to tie up a bundle for Ofsted to consume, using their terms but given my meaning, so be it. I have my own ownership of 'assessment' within my metaphor of education as liberation, and I want young people to develop theirs-because I don't want them to be duped.

Here is an example of assessment we can make on those who would like to dupe us. Right now, I walk into my newsagent and see a poster for the national lottery. It contains a slogan: 'everybody wins' with a picture of a smiling child and a logo of two hands shaking each other. This strikes me as a valuable 'resource'. Who wins? First, very few people, compared to those who pay for a ticket, get a return. Second, how many 'charities' actually get a grant compared to those who apply or need the money? Same answer. Third, who gets a huge and continuing profit? The people in charge of the national lottery: the corporation. Sounds to me like free-market capitalist competition. Maybe the slogan should say 'We must all compete'.

I can have great fun with a class 'assessing' this poster and I can put their 'performance' in the box under a number of headings: from literacy skills to citizenship education, from values education to thinking skills. You see, **maybe we can't escape surveillance, but we can, at least, evade the thought police.**

Clive Erricker