

The Whistleblowers: Philip Toogood

“The justification for ‘school’ in its present form no longer exists. There is now no longer any need to take children into a large inhuman centre for 7 hours a day, 40 weeks a year, to be looked after and institutionalised by kindly teachers, - ‘parent substitutes’. We are depriving the community of its young.”

(P. Toogood (1984) *The Head's Tale*. P.5. Dialogue Publications)

It was fundamentally the nature of schools that made Philip, founder of Education Now, reluctant to go into teaching at first. But he had to earn some money to support himself and his wife Annabel, who was expecting their first baby: *“I thought I would do it for a year or two while I looked around and found something else. Yet it was the children who convinced me that I ought to go on a bit longer, and a bit longer, ... and a bit longer.”*

(P. Toogood, ed. (1991) *Small Schools*, Education Now Books)

The ‘bit longer’ has included teaching at Uppingham School, working as Head of Department at Wyndham Comprehensive School, Egremont, Cumberland from 1966 to 1970, Warden of Swavesey Village College, Cambridgeshire from 1970 to 1977, Head of Madeley Court Comprehensive, Telford from 1977 to 1983, where he resigned in protest against the policy of the Local Education Authority in Shropshire.

He and Annabel spent two years working at the Small School at Hartland, before they were invited to re-open the Dame Catherine's School at Ticknall, Derbyshire which had been sentenced to death by the LEA.

It was re-opened as an independent, all ages school, and the base for the development of flexi-schooling

The journey of Philip and Annabel was not just geographical but a journey in educational ideas. In Cambridgeshire he was exploring the ideas of Henry Morris and his Village College concept. At Telford, he developed the theory and practice of Mini-schooling to break up large schools into small human-scale learning communities. At Hartland, he was invited by the Schumacher Society to co-ordinate a movement to become known as the *Human Scale Education* organisation in 1985.

The three main planks of *Human Scale Education* were:

Small Schools – both the preservation of those in existence as well the development of new ones,

Mini-schooling to humanise large schools,

Flexischooling to link the human scale structures of schools with home-educating families in genuine home-school partnerships.

“Our tricolour flag would have celebrated Small-schooling, Mini-schooling and Flexi-scholing” Philip says.

There were other ventures too. Philip established *Dialogue Publications* which ran a magazine for a few issues and published a book, *The Head's Tale*. Then he went on to found the *Education Now Publishing Co-operative Ltd.* in 1987, which has gone on to publish over 40 books and 12 magazines in its first years and 44 *News and Review* since then. Philip's writing has included *The Head's Tale*, editing *Small Schools*, co-authoring the ground-breaking *Anatomy of Choice in Education*, contributing to *Flexischooling*, and writing a manual on *Minischooling*.

Philip and Annabel are now exports, having currently put themselves on loan to Spain, running a language school venture both teaching English as a foreign language and teaching Spanish to ex-patriates. At least I **think** they are just are on loan - the moribund and degenerating learning system of the UK, with its proposed drug tests, its imprisoning of teachers and parents, its fines for parents, its truancy sweeps, etc., perhaps needs them to return?

Roland Meighan

Radical Educational Texts Revisited:

The Betrayal of Youth

by James Hemming

The golden thread which runs through the progressive critique of education is that it is, and has always been, about adults, not children. Teachers corral children into classrooms, fill them with information, test them to see how well the knowledge has stuck in their minds, and send them out armed with certificates that show they have done so. At no time does anyone try to find out what the young students are interested in, or wish to know how the teaching process has affected them. The result is an education system almost universally perceived to be in crisis. Every Government spends vast sums of money on 'reforming' it, and claims to have succeeded in 'raising standards', but there is always an opposition determined to show that in fact education is spiralling into chaos.

James Hemming, who both taught and studied psychology, was not willing to collaborate with the failure of a system supposedly based on a professional understanding of the minds of children, but which appeared to deal with only the most limited and formal categories of knowledge. He saw clearly that most schools, particularly in the secondary sector, dispensed an unbalanced curriculum, biased towards old-fashioned book-learning, and unsuitable for many young people, who needed something very different, a child-centred array of interesting activities aimed at letting them discover for themselves how their minds worked. Many teachers, he discovered, thought that their educational responsibilities included developing their pupils' social competence, their ability to argue and speak persuasively, to make good decisions and recognise right from wrong. Yet in most schools, the need to prepare pupils to take tests and examinations made it well-nigh impossible to spend enough time on these subtler and more abstract aspects of education. It is worth noting here that Hemming (1980) was writing before the present toxic regime of almost wall-to-wall testing was thrust upon teachers. What does he think about education now, when even the content of the curriculum is prescribed by the Government, and the very existence of a school may depend on its ability to conjure high exam results?

He would certainly call it a betrayal of youth. Young people, he pointed out, were not necessarily academic. An education in which knowledge of facts had priority over everything else was going to leave most pupils with a greater or less sense of failure. "*To generate failure,*" he wrote, "*is to kill confidence. And confidence is the vitamin of human capability.*" The core of 'good' school-based education in modern times is universally understood to be assessment. The time and trouble which is taken over the business of setting 'demanding' examinations, and over making sure that all those who take them use no tools to help them do the tasks assigned to them other than their unsupported intellect, is unrelated to the real educational value of those tests. They are a transient convenience, a piece of knowledge which will be

redundant within months, possibly weeks. They interest teachers and parents because their own self-esteem is bound up in the amount of knowledge their children acquire. But to the children they are either comforting 'gold stars' or daunting and discouraging proofs that they are not as 'clever' as others,

Hemming saw clearly that failure lies at the root of social dissatisfaction and conflict. Since academic values outstrip all others in the prestige, and often the material prosperity, which they attract, many of the young people who go through our school system emerge from it convinced that they are second-rate, less competent and valuable to society, simply because they cannot master the limited range of studies which schools offer them under the guise of 'essential knowledge'. Much of the school-based programme of education concentrates on 'left-brain' skills and aptitudes, he writes, the elements of thinking which are logical, sequential and concrete. This aspect of thought appeals to schools because it is easy to prescribe and assess. It favours 'right' answers, conclusions which can be recognised and rewarded as 'correct', or stigmatised as 'entirely wrong'. There is little room for intuition, trial-and-error, the chasing of rainbows, knowing that one can never reach their end, but valuing the journey for its own sake. The 'right-brain' skills, in which are born metaphor, taste and emotion, are ill catered-for in schools, and pupils in whom these predominate are often at odds with their teachers, sometimes for no graver reason than that they find themselves pursuing an idea beyond the boundaries prescribed for it during that particular lesson.

This disjunction between the natural working of the human brain and the way in which traditional schools operate leads to a deep-rooted injustice. Schools fail those of their pupils in whose mental architecture the right side of the brain predominates. The established curriculum, delivered to each pupil in the context of whole-class teaching and an underlying pressure to master a complete array of knowledge, creates, quite inevitably, a group of winners and a group of losers. The losers cannot necessarily console themselves by succeeding in some other field of endeavour, because the whole programme is skewed towards activities which call for technical skill and yield measurable, predetermined results. This group tends to emerge from childhood convinced of their incompetence and alienated to some extent from the society which they feel has forced them to fail.

What is needed, Hemmings contends, is a curriculum which transforms the school into a place where young people are encouraged to see themselves as competent, where they have tasks which mobilise all their resources, social and affective as much as intellectual, and where their work can be made to centre upon success, progress and respect for the unique structure of each pupil's mind.

Chris Shute

The next learning system will grow out of the public library?

Britain's first public lending library opened in Manchester just over 150 years ago, (in September 1852), 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.

Visiting the library is the fourth most popular pastime in the UK, after going to pubs, restaurants and takeaways. 58% of Britons are members of their local library borrowing some 480 million books per year. As regards value for money, it costs the price of a first class stamp (28p) per person per week. There are 4160 in UK plus another 630 mobile libraries in use.

Part of the appeal is because it is a learning system fit for a democracy. Mass coercive schooling, on the other hand is anti-democratic. Even during the last century it was described as '*compulsory mis-education*' (Paul Goodman), '*the tragedy of education*' (Edmond Holmes) and '*the betrayal of youth*' (James Hemming). It was devised for totalitarian not democratic societies, which is why it was so popular with leaders Stalin and Hitler.

A democratic learning system needs to get away from **domination** and its endless stream of uninvited teaching. Instead it needs to be personalised in the sense of being learner-managed, based on invitation and encouragement and, if we actually believe in life-long learning, non-ageist. It needs to be democratic in at least three aspects (a) its organisation for participation rather than imposition, (b) its monitoring procedures for the celebration of learning rather than incessant and stultifying testing, and (c) in its adoption of the more natural 'catalogue' curriculum approach.

Therefore, we already have a democratic learning institution in our midst based on these principles. It is called the public library system:

"There is not such a cradle of democracy upon the Earth as the Free Public Library, this republic of letters where neither rank, office or wealth receives the slightest consideration." Andrew Carnegie

There are other democratic learning systems, such as museums, nursery centres, home-based education co-operatives (such as *The Otherwise Club*, London and *The Learning Zone*, Isle of Wight) and also Community Arts programmes. So we already know how to make such systems work.

Recently, there was surprise that Finland topped the league tables for school performance despite starting school much later and having a more learner-friendly school system than countries like England. Public libraries seem to something to do with it. The country's diverse network of libraries receives the largest single state grant and new media also encourages reading, with many foreign language television programmes. Tomi Kontio, 'the Finns answer to JK Rowling', explained: *"Finns love libraries and our system is probably the best in the world. Every village and suburb has one. I spent almost a third of my childhood in libraries and am happy to pay more taxes to preserve them."*

(from *Times Educational Supplement* 3rd Oct 03)

Here are some ideas from Bill Ellis of www.CreatingLearningCommunities.org. He writes that there is currently no perfect library he knows of, but that it provides a model on which we can build. Could we envisage a learning centre that served all the needs of the self-learner? In addition to books, it might include:

- equipment loans (microscopes, plastic models, telescopes ...)
- a library of learning CDs so that one could work up the ladder in any topic they choose, when they choose, and how they choose.
- class and meeting rooms so that self-learners could meet regularly and could hire teachers if they wanted
- a data-base of learning opportunities both in the local community and world-wide including farms, organic farms, factories, museums ..
- Community Mentors who have the skills to advise self-learners who wanted advice.

So, 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 20002)

John Taylor Gatto, in *The Underground History of American Education*, forecasts a bright future:

"If we closed all government schools, spent twenty times as much as we do on free libraries ... we would quickly find that the American school nightmare had vanished."

We need to add ... and the school nightmare of all the other countries, too.

Roland Meighan

Book review

Damage Limitation:

**trying to reduce the harm schools do to children
by Roland Meighan**

with contributions by **Linda Brown, Hazel Clawley, Charlie Cooper, Jane Dent, Clive Erricker, Kim Evans, Michael Foot, Derry Hannam, Clive Harber, Ben Koralek, and Philip Toogood**

Educational Heretics Press, 2004, **price £10-00**

When I first heard that Roland Meighan had written another book, *Damage Limitation: trying to reduce the harm schools do to children*, I had to smile to myself. A more tireless campaigner against the present education system and a more eloquent advocate of alternative education possibilities is nowhere to be found. I looked forward to reading it. The main thrust of this book is to offer those who do reluctantly send their children to school some ideas about how to mitigate any damage they might receive through attending.

Before putting forward ideas about helping relieve problems caused by the school system the problems that the school system present are recounted. From an autonomous home educator's perspective, this alone warrants getting hold of this book. This reminder of what home educated children are 'missing' is always useful. This book confirms what you already thought and puts together into a concise readable form all those incredible news items that you have read, been aghast, cut out and then can never find again when you want to show them to Great Aunt So and So.

The fact the most children do attend school is often felt as a permanent dark cloud hovering over alternative education circles. By addressing not just what is wrong with this system, what new systems of education might look like, but also how we can now help mitigate the damage done to children who are in the system now, we can create a little more sunshine for children who may be suffering.

Several times the question is raised of whether the modern school system has any place at all in a democratic state. This question highlights the relationship between a state and its education system. This issue can not be shied away from when discussing 'education'. Although this is not the main thrust of the book, the answer over and over is how damaging the system is to hopes of raising democratic practice and creative thoughtful and self-empowered adults.

The book is split into eight parts with Meighan being the core writer, eleven other contributors form the basis of the book. In the first part of the book Meighan collects together some stark facts that present a crystallised picture of the state of education in Britain today. It makes for chilly reading. Meighan describes his own life history and devices his family used to limit the damage school might have done to his son. From his son's point of view just knowing that he

had a choice and did not have to go to school seems to have made an enormous difference to his school experience.

The second part focuses on learner's ideas of an educational institution (as it would no longer look like school as we know it). A catalogue of what learners would like to see is presented and opposed to what they have now. Needless to say there is a very long way to go. A fascinating bit of history was a piece about the Little Red School Book. I had one of these years ago. Charlie Cooper, Lecturer in Social Policy at University of Hull, has made a study of this book and discusses how relevant it is to school today. If his analysis is correct this might make an exciting project.

The third section is a section of quotes from John Stuart Mill to John Taylor Gatto to help support you when you are helping your child deal with the system by giving you ammunition from famous well-respected people. The fourth section gives voice to parents who describe their own situations and ways they have found of helping their children cope in the school system.

The most interesting sections to me were the last ones, section five through eight, which included teachers talking about how they have tried, even with literacy and numeracy hour and mountains of tests and bureaucracy, to subvert the system and add a little creative open-ended space for children to think for themselves. But it is also argued by Philip Toogood, as John Holt did, that there is very little you can do within the system. Ben Koralek points out how important the architecture of schools are in dominating both teachers and students.

Part seven, includes essays on how children themselves subvert the system in many ways, daydreaming and 'not paying attention' as the first line of defence to truanting, a more dramatic defence. Hazel Clawley sees all of these as forms of damage limitation initiated by children themselves.

The last section Professor Clive Harber argues the basis for violence in our society both between adults and nations is laid down by the school system despite rhetoric to the contrary. Until we have a participatory democratic education system where cooperation, collaboration and teamwork are real parts of children's lives we cannot expect them to grow up to be anything other than very angry, potentially violent adults.

The postscript, written by the remarkable and far sighted Edmond Holmes, Chief Inspector of Schools, in 1911, states the principles by which an education system can be made sane. They are very relevant now to those seeking a more child-centred education system whether in or out of school.

This book *Damage Limitation* presents a very interesting side to alternative education that is not often discussed. The fact the most children do attend school is often felt as a permanent dark cloud hovering over alternative education circles. By addressing not just what is wrong with this system, what new systems of education might look like, but also how we can now help mitigate the damage done to children who are in the system now, we can create a little more sunshine for children who may be suffering.

And that has to be a good thing.

Leslie Barson

Parents, teachers and other adults in our lives ignore and marginalize our views.

Youthful wisdom ... on outcomes

“... we have taller buildings, but shorter tempers; wider freeways, but narrower viewpoints; we spend more, but have less; we buy more, but enjoy it less. We have bigger houses and smaller families; more conveniences, but less time; we have more degrees, but less sense; more knowledge, but less judgement; more experts, but more problems; more medicine, but less wellness. We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values. We talk too much, love too seldom and hate too often. We have learned how to make a living, but not a life; we have added years to life, not life to years. We have been all the way to the moon and back, but have trouble crossing the street to meet the new neighbour. We have conquered outer space but not inner space; we have cleaned up the air, but polluted the soul; we have split the atom, but not our prejudice. We have higher incomes, but lower morals; we have become long on quantity, but short on quality. These are the times of tall men and short character; steep profits and shallow relationships. These are the times of world peace, but domestic warfare; more leisure, but less fun; more kinds of food but less nutrition. These are the days of two incomes, but more divorce; of fancier houses but broken homes. It is a time when there is much in the show window and nothing in the stockroom; a time when technology can bring this letter to you, and a time when you can choose either to make a difference, or just hit delete.”

A student at Columbine High School, scene of the mass shooting of students by their classmates, in *Living Lightly*, Spring 2001

Youthful wisdom ... on building a better society

We are a group of students, teachers, artists, activists, musicians, writers, journalists, filmmakers and farmers. We are kids, and we are fed up with the way that we and our peers are treated. Young people are capable of playing a vital role in our communities. Throughout time, we have participated in progressive political action. However, adults often overlook our potential and fail to support us.

WE WANT OUR VOICES BACK! We are locked up for seven or more hours a day, for at least 13 years. We are forced to ‘learn’ things that aren’t useful or applicable to our lives and that often aren’t even true. We are taught to obey, to keep our opinions to ourselves and to remain silent. We are groomed to enter the workforce. We targeted by corporations that prey on us as lucrative customers.

WE WANT OUR MINDS BACK! We are punished for pursuing our dreams. We are raised and indoctrinated into a culture of racism, sexism, ageism and violence. We are forbidden from being in public during certain hours of the day.

WE WANT OUR FUN BACK! We are taught not to question or challenge our own oppression. We learn only how to operate within and perpetuate authoritative relationships. We want to escape these destructive environments.

WE WANT OUR LIVES BACK! For all of these reasons, we are *organizing Celebrate Youth!: A Conference on Liberation*, a three-day gathering ... in St. Petersburg, Florida. The conference will incorporate serious discussion, analyses of the problems facing youth today and constructive workshops that equip us with the tools we need to dismantle these oppressive systems in favor of a healthier approach to learning and living. Of course, we will also have fun with activities such as games, movies, picnics, a concert, free-form performances and bike rides through the city. Through this conference, we hope to empower youth and adults from a variety of communities and diverse backgrounds to begin building a society based on freedom and respect, rather than oppression and domination.

Statement from ‘*Celebrate Youth! A Conference on Liberation.*’

International Association for Learning Alternatives (IALA)

IALA STATEMENTS OF ADVOCACY

Definition of alternatives

Learning alternatives are approaches rather than programmes, and model democracy by providing multiple choices, options, and environments for everyone.

Implementation of Alternatives

Learning alternatives reflect the continuum from traditional to non-traditional designs and modifications, experimental research centers, home-schooling, charter and magnet centers, on-line programmes, specialized academies - the list is endless - *if the concept is understood as options for all ages*. Further, public school choices should be *voluntary*, for *mandated* uniformity hinders maximum personal development.

**Learning alternatives are ...
democracy in action.**

This concept is practical without additional expense or challenging laws, through schools-within-schools, diverse schools as clusters, team teaching, programmes-within-schools, open enrollment, or special school sites. Individual counselling assists students in selecting learning styles. Waivers from mandates are obtainable in the majority of states. The practicality is illustrated by choices among churches, synagogues, temples, and mosques representing many religious cultures. ***Learning alternatives are democracy in action.***

Programmes of choice change the education systems in communities. Schools no longer look, act, and test alike. Diverse styles and content replace central control. Curriculum, methods, resources, scheduling, staffing, facilities, structure, and calendars are among the categories that feature wide variations.

Students can experience democracy, accept responsibility, and make individual decisions. For many young people, if learning programmes are to be significantly different and thus potentially significantly better, student-centered environments must be created to provide:

- (1) opportunities for success each day by maximizing strengths while minimising weaknesses,
- (2) learning climates that promote growth of personal and social responsibility,
- (3) continuous twelve-month opportunities,
- (4) enrollment without waiting lists and lotteries,
- (5) curriculum options ranging from teacher-directed to personalised self-directed studies,
- (6) facility locations offering group activities as football, band, and carnivals,
- (7) participation in experimental programs for self-enhancement, research, or new designs,
- (8) re-allocation of human, fiscal, and physical resources to support invention,

Programmes of choice change the education systems in communities. Schools no longer look, act, and test alike.

- (9) attention to individual and societal cognitive, affective, and psychomotor goals,
 - (10) experiences contributing to the confluence of spirit, mind, and body,
 - (11) volunteerism in local, state, and world communities,
 - (12) structures where "everyone is a teacher, everyone is a learner,"
 - (13) self-selection of learning advisors and facilitators,
 - (14) acceptance of all programmes as "regular" without labelling, and
 - (15) concern for global dilemmas, paradigm shifts, and societal and educational futures.
- Learning alternatives exist to promote, explore, and support a wide variety of educational options for each student.**

9/04/03 Version

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The best of ... Flotsam and Jetsam

The 'one size fits all' educational disaster

"Almost every institution I have had contact with in my life has failed me, they have all expected me to fit them rather than they adapting to my needs and I no longer want any part in them. It's no longer to do with social capital - they could rebuild every school in the country and fund them like Eton with class sizes down to 3, and still we wouldn't send our kids ... of course at the moment schools are drugging children ... with Ritalin but that can't last - once a few schools and doctors have been sued for the use of untested drugs on children."

Mike Fortune-Wood www.home-education.org.uk

We need more restrictions?

"Necessity is the plea for every infringement of human freedom. It is the argument of tyrants, it is the creed of slaves."

William Pitt

Get yourself a plan

"Having attended a recent meeting on asset management planning, I realised I needed an asset management plan, a building management plan, and an accessibility plan which would be a part of our budget plan and our development plan which will, of course, include our literacy plan and our numeracy plan. Now, when we have a planning meeting to plan our plans, we plan to put all our plans into one overall plan and to take the advice of the DFES and plan to reduce our paperwork by having a paperwork reduction plan!"

P.S.Booley in *Times Ed. Supplement* 29th March 2002

The 'nothing' curriculum

"I was taught to show nothing, say nothing, feel nothing and question nothing."

Soldier speaking in the TV programme *Casualty*, (episode entitled '*Calm, Before the Storm*', 19/9/99)

Bubble-blowing therapy anyone?

"Last summer I spent a whole afternoon in our garden with our two-year-old blowing bubbles and discussing them in great detail - their colour, texture, direction of travel, and likely destiny. We made up stories about them, because as everyone knows, all bubbles are different even though they are borne equal. It's a great way to put the rest of the world into proper perspective. Who actually cares about the third way, the Tory party leadership, the directorship of the national theatre, digital revolutions and cyberspace? Blow a few bubbles, you know it makes sense." Playwright, Alan Plater in *Playgroup Network Richmond News*, Autumn 2001

Academies of bullying?

"Excluding bullies from schools won't make the slightest difference. The whole edifice of formal education is predicated on bullying, with its competitive league tables, and stark statistical measures of success. Not wanting schools to be academies of bullying is like saying the Nazis would have been sweet if it wasn't for the fascism ... it's school that makes everybody both bully and victim." A.A.Gill in the *Times*, 20th January 2002

Why schooling continues way past its sell-by-date?

"A long habit of not thinking a thing wrong gives it a superficial appearance of being right." Thomas Paine

(quoted in the *Observer*, 13.8.00)

How to be an undergraduate without debts

"The Open University is undergoing a boom as 18 year-olds discover they can study for a degree without going into debt ... Eight years ago around 1% of Open University students was 22 or under. Now the total is around 6,500 and rising - 5% of the institution's 100,000 undergraduates." *Guardian Education*, 5th Feb. 2002

The test of real intelligence

"How brainy is Britain? The BBC is giving us the chance to find out with a prime time IQ test. But if you're really intelligent you'll know the whole concept of IQ is discredited."

In the *Observer*, 17th Mar. 2002

Why pupils need to be stretched

Men who are above average height at the age of 16 earn more later in life, say University of Pennsylvania researchers, with an extra inch representing 1.7 percent to 1.8 percent extra in wages. *Guardian*, 26th Apr.02

Socialisation watch

A home schooling father was being interviewed by the local newspaper reporter, who asked him all sorts of questions about curriculum, schedules, athletics, and so forth. But, of course, after all this, the reporter had to ask THE question - "What about socialisation?"

The father replied, "We make sure he has EXACTLY the same level of socialisation as he would get if he were in public school."

The reporter asked, "how do you do that?"

The father said, "Once a week, I take him into the bathroom, beat him up, and steal his lunch!" (via Chris Shute.)

Leadership watch - it's a jazz thing

The current fashion of describing leadership in terms of the authoritarian model of an 'action man' or 'action woman' Contrasts with the democratic view. Dame Patricia Collarbone suggests a flexible model: "*Max De Pree likened leadership to jazz. For me this captures the essence of leadership and learning communities. Jazz bands are collegial. Their members learn from each other, follow each other, lead each other. They are passionate about what they do. They continually experiment, change the rules, take risks. And when it all works it thrills and excites the participants and the listeners*". (RSA

Journal 4/4, 1999)

This way to the killing fields

Perhaps one of the saddest pieces of news is the claim by the chairman of BAE Systems that his company is now the first choice of the UK's engineering graduates. Do our brightest youth really want to devote themselves to what he calls 'a prime contractor of the digital battlefield', i.e. A high-tech killing system? *CAAT News* 159, Jan 2000.

Bullycide

At least 16 children commit bullycide (suicide due to bullying) in UK every year. Due to misdiagnosis, it could be higher. 19,000 UK children attempt suicide every year. *Bullycide: Death at Playtime* by Neil Marr and Tim Field

Rude awakening (or, 'nappy days are here again')

A replica of Michelangelo's David now wears a white loin cloth after complaints by residents of Luke Alfred, Florida, when it was placed outside a local business.

The *Guardian* 26th April 2001

Educational Beachcomber

Little boxes ...

"In order to become certificated as a teacher of primary and middle school children nowadays you have to complete 851 objectives. I'll repeat that, so the fall nightmare can sink in. In order to teach children aged five to 13, you have to put 851 meaningless ticks in 851 stupid boxes. It is so utterly preposterous, so monumentally crass, that the whole steaming edifice should be dismantled this second. Not tomorrow, not next week, not at some vaguely specified time in the future. Now.

Ted Wragg in *Times Ed. Supplement*, 23rd Feb 2001

No more revolution

NOP Family is conducting a poll of the youth market for the Observer. *"Four out of five rate 'having a good time' and music as a 'most important to me'".* Designer clothes are more important than the environment, and making money rates higher than helping others. Far from rebelling against corporate success, youngsters cannot get enough of it. *"Young teens do not use politics, religion or class to express themselves; they speak a new language - consumerism."* 'They used to want a revolution. Now they just want money' in *The Observer*, 19th November 2000

The failing school system 1

"Schools are now beginning to fail on a breathtaking scale: they produce indifference to learning, fear of knowledge, unhealthy stress and cheating, and dysfunctional relationships in peer groups and across the generations ... Meanwhile education is like a patient who is getting sicker with each new prescription." Tim Badderley, Modern Languages Head, in the *Guardian* 6th June 2002

Suffocated on entry?

Many newly-qualified teachers say they are too terrified to try anything adventurous. They have been warned to stick like glue to qualifications and curriculum authority work schemes, no deviation, nothing so frivolous as a project. What are we doing to people? Here is the next generation, desperate to innovate, yet some are being suffocated on entry. No wonder nearly half of them are quitting within three years.

Ted Wragg in *Times Educational Supplement* 16.11.01

Socialisation watch

"Once in school, they'll learn to hate each other." This was the title of a report by David Hill on a new book by Cedric Cullingford entitled *Prejudice*, proposing that in theory prejudice has no place in the classroom, but in practice that is precisely where it breeds.

(report in *Guardian Education*, 3.10.00)

How many failing schools? Answer: all

Professor Guy Claxton concludes from his research that parents, teachers and other education professionals, practically without exception, believe that the school is doing a poor job of preparing young people for the demands of the future, and that currently mooted reforms are unlikely to improve the situation significantly. The breakup of the old certainties of job for life, a stable community and an agreed morality, requires a flexible, learning-based mentality that young people do not feel they possess and they feel let down by an education system that has peppered them with arcane activities instead.

RSA Journal 4/4 2001

Standards are rising fast (of cheating that is)

"When it comes to exam cheating, today's best documented culprits, by far, are primary teachers in charge of Key Stage 2 who have discovered innumerable ways to 'massage' their pupils results ... there were 270 reported SATs incidents last year, more than 90% up on the year before, and 11 schools had their results annulled.

"Compared to this, schoolchildren seem like models of virtue ... but students tell a different story. They say low-level cheating is now so commonplace that no one thinks twice about it ... Parents do their children's course work. University students download essays from the internet, postgraduates pinch other people's research ... In addition, both teachers and students understand very clearly that they are now being made to jump through a completely absurd amount of tests and exam hoops, not for their own benefit, but for the glory of the school and the Government. Given that, perhaps the only surprising thing about exam cheating is that there isn't ten times more of it."

Hilary Wilce in the *Independent* 11th July 2002

Standards of 'teaching to the tests' on the rise

Professor Dylan Wiliam says rising test scores demonstrate little more than teachers increasing ability to teach to the tests ... Professor Wiliam's report, commissioned by the association of teachers and lecturers ... adds to growing concerns that tests lead to 'skin-deep' learning, yet are used to judge pupils, teachers and schools ... The limitations of test reliability also mean that at least a third of the pupils could be awarded a higher or lower level than they should be.

Julie Henry, in *Times Educational Supplement* 30.11.01

School league tables on the scrap heap

School league tables have been variously described as 'a cancer' and 'educational pornography'. Northern Ireland has responded by declaring that tables will no longer be published in the province. More than 1,000 consultation responses showed a 75 percent majority opposed to them. Instead, schools will supply details of exam results and other information directly to parents on request.

A life of denial

"By teaching them at home we are denying them the life giving possibilities of getting beaten up in the playground, ignored in class, humiliated in the gym and reduced to tears on the pavement. They are not receiving the sensible knocks that fate has prepared for them. It is true that certain forms of training entail discomfort, but it never ceases to amaze me how keen

grown-ups can be on children suffering. May be it makes them feel a little better about the childhood mysteries that they once endured.

"There is only flaw in this argument: it is wrong. Miserable or frightened or bullied children learn no better or faster ... as to the endless warnings about our children being insufficiently socialised, they too have been proved wrong. Our children are perfectly at ease with other children as well as with adults and delighted to meet someone new. They have become neither withdrawal nor clannish."

Alan Wall in *The Times* 1st March 2000.

Sheeting it down?

I have just looked with horror at my eight-year old's schoolbooks, sent home as she entered Year 3. As a child I remember waiting in anticipation to show my parents the fruits of my labour. I couldn't wait to show the stories I'd written or pictures I had drawn with, on the whole an encouraging comment written at the bottom. There was no such excitement with my daughter as she thrust a dishevelled carrier bag at me. Gone were the lovely stories ... to be replaced with comments such as, *"where are your full stops?"* ... My worst fears were confirmed when looking on the back of yet another maths worksheet. It had been annotated as *"maths worksheet 136(b)"*! ... perhaps my youngest child, aged 6, summed it up when discussing what he did at school today by replying, *"well we didn't do anything for Father's Day if that's what you mean. I don't think we've got any worksheets on it!"* (letter by D. Vinsome in *TES* 14.7.00)

Back to the past?

According to *Changing Schools*, a report by the Scottish Council Foundation, schools are stuck in a Victorian time warp. Director, Graham Leicester, writes: *"While it is true that schools have undergone some changes over the years, they would still be the most familiar institutions to the Victorian time traveller. Schools were built, managed and run like factories and, by and large, they still are, right down to the clocking-on clock and the factory whistle. We still use a mass production model in which one size is supposed to fit all and in practice fits nobody perfectly."* (in *Schoolhouse Home Education News*, 6, Autumn 2000)

The nightmare called school

Nick Davies is too generous to Blunkett. What extra money there is goes on coercive policies no sane teacher wants - targeting, management consultants, abortive bids for extra funding, Ofsted, tests, tests, tests. The state school scene is a nightmare. (Letter, Bob Spooner, the *Guardian*, 13.3.00)

How to hinder performance

The fact is the targets don't help us get to where we want to be. Worse, they actually obviate the possibility by making people focus on the wrong things ... their use in a hierarchical system engages people's ingenuity in managing the numbers instead of improving their methods ... (targets) are imposed with authority, by people who are generally detached from the work being carried out ... the targets are a major cause of waste, consuming people's time in artificial activity and, worse, deflecting their attention from what they ought to be doing ... when their purpose has effectively become 'serve the hierarchy'

rather than 'improve the work' people get disheartened and demoralised. (John Seddon, in *'On target to achieve nothing'* in the *Observer*, 27.8.00)

Parent league tables?

"In Chicago, parents, as well as pupils are graded by schools on their performance. Parental Involvement Report Cards are being sent out, rating parents from A to D on everything from whether they have checked their children's homework, to getting them into class on time. Parents rated poorly receive home visits from school officials. Some parents called it an insult." The official response was "it is natural development of educational reform". In the TES, 15th December 2000.

No faith in Faith schools ...

"Afghanistan is what happens when you hand the government over to those kids at school who actually wanted to do RE. And yet back in Britain, we are increasing the role of religion in our schools. As church and state are being separated in Kabul, we all proposing that the next generation of Britons be educated in a more religious environment ... You'd think the government would have enough problems on its hands deciding what to do with all these Taliban leaders, without setting up new faith schools back home that'll be needing religious heads to run them all. Oh no, they wouldn't would they? Suddenly it all fits together ..."

John O'Farrell in the *Guardian*, 17/11/01

League table watch

The United Kingdom lies 55th in the Human Rights Index. In other words, there are 54 better countries to live in.

NEWS 27 Leadership

Educational Beachcomber

Learning Exchange: *Teaching Without Schools*

On Sunday 4th April, 20 educators met in Loughborough to exchange views on John Adcock's proposal for *Teaching Tomorrow* (Education Now Books, 2000).

John introduced the key principles of his vision for the 21st century: a highly-trained personal tutor who develops and monitors personal study programmes for each of 20 children in a 2-year age group; radically closer relationships between tutors and parents, with tutor supporting family education as a GP supports family health; 7 tutors making up a tutor panel, cooperating closely in student transition between tutor groups and sharing of resources; resources include community resource centres (old school buildings), field centres (for specialised learning, e.g. a converted farm for learning about agriculture) and an online national media library and interactive resources; total per capita costs no greater than current education expenditure.

Many of those present, perhaps all, themselves disillusioned with the mass-production model of current mainstream education, felt there was something special about John's vision of the personal tutor at the centre. Trusting relationships are central to effective learning, and can only be developed between individuals, so why do we persist with a mass model which invests so little in the development of individual relationships?

John explained why he thought his attempts to arouse interest in the proposal had met with only 'modest success': there is no popular desire to change schools since 'the nature of the society we live in obliges parents to view education in this way'. The drive towards economic growth requires parents to leave home for work and requires schools to 'child mind'.

Other reasons. It is not in the interests of elected politicians, elected every 4-5 years at most, to invest in the long term. Publishers will publish what's on the public agenda – today's public, not tomorrow's. And it is in the interests of teaching groups to protect the interests of their members – better hold on to existing 'teacher' jobs than face competition from a new breed 'tutor'.

John boldly asked: "*Is the whole notion of 'Teaching Children Without Schools' simply a non-starter?*".

After lunch four sub-groups were set up to challenge the proposed benefits of *Teaching Without Schools* for different stakeholders: 1) Children, 2) Parents, 3) Teachers and 4) Society. The final 45 minutes was plenary feedback.

There was considerable support for many of John's principles. Some comments were:

- Children want to be trusted to make choices about what they learn, how to assess their learning, and to take part in democratic decision-making about social activities/structures
- At present, children spend only 20% of their waking hours in school (the other 80% in and around their home)
- What is learned is more important than what is taught
- Mixed-age activities, e.g. family forums, help young and old people to learn from each other while enjoying themselves
- There needs to be a tacit admission some things are wrong with the existing school system
- The economic structure is changing: new working practices demand that people learn to be flexible.

Some participants dug deep to find and represent social and pedagogical problems with John's proposal, rather than the purely political barriers he had already identified.

- State-funded education delivery must be accountable. What would be the measures of *Teaching Without Schools* success, e.g. reduction in truancy, standardised test scores, reduction in crime? It may be difficult to agree on outputs which are measurable.
- Many parents work, and expect school to care for their child, during school hours. Will most parents accept that children are

not accompanied by a qualified adult for all of the time, and worry about 'stranger danger'?

- Wouldn't the community be concerned about anti-social behaviour by groups of students 'on the street'? (One experienced home-based educator countered that home-educated students, in their travels between learning resources, neither experienced threat from strangers nor got involved in anti-social behaviour. Someone else said that children given greater freedom are less inclined to abuse it.)
- Would *Teaching Without Schools* deliver what employers want? (A recent CBI survey says employers would prefer to stick with GCSEs than move to a diploma framework.)
- It would be important, but may be impossible, to pilot *Teaching Without Schools* activity simultaneously in different parts of the country
- There would be significant forces against change to a *Teaching Without Schools* system, e.g. the teaching unions.

Other issues were identified:

- Any new scheme is in danger of re-creating the problems of traditional schooling. *Teaching Without Schools* would need to stay close to learning models such as the Scouts, libraries, LETS schemes, early childhood centres.
- Who would arbitrate between the tutor panel and parent(s) in cases of parent/child dissatisfaction?
- The training of personal tutors – including a wide range of disciplines, e.g. sociology, psychology and pedagogy – could become a significant growth industry
- Who has main responsibility for a child's learning, the parent/child or the tutor?
- A number of government-led initiatives, current and planned, contain elements of *Teaching Without Schools*, e.g. Sure Start, Tomlinson Report, Remodeling the Workforce. Also, there is a significant growth in home-based educating.

The group agreed that to debate now what we would like our education system to look like, in 2020 and beyond, is important. Perhaps the next step in the debate is to seek from outside of the *Personalised Education Now* circle the best informed and fiercest critics of John's vision. Perhaps they will be found in central government, universities, business and parent groups. For my money, it is the accountants of state education whose detailed analysis we most need – especially considering the high cost of tutor education in the basic vision.

Only when the strongest critics are found will we know whether we are really banging our heads against a wall, and whether we should divert time and energy to furthering different, more realistic, reform. This was John's challenge to those of us who attended the learning exchange.

One thing seems certain. Unless we can agree what is fundamentally wrong with the vision outlined in John Adcock's *Teaching Tomorrow*, discussion about what is fundamentally right with it will run and run – maybe faster if today's school disaffection, with its personal and social costs, continues to grow.

Tom Bulman.

Personalised Education

The next publication in the Autumn, will be the first in the new series by *Personalised Education Now*. It will be called simply *Personalised Education* so reflecting the new name for the organisation. The format may change a little, but we hope you will enjoy this development.

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113 Arundel Drive, Bramcote Hills, Nottingham NG9 3FQ

Education Now is merging with the Centre for Personalised Education Trust (CPE). Membership of *Personalised Education Now* which is the trading name of CPE costs £25 per year. Members will receive

two Newsletters, two issues of a new publication, *Personalised Education*, and information about new books, Learning Exchanges etc.

Printed by Mastaprint Plus