Paths of Learning

Options for Families & Communities

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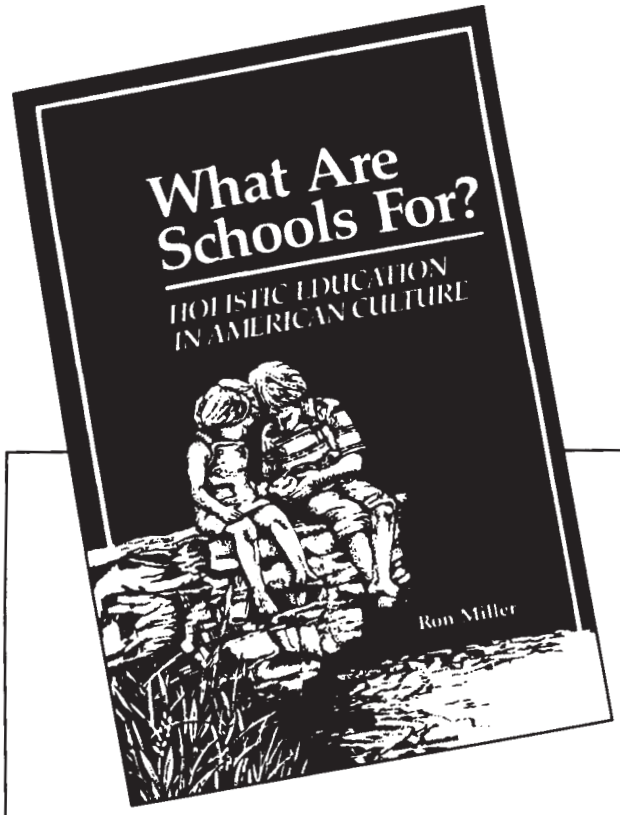

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Paths of Learning

Options for Families & Communities

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The Foundation for Educational Renewal, Inc., is a nonprofit organization set up in 1998 to publish *Paths of Learning* and promote alternative perspectives on teaching, learning, and human development. The Foundation is not affiliated with any institution, partisan interest group, or particular educational movement, but aims to stimulate dialogue and build bridges among diverse educators, parents, scholars, policymakers, and citizens who seek more democratic, holistic, student-centered forms of education. The founder and president is Ron Miller, a leading historian and commentator on alternative education. He can be contacted through *Paths Of Learning* at P.O. Box 328, Brandon, VT 05733, or by e-mail to <milleron@together.net>.

Manuscripts

As stated in the Mission Statement for *Paths of Learning* (see http://www.great-ideas.org/pathmiss.htm), the purpose of this journal is to "encourage an understanding of education as a means of nourishing holistic personal development and a sustainable, democratic, and peaceful community life." To this end, we welcome manuscripts on any aspect of teaching, learning, and mindful living, written from diverse points of view and encompassing a wide range of educational choices.

Except in unusual cases, manuscripts should not exceed twelve pages. Submit three copies of the manuscript to the Editor of *Paths of Learning*, Richard Prystowsky. Manuscript should be double-spaced printed in 12 point type. Submissions should be aimed at intelligent readers who, though interested in, might be unfamiliar with the subject matter being discussed. We also ask that authors demonstrate respect for persons holding alternative points of view, even if the authors passionately disagree with these views.

You may also fax your submission to the journal at 909-549-0516. If you wish to e-mail your submission, with or without attachments, please send your work to the editor at <rjprys@ix.netcom.com>. If you want your printed copies returned to you, please be sure to include a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Please include with your submission a brief autobiographical statement, as well as a short, descriptive summary of your article. If your article is accepted for publication, we will then ask that you send us a photo of yourself, as well as one or more photos that you would like for us to consider using in connection with your article. We will also ask that you send (by mail or e-mail attachment) a copy of the final accepted article after all revisions have been made and approved by the editor.

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Paths of Learning

Options for Families & Communities

Issue Number 3 Winter 2000

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Practicing Mindfulness in the Present Millennium

Dear Friends:

Depending upon the Y2K situation where you are, perhaps you are reading this magazine by candlelight, or by a lamp powered by a generator, or, anticlimactically, by an artificial light unaffected by any Y2K problems. Whatever your circumstance, welcome to our third issue of *Paths of Learning*, our first issue of the so-called new millennium.

As you scan the Table of Contents, you'll notice that a number of the pieces in this issue have to do with futuristic modes of teaching and learning: from Karen Davis-Brown's article "Weaving the Future," which focuses on Partnership Education as a cooperative, relational mode of teaching and learning, to Don Glines' essay on "imagineering" future learning projects, to Nancy Friedland's profile article on a charter school program devised by and geared towards homeschooling families, and so on. Other pieces, such as Mary Leue's review of John Taylor Gatto's as yet unpublished manuscript on the problems and problematics of American education, or Jerry Mintz's update article on the crisis facing Summerhill, teach us about problems past and present that must be addressed if we are to have a future of nurturing, caring, freedom-based, child-centered education.

And yet, as every piece in this issue attests, many alternative education-oriented, future-looking thoughts about education, more intensified as we near the end of one millennium and enter a new one, are already grounded in real, concrete, present practices of compassionate, freedom-based, child-centered learning. The venerable Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh teaches that the best way to take good care of the future is to take good care of the present moment. Many caring parents, teachers, and students in alternative education environments, or inspired by alternative education ideas, have demonstrated that this way of thinking accounts for much of the sum and substance of our teaching and learning endeavors.

Thich Nhat Hanh's point is crucial. For one

thing, the future is comprised only of present moments from the past (thus, if, for example, we don't take good care of our bodies now, we will not have healthy bodies in the future). In addition, if we forget to live mindfully in the present moment, we cannot be fully alive in the here and now, which, as Thich Nhat Hanh also teaches, is the only time in which one can be really, truly alive (we cannot be alive in the past, which is over, nor in the future, which has not yet arrived).

Being fully present, right here, right now, we will be truly here for our children and students in this, the present millennium. Indeed, we do not have to wait a thousand years to prepare for a millennial celebration, since a new millennium occurs every second. Thus, we need not spend our time worrying about the next millennium, adjusting our lives, our goals, our dreams, and our worries accordingly. Rather, we can practice a millennial celebration every second, every minute, every day of our lives.

With this understanding, let us, then, concentrate on the child who is before us, on the student who presents her work to us, looking to us for help, for love, for the guidance that only a mature, fully alive adult can give her. Let us embrace the spirit and heart of the young woman or young man who studies with us, who trusts us to guide her, to guide him, wholly and with compassion, and in whom we entrust our deepest, most profound teachings. Such teachings need not be weighty with profundity. Offered with love and our deep presence, often they are reflected in something as simple as the gleaming eyes of a child who discovers that chocolate syrup mixed into milk swirls and then blends with the milk.

To practice mindfulness with our children and students, we must first practice it for ourselves. But we need not live in a monastery to do so. We have an opportunity to practice mindfulness when we drive our cars, when we sit, when we brush our teeth—indeed, at any time. When we eat our meals, we need only look deeply into the gift of food that is before us in order to be fully present with it. When we are at work or at home, we need only make an agreement with some paths on which we walk regularly, promising them that, when we reach them, however harried and hurried we might otherwise be, we will walk with gentle, mindful steps, honoring the earth and our deep connection to it. Practicing our lives in such mindful ways, we will be well prepared for practicing mindful relationships with our children and students. Living fully in the here and now, we will bring them the gift of our true presence—which is really the gift that they want most from us, of course. In return, they will give us the gift of themselves, and a wonderful act of peaceful practice will be born in that moment.

Practicing mindfulness in this way, our children, our students, and we will be honoring life deeply and giving meaning to our collective, interdependent existence. In the spirit of this simultaneous path and goal, I offer you, our dear friends in the *Paths of Learning* community, a hope for freedom couched beautifully in the words of one of my teachers: "May we be free to express our love and compassion, our joy and serenity."

In peace and friendship,
Richard Prystowsky

Weaving the Future

Partnership Education for the 21st Century

BY KAREN DAVIS-BROWN

Karen Davis-Brown is Program Director for the Center for Partnership Studies.

The child in all of us loves stories that have joy, drama, danger, and, most of all, a happy ending. No story is more exciting than that of human evolution, from the depths of prehistoric civilizations to our own times. And, how we tell this story—what we include and what we leave out—communicates to the next generation what we consider to be valuable, normal, right, and true.

At the dawn of recorded history, there were human societies—such as the Minoans who lived on the island of Crete in the Mediterranean Sea—in which men and women shared the joys and responsibilities of leadership, caregiving, commerce, and religion in mutual and interdependent partnership. Then, a global shift took place in which the violent conquest of peaceful peoples, the authoritarian domination and commercialism of nature and the environment, and the subjection of women and children to the ownership of men came to be accepted as normal and inherent qualities of human nature and progress.

The last few hundred years of the present millennium have seen a gradual shift away from this "dominator" end of the human relationship continuum back toward "partnership." We have come a long way in this time, but we have a long way to go and much work to do before we can again claim to be partnership societies.

This is the story told by Dr. Riane Eisler in her groundbreaking book *The Chalice and the Blade*, published in 1987. Since its publication, Dr. Eisler and colleagues from around the world have worked together through the Center for Partnership Studies to raise awareness of this story and its implications for human relationships and cultures. In this regard, the Center for Partnership Studies' most recent programmatic initiative, "Weaving the Future," addresses the need for the development of partnership structures, processes, and contents in systems that serve young people.

Weaving a Partnership Future

We are all aware of the centrality of schools, childcare programs, and other, less formal, group venues to future generations' development of values, skills, and understanding. In her soon-to-be-released book, *Tomorrow's Children: A Blueprint for Partnership Education in the 21st Century*, Dr. Eisler provides a blueprint for planning and implementing a new, comprehensive approach to incorporating knowledge and experience related to partnership into young peoples' lives.

Partnership Education is taking place when

- both teacher and student knowledge are considered valuable input into the learning process, instead of the teacher's being considered the sole source of knowledge;
- the learning and teaching of subject areas and related skills are integrated and multidisciplinary, rather than fragmented and compartmentalized;
- gender balance is integrated into all aspects of the curriculum, leadership, and decision-making of everyday life;
- the multicultural reality of human experience is valued and tapped as a source for learning, instead of one culture's worldview being taught as the measure against which others are analyzed and ranked;
- the social and physical sciences emphasize humans' interconnection and interdependence with each other and with nature, instead of communicating an implicit value on conquest and control; and
- mutual responsibility, empathy, and caring are highlighted and modeled, rather than competition, one-upmanship, or an "us vs. them" mentality.

Most people would agree that these are important and valuable goals for any program, though some may argue that achieving them is unrealistic in today's traditional educational environment.

Barriers to Partnership Education

The challenges in reaching these goals are threefold:

1) *Many parents and others fear that children educated with too much "partnership" may be unable to achieve academic, social, and economic success as they get older and enter adulthood.*

Most of these fears are based in a false or uninformed mythology regarding the nature of partnership, as Dr. Eisler demonstrates in her work. For instance, the belief that Partnership Education devalues achievement, individual creativity, or leadership results from the inability to imagine these important aspects of human interaction when they are not couched in the domination of one person over another. However, a student can achieve either by acting out of her fear of being left behind or by responding to her desire to understand an area that she loves. The former illustrates achievement at the dominator end of the continuum; the latter, at the partnership end of the continuum.

Similarly, individual creativity and leadership can be perceived as "my way is better," or they can be treated as valuable gifts to be shared with the larger group. At the dominator end of the continuum, leadership is understood as one's having power over others. By contrast, in Partnership Education, everyone is perceived as creative and as bringing leadership for the strength of the larger group.

In fact, Dr. Eisler argues persuasively in *Tomorrow's Children* that, if schools are truly going to support the success of students entering the workforce in the twenty-first century, they need to update their definitions of success and their implementations of these definitions so that our schools reflect the theories and practices of Partnership Education. In the corporate sector, teamwork, thinking "outside the box," and hierarchies that support rather than suppress the actualization of workers are considered cutting-edge and are already in place in the most successful business venues. Surely, schools can follow suit, developing and modeling complementary programs and curricula accordingly.

2) *There is a constant personal challenge, both within ourselves and in relationship with others who believe in Partnership Education, to confront the habits and subconscious investments in domination that still live in us and the institutions we hold dear (particularly when they are brought to light by the children in our lives!).*

In most of us, these lingering dominator habits and attitudes play out chiefly in the hidden subtext of gender relationships and role expectations. Socially constructed perceptions of what it means to be male and female are developed early in life and are absorbed in relationships with caregivers upon whom we depend for physical, emotional, and psychological survival. Therefore, our understanding of who we are as females and males—and what this understanding means in terms of our value and roles in human society—provide a largely subconscious foundation for what we think is normal, right, and true. Since many adults (including those who work with

children and adolescents) grew up in families and communities in which the dominator worldview was in place, we often have difficulty recognizing when we are acting out the rigid roles and relationships that became habits long before we became acquainted with partnership approaches to life. Supporting each other in consistently and lovingly identifying these "blind spots" is an ongoing, humbling, important aspect of our work.

At an even deeper level, a dominator worldview teaches one at an early age that, if two things are different, then one must be superior and the other inferior—what in Partnership Education is called "ranking." This "law" seems to apply to everything from a piece of candy to people—being bigger is better than being smaller, being thin is better than being thick, being white is better than being brown, being rich is better than being poor, and so on.

In Partnership Education, ranking is replaced by "linking," so that no inherent difference in value is attached to differences in characteristics. Therefore, diversity can be honored in all aspects of humanity and life together. To understand and practice linking in ways that help young people learn partnership language, values, and actions so that they perceive themselves, others, and nature as equally valued and valuable rather than as inferior or superior—that is indeed the challenge.

3) *It is sometimes difficult to visualize what Partnership Education "looks like" for different age groups or topic areas and in relation to other educational strategies and materials.*

We all know that Partnership Education in a preschool setting will look different from Partnership Education in a high school classroom. As the Center for Partnership Studies and its Weaving the Future partners pioneer forward, we are exploring together what it means to develop curricula that (a) meet students' needs (b) in a developmentally appropriate way, (c) considering their personal experience in relationship to the Partnership/Dominator Continuum, so that they (d) develop partnership knowledge, skills, and values.

When examining existing resources using the Partnership/Dominator Continuum as an analytical tool, one notices quite clearly that major gaps still exist in educational and literary materials that comprehensively and cohesively convey partnership principles. This problem is partially due to the current trend simply to "add on" partnership themes to curricula such as "Women's Studies," "African American Week," or "Peace Day," instead of integrating partnership into the central structure, process, and content of each group's work each and every day. Because authentic partnership materials are still so scarce, those who use partnership as the touchstone for all their work with young people must develop their own materials as they go along.

The other aspect of this third challenge is that, due to its inherently collaborative nature, Partnership Education will never come out of a cookbook or have only one "look." Every class every year will develop organically, as students and teachers develop and achieve shared individual and group academic, social, and spiritual goals. Thus, there is no simple and clear formula for Partnership Education. As is the case with all aspects of human interaction, Partnership Education demands flexibility and joint creativity.

Weaving the Future Partners

Weaving the Future currently has six partners with whom it is working to develop diverse models and prototypes that operationalize partnership work with young people. These projects involve the direct development of curriculum, as well as training and technical assistance.

These collaborators are

- ***Bright Horizons/Family Solutions***, a national childcare firm that serves a variety of constituents, with whom CPS is developing nonviolence and leadership training for preschool staff;
- ***The School in Rose Valley***, a private elementary school in the Philadelphia area, whose work with the Center for Partnership Studies integrates Service Learning and Partnership Education into the core of the curriculum offered in participating classrooms;
- ***New Moon Publishing***, a Minnesota-based organization that publishes *New Moon*, an award-winning, bi-monthly magazine with an editorial board comprised of 8- to 14-year-old girls;
- ***The Nova Project***, a public charter high school in Seattle, Washington, whose student/staff/alumni team has developed and is now teaching and testing a systems course on biological and cultural evolution;
- ***The University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning***, which co-sponsors short-term training opportunities for teachers and others who work with young people; and
- ***The California State University Monterey Bay Institute*** for Field-Based Teacher Education, where a Masters in Education Program with a specialization in Partnership is being developed for those already working in the field.

Each partnership involves the development of materials and activities that meet the specific needs of the students, teachers, and organizations involved. These

resources are based on the guidelines and resources provided in *Tomorrow's Children*.

Among the tools provided by Dr. Eisler in her forthcoming book are a Curriculum Loom and Tapestry. The warp, or vertical threads, of the tapestry is comprised of prehistoric and historical epochs from the development of the universe to "The Partnership or Dominator Future." The woof, or horizontal threads, is a comprehensive listing of curriculum subject areas, such as life sciences, physical education, and art & music. The "cross-stitchings" of the Learning Tapestry are woven of various Partnership characteristics, including multiculturalism, gender balance, and the use of the Partnership/Dominator Continuum as an analytical tool. Together, these three types of threads weave together to create Partnership content, structure, and process.

The materials and activities developed by partners applying the tools in the book are then documented for dissemination to other interested groups, along with the process that each partnership used in developing course content. This two-part "product" is subsequently made available to other educators and service providers for testing, adaptation, and application in their own programs' settings. The process then begins again, with the resulting "product" made available to others for use, along with the original curricula and process, so that the cycle may begin yet again.

We are now at the beginning of creating what we plan to be a "snowball effect" in the development of Partnership Education materials. In a few years, we will have a much better idea of what Partnership Education can look like, in terms of both the work being done in the classroom and the ability to assess its impact on student values, skills, and relationships.

The Time is Now

Dr. Eisler's urgency for the expansion of Partnership Education is grounded in decades of research and observation of the human condition, as well as in an unrelenting optimism regarding our shared future. The Weaving the Future project will build on the knowledge and hope generated by her work to facilitate the development of partnership structure, process, and content with a wide spectrum of age groups and types of programs.

Children have only the images, reflections, materials, and tools that those around them provide. It is our responsibility to provide the threads of partnership, so that they can join us in weaving the future.

The Cultural Transformation Continuum

The Dominator Model ←	→ The Partnership Model
Values and supports:	**Values and supports:**
domination of one sex over the other	male and female equality
fragmentation of one's life, to minimize dissonance	integration of all aspects of one's life and growth
manipulation of power for gain	democratic relationships at all levels
exploitation of the environment	subjective, mutual relationship with the environment
control of those who are different from oneself and one's group	equitable treatment of those different from oneself and one's group
suppression of emotional needs	respectful, mutual expression of emotional needs
fear-based self-centeredness	empathy-based spirituality and ethic
the development of "brains and brawn" at the expense of other aspects of self	developmentally appropriate settings, supporting the whole person
possession of those in one's care	responsibility for wellbeing of those in one's care
constricting children to adult requirements	nurturing children's unique potentials and differences

Reconstructing Education

I want to begin by briefly outlining the basic differences between what I have called the partnership and dominator models, how I came to see them, and why I so passionately want to bring the partnership model into education.

The journey of exploration that led to my discovery of the configurations I named the partnership and dominator models is rooted in my childhood. I needed answers to questions many of us have asked: questions about human society and human possibilities.

As a refugee child from Nazi Austria, I found that these questions had a particular immediacy for me. I saw my father brutalized by Gestapo men and dragged away. I also saw my mother stand up to these men, demanding that they let my father go, risking her life, shouting that what they were doing was wrong. And I saw that, miraculously, my father was returned to us, and we were able to escape my native Vienna.

In my child's mind, I tried to make sense of all this. As time went on, I began to ask questions. Why are people cruel? Why do they hurt and kill one another? If this is really, as we are often told, just human nature, why isn't everyone like that? Why are some people caring and peaceful? What pushes us in one direction or the other? And what can we do to affect this?

My formal research began many years later, after a stint as a social scientist at the Rand Corporation's Systems Development Division, after law school, after marriage and two children, and after the omnivorous consumption of information from a huge range of fields—from sociology, anthropology, history, psychology, and systems science to archeology, mythology, literature, evolutionary studies, and the arts.

A Journey of Discovery

Gradually, I began to glimpse patterns, connections, as if the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle were coming together. I was by now drawing from a very large database. I was looking at the whole of human history, including prehistory. I was looking at both the so-called public sphere of economics and politics and the private sphere of intimate parent-child and gender relations. I was deliberately including data about both halves of humanity: both women and men.

What I found is that underneath the many differences in societies throughout human history—differences in geographical locations, time periods, religions, economics, politics, levels of technological development—are two basic possibilities for structuring our relations with one another and our natural environment. There were no names to describe this discovery so I had to coin new terms. Yet I did not want to use terms that were arcane; I wanted terms that would immediately convey some sense of the two contrasting social configurations I was seeing.

The four core elements of one of these configurations are an authoritarian top-down social and family structure, rigid male-dominance, a high level of fear and built-in violence and abuse (from child and wife beating to chronic warfare), and a system of beliefs, stories, and values that makes this kind of structure seem normal and right. Since rankings of domination—man over woman, race over race, religion over religion, nation over nation, man over nature—define this way of structuring relations, I called it the dominator model.

At the other end of the spectrum were societies orienting to a very different configuration. The four core elements of this configuration are a more democratic and egalitarian family and social structure, gender equity, a low level of institutionalized violence and abuse (as there is no need for fear and force to maintain rigid rankings of domination), and a system of beliefs, stories, and values that supports and validates this kind of structure as normal and right. After much pondering, I chose the term partnership model to describe this template for structuring relations.

My first book deriving from this research was *The Chalice & The Blade: Our History, Our Future*. It traced the cultural evolution of Western societies from prehistory to the present in terms of the underlying tension between these two basic alternatives for organizing how we think and live. It also outlined the new macrohistorical analysis I called cultural transformation theory, proposing that shifts from one model to the other are possible in times of extreme social and technological disequilibrium; that there is strong evidence of such a shift during our prehistory; and that in our time of massive technological and social dislocation another fundamental shift is possible—to a world orienting more to partnership rather than domination.

My findings show that we have the power to create for ourselves the reality we yearn for. Indeed, sensing the partnership possibilities for our lives and our children's future, many of us are today questioning assumptions that were once considered unquestionable. We are rejecting the inevitability of war, injustice, and the dominator course that decimates, pollutes, and destroys our natural habitat in the name of the once hallowed "conquest of nature." We are learning that the war of the sexes is also not inevitable, that women and men can live and love in partnership. We are searching for a morality and spirituality that no longer

BY RIANE EISLER

Riane Eisler is the co-founder of the Center for Partnership Studies in Pacific Grove, California, and the author of the acclaimed The Chalice and the Blade.

directs us to an afterlife for better things or instills in us fear of angry deities, but recognizes the divine in that which makes us fully human: our great capacity to love and to create.

Because many of us are today searching for paths that can take us and today's and tomorrow's children into a future guided by partnership rather than domination, I was invited to many places to speak about my work. I lectured at universities, wrote for many publications, and was asked to do educational consulting for both public and private schools.

More and more, I began to think of systemic educational change. When I taught university classes, I had experimented with what I now saw were partnership methods. I had also given a great deal of thought to how the structure of schools does not encourage partnership in their top-down administrative hierarchies, and that many grading methods encourage the formation of dominator mindsets. Most jarring, however, were the conclusions I reached about what the curriculum content, much of the old educational canon, was actually instilling in the minds of students as knowledge and truth.

I began to think of writing this book. I have been writing it for five years. I write it with a tremendous sense of urgency, because in our time of mounting environmental, economic, and political crises all the world's children are at risk. At the same time, I see in our children the hope for the future.

Nurturing Children's Humanity

At the core of every child is an intact human. Children have an enormous capacity for love, joy, creativity, and caring. Children have a voracious curiosity, a hunger for understanding and meaning. Children also have an acute inborn sense of fairness and unfairness. Above all, children yearn for love and validation and, given half a chance, are able to give them bountifully in return.

In today's world of lightning-speed technological, economic, and social flux, the development of these capacities is more crucial than ever before. Children need to understand and appreciate our natural habitat, our Mother Earth. They need to develop their innate capacity for love and friendship, for caring and caretaking, for creativity, for sensitivity to their own real needs and those of others.

In a time when the mass media are children's first teachers about the larger world, when children in the United States spend more time watching television than in any other activity, children also need to understand that much of what they see in television, films, and video games is counterfeit. They need to understand that violence only begets violence and solves nothing, that obtaining material goods, while necessary for living, is not a worthy end in itself no matter how many commercial messages to the contrary. They need to know that suffering is real, that hurting people has terrible, often lifelong, consequences no matter how many cartoons and video games make mayhem and brutality seem normal, exciting, and even funny. They need to learn to distinguish between being hyped up and feeling real joy, between frantic fun and real pleasure, between healthy questioning and indifference and cynicism.

If today's children are to find faith that is grounded in reality, they need a new vision of human nature and our place in the unfolding drama of life on this Earth. If they are to retain their essential humanity, they need to hold fast to their dreams, rather than give in to the cynicism and me-firstism that is today often considered "cool." They need all this for themselves, but they also need it for their children, lest they raise another generation X, a generation struggling in this uncertain time to find identity and purpose and all too often becoming lost.

For today's children to escape this, they need intensive support, a clear sense of human possibilities, and the tools to make this vision reality—if not in their generation, in the next. One of the greatest and most urgent challenges today's children face relates to how they will nurture and educate tomorrow's children. Therein lies the real hope for our world.

I passionately believe that if we give a substantial number of today's children the nurturance and education that enables them to live and work in the equitable, nonviolent, gender-fair, environmentally conscious, caring, and creative ways that characterize partnership rather than dominator relations, they will be able to make enough changes in beliefs and institutions to support this way of relating in all spheres of life. They will also be able to give their children the nurturance and education that we are today learning makes the difference between realizing, or stunting, our great human potentials.

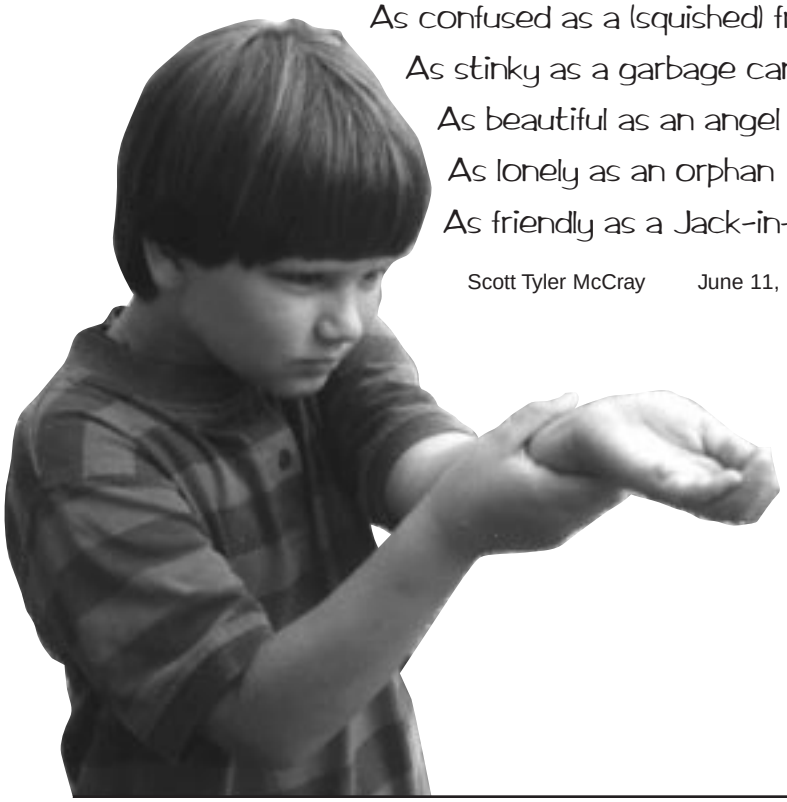
Lori McCray is a writer, musician, and preschool teacher. She is the mother of eight-year-old Scott, who shares her love of words.

Lori McCray ...a mother's love for her son.

As Quick as a Cricket

As quiet as a goldfish
As loud as a motorcycle
As soft as a flower
As hard as a rock
As wiggly as a worm
As still as a stick
As shy as a buttercup
As brave as a soldier
As smart as a scientist
As confused as a (squished) frog
As stinky as a garbage can
As beautiful as an angel
As lonely as an orphan
As friendly as a Jack-in-the-Box.

Scott Tyler McCray June 11, 1999



Fly Away Home

You,
my son,
will fly away
from me.

Above, beyond,
and over me.
Away . . .

I watch you
from a
window
in my soul
that only
parents
know.

Someday,
when you have
taken flight
and
I no longer
see your
face

I pray the
gentle winds
that
brought you
here to me
will guide
you
safely
home.

(Scott turned eight on October 4, 1999.)

Passing Through

For my son, Scott Tyler, in appreciation of his almost eight years...

You are
the gift
that I give
to my
Self.

You have lived
inside me
like no
other.

You have
known me
so completely
I have seeped
inside your
skin.

Passing through
the center
of my
being,

learning
your way
towards
freedom,

emerging
from the
safety
of my shadow—

you search
for your
own
light.

Protection

If I was
a lion
and you were
my cub,
I would roar
with all my
might
should any
harm
befall
you.

If I was
a duck
and you
were my
duckling,
I would hide you
under my wing
until the water
was safe again.

If I was a cat
and you were
my kitten,
I would scratch
and claw and bite
'til the intruder
ran away.

If I was a fox
and you were
my pup,
I would
dig a hole
and pull you in—
hold you close
to my heart,
until the
scary part
was over.

If I was
your mother,
and you were
my son...

A Way To Read

BY
AMANDA SARI WOOLFSON

Amanda Woolfson is 12 years old. She lives with her mom, dad, younger sister Kenda, golden retriever Murphy and big white cat Doodles. They live in Riverside, California. She really enjoys ballet.

My way to read is a special way to read. I read with my Gramma. I go to my Gramma's house five days a week for two hours. At times my Gramma reads to me, and at times I read to my Gramma. Every two weeks my aunt's one-year-old pug, Fuj, comes to visit my Gramma. Fuj always sleeps on my lap when Gramma reads.

We read for about thirty to forty minutes. The rest of the time we practice piano or study French. All the subjects are covered sometime during the two hours. Reading English helps my French. A lot of the words are similar in both languages. Example: foundation and fond. If there are difficult and new words we discuss, explain or look the words up. By sounding the word out orally, I often can understand the word. With reading it silently that does not happen.

The books we read are selected by my Mom. She gets ten to twelve books. Then my Gramma and I choose by interest. My favorite books are *The Gypsy Game* and *Cat Running*, both by Zilpha Keatly Snyder. Nancy Farner's book *The Ear, The Eye and The Arm* is weird so we do not know if we will finish it. Although once we have started a book, we have never not read it. One book we read called *Holes* by Louis Sachar is a horrifying story about how unfairly somebody can be treated.

However, from the one book we found horrifying we learned a great deal. That will probably be true about *The Ear, The Eye and The Arm* as well.

Sometimes we read more than one book at a time. Now, besides *The Ear, The Eye and The Arm*, we are also reading *The Railway Children* by Edith Nesbit— a fascinating combination. The first book takes place in Zimbabwe in the year 2194. The setting of the second book is England at the beginning of the 20th century.

I should say that whenever we read English, we drink peach tea and eat chocolate-covered marshmallow cookies. In the winter the tea is warm. In the summer we have iced tea. Can you think of a more pleasant way to learn to read?

This essay originally appeared in the October 1999 issue of the California HomeSchooler, *Vol. 7, no. 5.*

To Our Young Readers: We would like to hear from others of you about your own experiences with reading. If you are over twelve, please send your material to our Teen and Young Adult Editor, Samara Miles. If you are twelve or younger, please send your material to our Youth Editor, Jacob Miles-Prystowsky. Both can be reached at moonsong@ix.netcom.com. If you don't have e-mail, you may submit your material to either Samara or Jacob c/o *Paths of Learning*, 420 McKinley Street, Suite 111-437, Corona, CA 92879-6504.

When is a School Not a School?

BY NANCY FRIEDLAND

Nancy Friedland has homeschooled her 15- and 12-year-old children for nine years. She coordinates a charter school homeschooling program, and tries to be a writer and a musician. She lives with her husband, Alan Moses, and children in Santa Barbara, CA.

My family has been homeschooling since 1990, when my oldest child turned five. We made this decision after looking into all of the various school options, reading about education in general, and about homeschooling in particular. Finally, homeschooling made sense mainly because our daughter was learning well and was excited about learning—why change what we were doing? We arranged our work lives around having the children at home. We were friends with another family who was choosing homeschooling as well, so we had some companionship in the effort, and we began to meet other homeschooling families.

Homeschooling has been a gratifying, enriching, and empowering experience for the whole family. Our style is a form of homeschooling known as "unschooling": child-initiated, child-led education that stems from the child's needs and interest in learning, supported by parents through discussion, providing supplies and support as needed or asked for by the child. Although we sometimes offer or suggest ideas and alternatives, the child's choice and initiative are honored. The result of our efforts? I see that my 15- and 12-year-old are smart, interesting, capable, caring, and, yes, educated.

We homeschooled independently for three years and were part of an active, burgeoning, local support group of homeschooling families of young children. Social needs were easily met, educational networking was rampant, parent support plentiful, and shared childcare, when needed, available.

Then, in 1993, a group of Santa Barbara families and teachers interested in alternative education started a K-3 charter school, and asked if we homeschoolers would like to join them in order to create a program for homeschoolers in conjunction with their daily classroom program.

"What is a Charter School?" we asked.

A charter school bill had just passed in California, intended to help teachers and parents try some innovative ideas in education and create publicly funded schools with as few restrictions as possible. (Some of the political motivation involved the attempt to avoid a voucher system.) While the funding for charter schools is much the same as is the funding for any regular public school in the state, the Education Code has been set aside, with the exception of health, safety, and discrimination requirements. The structure, curriculum, style, and the manner in which funds are used are decided by the school rather than by its sponsoring school district or the state. Many different kinds of charter schools evolved throughout the state as a result of this bill, and now, 6 years later, there are about 160 charter schools in California. As the charter school movement grows and develops, it is also continuously working out various problems that arise for the state or for the schools, evolving into a system that appears to be here for a while. The various charter schools are diverse in their educational philosophies, targeted populations, structure, goals, and physical aspects. There are alternative schools, back-to-basics schools, continuation schools, bilingual schools, arts-based schools, distance-learning schools, schools for homeschoolers, and more. Some combine these ideas in various ways. About 60% of the California charter schools are new start-ups, and about 40% are conversions from existing public schools. The people involved in creating a charter school, be they teachers, parents, administrators, or entrepreneurs, write a charter that spells out their philosophy, structure, and desired outcomes. If the charter is approved, the state then grants operational status to the school. The school must find a school district that will sponsor them and then maintain a legal and financial relationship with that school district. This relationship also varies, depending upon the needs and wishes of both sides.

"Why would we want to join?" we asked.

When the newly formed Santa Barbara Charter School contacted our support group of homeschoolers to see if any of us might be interested in being involved, we were quite tentative. For most of us, our independent homeschooling status was quite satisfactory. This group of homeschoolers represented an array of homeschooling styles that varied in approach and amount of structure but that, as a whole, leaned toward a more child-led unschooling philosophy. As a group, we were cautious of getting involved in the public school system and

mistrustful of being pulled into something that might curtail our freedoms as independent homeschoolers.

As we studied the situation, we found that the charter written by these teachers and parents was based on their philosophy that children learn all of the time and in many places besides the classroom. They felt that including homeschoolers would add to the diversity of educational styles in the school, support parents who choose alternative forms of education, and be economically advantageous for the school.

The possibilities intrigued us. The children could have a day of special activities, the opportunity to do activities with a larger group, access to a more diverse population, access to different materials, ideas, and adults, and access to school-only activities. The parents would get a little time off, and the school would provide and pay for enrichment activities.

In addition, some of the children—my own daughter, for one—were displaying an interest in attending school. Many homeschooling children are curious about school, since most children attend school—nationwide, homeschoolers comprise only about 2% of the student population. Homeschooled children might want to participate or engage in activities (such as team sports, science lab classes, or theater classes) in which they've had difficulty participating or engaging in the community. They might want to see how they measure up, or want to

experiment with more structure or diversity, or want to have "recess," or want to make more friends, or even want to ride a school bus. Since most public schools are not interested in allowing part-time attendance to meet some of those needs (though this is changing in some areas), here was an opportunity to provide some children with enough school to assuage their curiosity and still allow them to continue to homeschool.

"Wouldn't there be all kinds of requirements and constraints and controls?" we asked.

Rather than trying to make us fit into an already designed program, this charter school was willing to give us the freedom to design a program that would fit in with our current homeschooling styles and patterns. The state was allowing us to create a program free of the confinements we had rejected. Perhaps, we thought, in an effort to explore alternate forms of education, the state really would allow experiments as radical as allowing homeschoolers to participate in the schools. If not, we'd leave.

The more we learned about the charter school, the more we liked, and the more comfortable we felt. We met with representatives from the school over a number of months, defining purposes, clarifying the needs of the two groups, trying to find common ground. Ultimately, their teachers and parents were busy creating their own classroom-based program and didn't have much time for us. The task of creating a home-based program for the school fell to the homeschooling families. We then embarked on creating a program that uniquely met our own needs and desires.

"How do we go about creating a program?" we wondered.

We started by contacting various school districts with home-based programs around the state to see if there were any models from which we might draw ideas. We asked what worked and what didn't work, what they were required to do, what they did in addition to that which was minimally required, and what they had learned along the way. We also brainstormed various ideas of our own. We designed a reporting form that would meet the state and school district's need for information and fit within the school's parameters for acceptable reporting of information while still protecting the independence of the homeschoolers and keeping documentation to a minimum. Although we found other programs with more elaborate structures, we could find no laws that required more documentation or reporting than that which we offered to provide, so we went with what little was asked for. As a charter school, without the gargantuan list of requirements spelled out in the Education Code, we had a great deal of latitude in our design and prerequisites. This meant that we could create something that would be meaningful and useful to our families but would not bog us down in the kind of educational bureaucracy that we had rejected.

"What did we finally put in place that was useful and meaningful?" you might be wondering.

We named ourselves the HomeBased Partnership (HBP). For the homeschoolers, we would sponsor group activities and specialist-led classes and would provide a place to do messy projects—a classroom of our own with a community center kind of atmosphere. We would do some cooperative activities with the class-based students as well. In keeping with our homeschool philosophy, attendance was not compulsory, nor was participation in any of the activities. Full-time homeschooling qualified, for school attendance record keeping purposes, as full-time attendance.

"But how," we wondered, "do we move this idea from paper to reality?"

I go into some detail about our beginnings because the difference between our program now and what we started with is phenomenal. A program of this nature is an organic thing. The

program's growth reflects the goals and commitment of the parents involved, the needs of the school, and the available resources. Our program was directly influenced by a limited amount of staff, physical space, and equipment. The school, in these beginning days, had no administrators, no bookkeeper, and little office help. Both programs were winging it on a daily basis! The paperwork for individual children was the responsibility of each parent. Doing the minimal paperwork for the program in general, hiring the specialists, and keeping track of the accounts were the jobs of a parent volunteer—namely, me. However, it was truly a cooperative effort to bring everything together and keep the program going.

The physical space that the school district gave our charter school was an unused corner of a junior high campus. The school was comprised of one small building, whose four classrooms had movable walls. The "playground" was a small dirt field; the office, a closet.

HBP used one of the four classrooms as our site. Our classroom also served as the school's multi-purpose room: art activities room, meeting room, after-school day care room, office annex. Because it was used for so many other things, we had to time our activities so that we could use the room when it was available, but, even then, we experienced steady interruptions. Nevertheless, we persevered. We started with one four-hour day per week. Due to the size of the room and the limited activities we could offer, we enrolled 12 children, ages 5-9 (to match the classroom-based program, which started as a K-3 program).

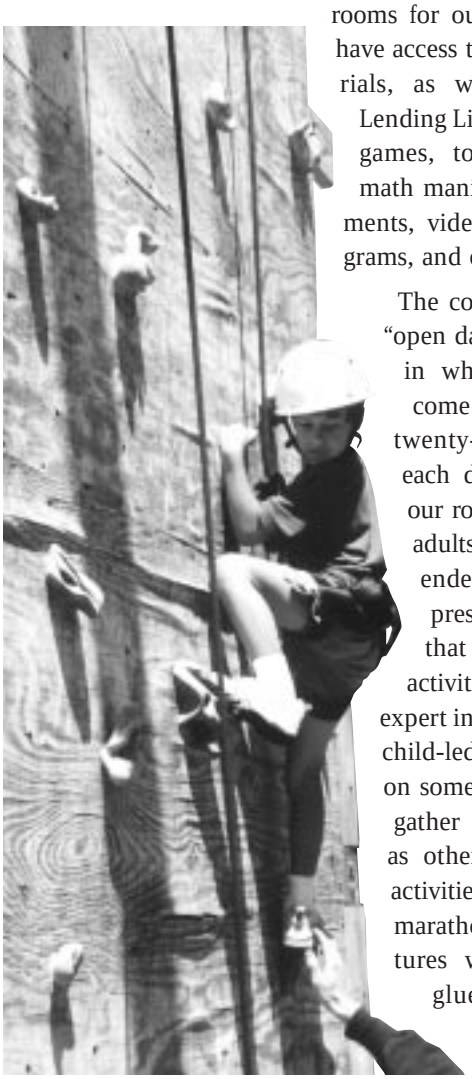
The kindergarten teacher was our sponsoring teacher; however, since she was not available in the mornings, we built a program that began at the school's morning recess time, giving the children from both programs some time to greet each other and play on the playground. A specialist then came to teach a class. These specialists were experts from the community, discovered by the parents, whom we hired to teach in the arts and sciences or to direct sports activities. A parent was on duty for the day to act as aide, coordinator of the day's activities, and an advocate for our children. The parents rotated that duty every week. Then came lunchtime recess, and the school's kindergarten teacher now became the HomeBased Partnership teacher. Our group was very comfortable with this teacher—an ex-homeschooler and friend—as well as with her style of teaching and the activities that she wanted to do with the children. She led a circle time during the next half hour, sharing questions and concerns, doing activities that helped facilitate the children's involvement in school projects, or leading activities such as singing, telling stories, and the learning of sign language. Following our time with her, the two groups, class-based and home-based, came together for group activities. The teachers and parents presented choices of afternoon activities for the entire group, including art and science projects, woodworking, games, storytelling, sports, music, computer play, and so on. The children chose an activity and then formed groups accordingly, working with these groups until it was time for everyone to go home.

This arrangement worked well because it both created a satisfying program for all of the children and allowed each group to maintain its own integrity and independence. The homeschoolers would bring fresh enthusiasm and spirit to the school each week. The school pursued its independent daily activities, adjusting minimally to the small influx of homeschooled children during the afternoon activity time. The slightly additional burden for the teachers created by the extra children was easily offset by the additional state funding generated by the attendance of the homeschooled children—funding that ultimately helped this fledgling school stay afloat. The

homeschoolers continued with their independent schedule of activities during the week, taking on the minimally additional responsibility of documenting those activities. Our homeschooling styles and formats did not need to change to reflect our new legal status; we continued homeschooling according to our own dictates and needs. Certainly, a lot of credit for the success of our program was due to having had a wonderful teacher/school founder, who as a strong advocate of homeschooling respected our families for what we were doing and provided a caring atmosphere at the school.

What does the program look like now?

Six years later, the HomeBased Partnership has 72 children (38 families) ages 5-14, and a long waiting list (about 50 children). There are three HBP staff members, who are responsible for all aspects of running the program: holding open days, overseeing elective classes, organizing field trips, holding meetings, interfacing with the school staff and school district as needed, and overseeing the legal and financial aspects of the program. We currently offer about twenty-five hours per week of optional activities for children and have two large classrooms for our exclusive use. We also have access to a vast array of art materials, as well as to an extensive Lending Library that includes books, games, tools, building materials, math manipulatives, musical instruments, videos, tapes, computer programs, and other learning materials.



The core of our program is two "open days," each five hours long, in which children of all ages come to be with friends (about twenty-five different children each day), use the materials in our room, play games, and have adults available to support their endeavors. An art specialist is present for part of the day so that children wishing to do art activities will have access to an expert in the field. Each week, new child-led activities emerge. Based on someone's idea, these activities gather energy, grow, and change as other children join in. Such activities include block-building marathons, the building of structures with cardboard and hot glue guns, game tournaments, the staging of puppet shows, or all-day soccer games. New friendships and alliances are born on a weekly basis as children discover common interests and talents. Learning takes all forms: a parent or child brings in a project for others, children are taught by peers, children share their skills, adults are taught by children, children initiate their own learning and investigating. Most anything goes; the activities are encouraged and supported by staff and parents. Normally, the school resembles more community center than typical school. Because the children are learning at home most of the week (average attendance is about one and a half days per week), they bring their unique learning styles into the school rather than having a specific, traditionally school-based style imposed upon them.

An important component of the whole program is that we offer time for child-led activities as well as for optional specialist-led classes. All of our offerings, whether large-group or small-group oriented, are intended for multi-age groupings: some activities cover our whole age span, 5-14, whereas others are aimed at a smaller age range. Our classes are taught by a variety of specialists hired on the basis of their passion for and expertise in their fields, their respectful approach to working with children, and their ability to handle the freethinking and creative approaches to learning that our children usually demonstrate. We have a staff member and parent present at all classes. An example of our elective classes from last year include singing, biology, animation, astronomy, creative writing, drumming, Orff music, Japanese culture, electricity, orienteering, band, gymnastics, entomology, Spanish, and every kind of visual art. Our specialists love teaching with us because the children are so responsive. HBP classes are not compulsory; the children choose to be there. Many of the classes develop out of the children's interests. That way, there is respect and validation for children's choices. Even within more structured classes, the children often choose to do things their own way. We generally re-hire the specialists who are open to this form of creativity. Teachers who don't fit in aren't re-hired. We continually develop new classes or hire specialists whom families suggest, or we develop classes that emanate from staff observations of the children's interests.

Children bring their unique learning styles into the school rather than having a specific, traditionally school-based style imposed upon them.

When the older children (about age ten and up) began asking for more structured activities, we started "Project Groups." This weekly group engages in learner-led study in which children choose an area they wish to learn more about. The children themselves determine how the learning will take place, as well as how (and if) the learned material will be pre-

sented to the other members of the group. The project might be independent or collaborative. Research takes all forms and is determined by the learners' own choices: reading, going on field trips, constructing something, interviewing others, working on a computer, working with a mentor, and so on. The final presentation, also determined by the learners' choices, might take the form of a fair, a lecture, a demonstration, a video or CD, or an exhibit.

What is the role of the staff?

One of the things that makes our program unique and successful is that all three of our staff members are themselves homeschoolers. We are required by the district to have credentialled teachers (though our specialists do not have to be). We have been fortunate to have staff possessing the necessary qualifications, who, by virtue of being homeschoolers, understand the heart of homeschooling and the many teaching and learning permutations that homeschooling entails. Parents participate in the hiring process. Our staff thinks outside standard school thinking: age-determined goals, grade-determined outcomes, grades, test-driven curriculum. The parents, and not the staff, take responsibility for the child's education; the staff is available to provide support and advice when asked. By being in touch with all of the children, the staff is in a unique position to provide many networking links between and among families, helping people find others with similar interests and skills or challenges and problems. In the traditional parent-teacher relationship, support and advice for parents is the teacher's domain. In this program, however, parent-to-parent support plays a big role.

What is the parents' role?

A central part of the HBP is required parent participation, which we achieve with almost 100% cooperation. In addition to taking turns being in the classroom with the children, the parents take on some of the work of creating and stocking interest centers, teaching classes, maintaining the Lending Library, maintaining the classrooms, and doing administrative work. They also help plan the year's activities, participate in the hiring of specialists, and assist in the development of the budget.

Does it work to mix class-based and home-based children?

The amount of overlap between the home-based and the classroom-based programs has changed over the years. It was fun and easy at the beginning to design and engage in cooperative activities when the school was only about a third its current size. One of the original ideas of the school was to use the best of both worlds: to allow children to mingle and have a larger pool of possible friendships and to let adults share their skills with all of the children. This arrangement has not turned out to be as workable or attractive as we had originally thought, though. As both programs in the school grew (it now enrolls 250 students in grades K-8 and has 12 teachers), we also increased the diversity of the families in terms of philosophy, educational approach, and even reasons for being at the school. The logistics of organizing cooperative activities at this level have become formidable. Moreover, we homeschooling families have become a large enough group to provide plenty of choices of friends and activities for our children amongst ourselves. However, some of our children enjoy the playground aspect of the larger school and have friends among the class-based

Many of the classes develop out of the children's interests; there is respect and validation for children's choices.

children. Over the years, some homeschoolers switched into the class-based program, and some class-based children became homeschoolers; their ongoing friendships have formed a link between the two groups. For the adults, some enjoy the stimulation and challenge of the larger school group and participate in school-wide committees, fund-raisers, festivals, and work parties. Currently, any formal interaction between homeschoolers and schoolers is by individual choice rather than through formally organized activities. Some homeschooling parents complain that we have too much contact with the class-based program. Others want more of such contact. We try to maintain a peaceful middle ground, since of course we can't please everyone.

Who enrolls in a program such as this?

HBP has a diverse population that includes a full range of children, including long-time homeschoolers, religious homeschoolers, temporary homeschoolers (that is, homeschoolers who plan to return to school), new homeschoolers, unschoolers, and school-at-homers. The growth and evolution of the HBP program reflects the growth in the homeschool population in California and in the country. Homeschooling has become more mainstream, more present in the media, more accepted as an alternative form of life and education. As school problems increase, both environmentally and educationally, and as more children develop problems in our nation's public schools, more people are turning to homeschooling for solutions. As a result, our program has a more varied population than it had initially, one that includes families who aren't involved necessarily because they have a philosophical belief in homeschooling (as was the case among the founding families), but rather because the school system just hasn't worked for them. Nevertheless, the benefit is that we are more diverse, more truly a part of the larger society and the local community. The challenge is that we attract not only more and more parents who want a program that will tell them what to do and how and when to do it, but also some parents who want someone to homeschool their children for them. We have to maintain a clear sense of what we want to offer—which is support for families who want to take direct control of their children's education, whether that support be educational, social, or emotional. We support; we don't "do it" for them. By maintaining this objective, we can continue to be a program that does not make extra demands and rules and penalties for homeschooling families who value their independence. For families that don't fit into this kind of structure, we suggest alternatives that offer something more appropriate.

A public program such as ours provides a safe and easy entry for new homeschoolers, especially those just withdrawing their children from school. Because we adults have spent much of our life in school, we carry some of the indoctrination and assumptions from those years of schooling about how

children learn, how one should teach, and how much adults ought to empower and trust children. Homeschooling makes one reexamine these assumptions. In addition, new homeschoolers must suddenly take on the whole responsibility for educating their children, thinking that they have to do what schools do, plus re-educate themselves, learn the legal issues, provide socialization, obtain supplies, and look for support. Some come to this task more naturally than others. A public program can take the pressure off and hold the hand of the new and nervous while still supporting the secure and confident. Because ours is an "official school," our program eases the minds of some new homeschoolers in a way that a grassroots support group might not. Resistant spouses or families who are still getting used to the whole idea of homeschooling are reassured because they perceive us as a "real" school (by virtue not only of our being a public school, but also of our having the approval of the school district and state). Along the way, new homeschoolers find that with all the support and positive modeling that they receive from others, they begin to develop a more relaxed, more creative style, and they allow themselves to stray from curricula that is designed for large groups of children learning at the same time. Some of our newcomers stay only for a year or two, and then with confidence move on to more independent endeavors.

There must be a dark side!

For all the wonderful merits of our charter school program, there have been some down sides. As a well-funded and relaxed program, it attracts many independent homeschoolers. But because we must limit our numbers, many who want to join us are necessarily left out. Until recently, no grassroots-based support group formed to offer an alternative to our program, so when new homeschoolers called, I had no support

group to refer them to and could offer only a spot on the waiting list. Not much support there.

Another drawback is that much of the grassroots, community-based networking and cooperative activities that previously we parents arranged as a natural extension of our commitment to homeschooling has been replaced by this state-funded program. With a few exceptions, HBP parents are not interested in planning and providing group activities when they have a program that does it for them. Homeschoolers who are not in the program but who want to network have a smaller number of homeschoolers to draw from because homeschoolers in the program don't want or have time for more group activities (besides those the program provides).

Who has the power, control, and responsibility for how I homeschool my children: the state or me?

To help new homeschoolers who can't get into our program, we encourage independent homeschoolers who call us to network among each other. We share our waiting list with them so that they can find each other and create their own groups. I encourage people to consider whether or not they really even need or want a program (some don't) and to find other ways to create their ideal homeschooling environment and organize group activities that they want their children to have. Some new homeschoolers don't know that they don't have to be connected to a school in order to homeschool legally, so we make sure that they know their options. We send out an information packet that is about not only our program, but also homeschooling in general—a packet containing information on how to get started and how to network on a local, state, and national level.

So, in addition to running a program, we have also taken on a responsibility to help, at least minimally, people new to homeschooling or new to our community, whether or not they become part of our program.

Of course, there will always be children who don't enjoy what we have to offer, or parents whose philosophies clash with ours. We've learned (sometimes in a painful way) that we can't please everyone all the time; this realization has become ever more clear to us as we've grown from a fledgling enterprise with a mere dozen children to a more stable enterprise with seventy-two students and a waiting list. Over the years, families have dropped out for various reasons. For some, the child just didn't enjoy the activities or the structure, and so the families moved on to pursue other educational options. For others, the parents were uncomfortable with or disagreed with various components of the program. Though we always have a full array of homeschooling styles represented among our families, some who have quit felt that the program was too structured; others, that it was too free. Then there have been others who, having discovered that they just didn't need the educational or social support, preferred homeschooling independently. We continue to grow and change as a result of all such disagreements and challenges, and, ultimately, the turnover allows a waiting list family into the program.

"How," you may ask, "can we start a similar program?"

I receive many calls from homeschoolers around the state who want to start their own local charter homeschool programs. I try to find and to help them understand the parts of our experience that can be replicated and those that are specific to us. Though I believe that our program is a good model for other charter school-based homeschooling programs, I don't think that ours is a blueprint that simply can or should be replicated. Though families interested in starting their own charter school-based homeschooling programs should feel free to glean from our program those aspects that might prove helpful and to discard those that might not be applicable—thus using our program as their model on which to build their own—they must pay attention to the local school politics and the available resources in their own areas.

The difficult process of developing a program was eased by certain fortunate circumstances. For example, we had the good luck of having a supportive school staff and a tolerant sponsoring school district. We were fortunate to get into a new start-up school whose identity was not yet firmly developed, and with whom we could be instrumental in shaping that identity. Furthermore, since homeschooling was not as mainstream six years ago as it is today, perhaps we posed a smaller threat to the district and state than we might pose today, were we to begin our program now. Additionally, charter school law until this year has been extremely vague, and that state of affairs has

Public-school homeschoolers must draw their own line, beyond which the state must not go.

worked to our advantage. Some of these things are unique to who and where we were at the time and may not be reproducible in another community. I would recommend that families wishing to start a homeschooling program find similar ways to get a foothold in their school district, especially when local teachers and administrators are resistant to the idea. Is there one teacher or counselor who is sympathetic or understanding, a principal who might be willing to bend a little, someone within the system who can help make inroads? Is the district losing attendance but doesn't know how to go about creating a compelling and useful homeschooling program? Families interested in starting their own programs will need to investigate and resolve such concerns if they are to build healthy, hassle-free programs.

I advise those who call me to start small. A very part-time

program with a dozen children in it does not constitute a big threat to a district's power, autonomy, or funding. There is little need for lots of rules for so few. At each growth spot, renegotiation can stretch what's allowed once those at the top are assured that this is a group that can be worked with, that homeschoolers are not a bunch of fanatics, counterculture freaks, or an angry mob. In our case, we have actually convinced many skeptics within the system that homeschooling is a viable way for parents to raise responsible, educated, contributing, happy citizens. From my observations, charter schools that start with large homeschooling numbers end up attracting negative attention from higher ups who, fearing they will lose control, decide that the situation calls for more rules and regulations.

"But," you ask, "doesn't a program like this curtail homeschooling freedoms?"

A concern of some homeschoolers is what the public school establishment will demand once they have homeschoolers enrolled and comfortable. I previously mentioned my "mantra": if they start demanding more than I can tolerate, we'll leave, go back to our independent status, form our own grassroots support group, or do whatever we need to do to reestablish our autonomy. My decision whether or not to stay in the program lies with who has the power, control, and responsibility for how I homeschool my children: the state or me? At every juncture as the school develops, I weigh whether or not school demands and rules interfere with my right and privilege to homeschool as I see fit. If I feel that the program is intruding too much, I will fight or get out, depending upon the situation. Those enrolled in a public program must decide for themselves both what is important to them about homeschooling and how much, if any, interference they can tolerate. Public-school homeschoolers must draw their own line, beyond which the state must not go. That line might have to do with the number or strictness of rules concerning important and often hotly debated issues such as compulsory attendance, enforced standardized testing, the reporting of daily learning activities, or the mandatory use of the school's curriculum.

These concerns are very relevant as I write this article, because the California state legislature, prompted by the statewide teachers' union, recently voted to impose more regulations on our state's charter schools, and specifically on charter school-based homeschooling programs, effective January 2000. Attempting to keep charter schools from "taking advantage" of the freedom allowed until now, legislators have instituted rules that bring back some of the discarded parts of the Education Code. (We might also be witnessing an attempt by the teachers' unions to gain back some control that they have lost in the wake of charter schools' growth and development, given that these schools function outside of the controls of teachers' unions and standard education code and to some degree empower parents over teachers.) The new laws require more in the way of tracking and reporting outcomes and demonstrating children's learning progress. Currently, the repercussions of this new law are not clear, and over the next year we will be finding out whether it will be time to say, "Thanks, but no thanks." Our challenge in the near future will be to find creative ways to document the learning of the unschooled children. I expect that this task will demand more of the parents in their reporting style, and will certainly demand more of the staff. My hope is that these demands will change the reporting process only and not the children's learn-

ing process, style, or activities. The latter would feel more invasive and is probably not something to which many of us would be willing to acquiesce. At that point, we will all have to make the decision to stay or go. Fortunately, we still retain the freedom to make such a decision.

To be sure, though, some homeschoolers do fear that the proliferation of publicly funded homeschooling programs will in fact reduce the freedom that we currently have to choose our style and mode of homeschooling. Until now, California legislators have chosen to rein in only those who accept public money. Every small piece of legislation that is introduced and that could harm independent homeschoolers, even inadvertently, brings on a tremendous outpouring of response from homeschoolers of all kinds, independent as well as public. In the face of such pressure, legislators have quickly backed down, and I believe that they will continue to do so in the future.

An important benefit to going public...

Charter schools with homeschool programs give us an opportunity to publicly demonstrate that homeschoolers are just another group of parents concerned for their children, willing to do what it takes to ensure an appropriate education for them. By being public, homeschoolers are no longer "those people." We are friends, neighbors, customers, and colleagues. By being public, we can work perceptions the other way, allowing educators to see successful alternative approaches to education, demonstrating the possibilities for changes in style and approach.

Looking back on the Charter School HomeBased Partnership, its history, evolution, and accomplishments, I can see that its salient features are that it has provided my children and me, as well as many other homeschooling families, a unique community center of friends, social opportunities, and learning experiences, as well as a wonderful exposure to a large and interesting world of information and adventure. While we could have created many of these things on our own as independent homeschoolers, a school-based program also has satisfied the curiosity some children (my own included) displayed towards going to school, and having a partial day off is something most of us homeschooling moms could only dream of before. Also, being associated with a charter school has eased some of the financial burden of independent schooling.

This route clearly is not for everyone. Indeed, families considering a charter homeschooling program should weigh very carefully both the possible benefits of such an option for them and the tradeoffs that they might have to make should they pursue this option. Fortunately, the choice still remains to homeschool independently. Our particular school works because of the commitment the parents and staff have for maintaining the best possible environment for the children. Most important, the children love being part of the program.

Note: A study guide for this article can be found online at <http://www.great-ideas.org/guides.htm>.

Homeschool Alumni

BY JILL BOONE

My choices, my opportunities, my possibilities in life, are endless. —Cristie, 19, a homeschool alumna who, today, is helping to lead a ten-day canoe trip for 30 eighth graders.

After twenty years of raising three children without sending them to school, I can finally address the real question on homeschooling: How do these kids turn out? As I watch my three teens and their homeschooled friends begin to "turn out," I recognize that we cannot use a normal yardstick to measure their success. In a culture that has bumper stickers professing "the one who dies with the most toys wins," trying to redefine success is difficult. Parents with kids in school are seldom questioned about how their kids will turn out; there is an acceptance in our culture that attending school equals the opportunity to have friends, go to college, have a good job, and, maybe, acquire the "most toys." On the other hand, for twenty years as a homeschooler, I frequently have been asked what was going to become of my children if they didn't attend school. As they leave home and venture into the work world and the university, I am finally able to answer this question.

I have met hundreds of homeschooled teens through editing *California HomeSchooler* for the HomeSchool Association of California, by visiting families across the U.S., and through sharing my children's lives. I have asked them to put into words their thoughts about homeschooling and their futures. Their responses demonstrate a view of life that is not measurable by things such as GPAs, SAT scores, or the quality or ranking of the colleges that they attend. How do we define success beyond these simple educational benchmarks? How *do* homeschooled children "turn out"?

The question that is begging to be answered is simple: Will someone who never attends school be *normal*? Can she make it in this world? Can he deal with bureaucracy and work with others to get a job done?

Take Jessyca, homeschooled all her life, a self-proclaimed beach bum who at sixteen decided that too many people leave trash all over the beach—her beach. She called up the city and arranged to have them supply everything from trash bags to gloves if she organized volunteers to clean up the beaches. She describes the outcome:

Jill Boone, the editor of the California HomeSchooler, *lives in joyous chaos with her three kids, two dogs, and a steady stream of wonderful friends and guests. At the time of publication, Cristie is seriously pursuing a career in archaeology, Paul has become a math major and is about to release his first commercial software, and Curtis is studying Herodotus with his Greek tutor and writing his sixth science fiction book.*

Homeschooled teens have learned to deal with the real world by doing authentic work rather than schoolwork.

Homeschooling incorporates nurturing our children's minds as well as their emotional, physical, and spiritual development.

We cleaned a 2-mile stretch of beach. Not only did the beach look better, but I learned something about myself; I have what it takes to take charge and get things done.

For years I have been asked how homeschooled kids will learn to put up with the real world. How do they learn to work under deadlines and do jobs they don't like? I have always wondered why we would want to teach our kids to put up with work they hate. My son Paul, at fifteen, approached the game review editor for *MacHome Journal* at a conference and asked what he needed to do to get a job reviewing computer games. He has been writing reviews (and meeting the deadlines) for three years now. Recently, he was recommended to an entrepreneur who needed independent programming and electronic help. Paul now has a part-time job learning a field he is interested in and using his knowledge to create real products that do real work. In college next fall, he will be studying upper-level computer science classes, having developed a strong, self-taught foundation in computer basics.

Paul, Jessyca, and other homeschooled teens have simply learned to deal with the real world by doing authentic work rather than schoolwork. They have learned the value of persistence and effort by seeing their endeavors pay off in paychecks, clean beaches, and solved problems.

But what about all of those wonderful high school experiences that they have missed? The memories of football games and proms or of just hanging out with friends? It is easy to wish for them to share the activities that were meaningful to us as teenagers, but they've created their own memorable times: theater performances, wilderness trips, swim meets, homeschool conferences, campouts, and the joy of *just hanging out with friends*.

They encounter many people and make friends without the aid of a classroom. Their friends range from young children to adults because they learn to relate to people in the natural settings of real life, where age segregation does not exist. At one homeschooling campout, for example, I watched 50 kids—toddlers to older teens—all play "Capture the Flag" together. The bigger kids didn't run down the little ones; rather, they chose to be competitive with challenging opponents and helpful with the younger kids. These same teens also sat around the campfire, talking with the adults, and went off to the beach with their teen group.

A common attribute I see among grown-up homeschoolers is an acceptance for people different from them. They often welcome into their circle people who would be in wildly different peer groups in school. As Yugen, a nineteen-year-old homeschool alumnus and one of my son Paul's closest friends, explains:

Paul and I are substantially different; we probably would not have found each other in school. He would have been in the computer lab and I am much more mechanically inclined. [Paul and Yugen combined their talents for several years in a tech challenge sponsored by a local museum.]

Families choose to homeschool for a variety of reasons and bring with them a diverse socio-economic and political spectrum of views, as well as different parenting styles, aptitudes, and interests. Coming together in various ways, homeschooling families become an eclectic social group of friends; the diverse community encourages the teens to be themselves in the midst of peers who are different. Lack of response to peer pressure and healthy self-awareness are the primary rea-

sons that many families continue to homeschool through the teen years.

Many of us choose homeschooling because of a philosophical perspective regarding both learning and family. We treat education as a natural part of life; if children do not need lessons to be motivated to speak or to learn to communicate, then why, when they reach the age of five, do we need to turn them over to an expert in order for them to continue to learn? Homeschooling is an alternative lifestyle, a way of being a family that incorporates nurturing our children's minds as well as their emotional, physical, and spiritual development. My children developed and followed very different interests and paths that led them into all kinds of educational pursuits. I included structure into their learning only when it seemed appropriate. For instance, if they chose to take piano lessons, they were expected to practice. When, at thirteen, my son Curtis wanted to learn Ancient Greek, we hired a tutor. And although we seldom could tell much difference between our summers and our school year, I usually asked the kids to do some kind of programmed math work—a practice which always ended abruptly when they noticed that the neighborhood was on summer vacation.

Our homeschooling years were filled with adventure and the joys of family and community. We discovered inexpensive theater, used the libraries extensively, and traveled cheaply, staying with other homeschooling families across the country. We read aloud together, volunteered in our community, visited museums and historical sites, and did impromptu science experiments when the desire struck. Each child had plenty of time to cultivate his or her own personal talents and discover her or his own inspiration.

By choosing to homeschool, we were given flexibility and time—time that they would have spent in school or doing homework. They could learn to read when they were physically and emotionally ready instead of on an imposed time schedule. For example, my youngest, Curtis, became interested in learning to read when he was eight. By nine, he read at a fifth-grade level without any pressure or concern that he was a "late reader." Our approach to homeschooling tended to dissolve the boundaries between education and life. Grade-oriented curriculum and expectations of the proper time or order in which one was supposed to learn something were not part of our experience. Paul would read his calculus book as bedtime reading. Curtis would read Greek myths. During the day they might bike down to the comic book store to check out the new arrivals. And we were always hard-pressed to answer the inevitable question from a friendly stranger, "What grade are you in?"

Although we followed this relaxed form of homeschooling, sometimes referred to as "unschooling," my kids have had no trouble fitting into a traditional educational program. In fact, most of their teachers love not only their intense interest in the topics they choose to study, but also the determination they bring to their work. My two oldest kids, Cristie at sixteen and Paul at seventeen, took their first English class at our local community college, where they learned to write formal essays and research papers. Their teachers were pleased to have students who were studying to learn rather than to get A's. And despite some initial panic on Cristie's part concerning the nature and function of a topic sentence, they both came through at the top of their class. Paul did the same with science and computer classes, often skipping several prerequisites so that he could take the classes that he both wanted and felt ready to take.

The unschooling approach gives kids more than academic readiness, however. They develop a sense of themselves and their futures that would make many adults twice their age envious. They have been empowered throughout their earlier years by being able to make real choices about their lives, not the least of which is whether or not to go to school. As Kendra, 18, who completed high school through independent study and is currently traveling and working in Europe, says:

> *I took it upon myself to leave high school and set about designing my own course of study, which has been both hard and rewarding. It takes self-discipline and motivation. Because I am free, I am able to plan my life.*

Adults, deep in midlife crisis, often feel that they have never had the freedom to choose the direction of their own lives. I have seen many people ask themselves for the first time at age forty-five: "What do I want to do now?" Homeschooled teens have been asking themselves this question for years. They may not have their futures charted out, but they do feel in charge of their options. For instance, Mike, at seventeen, chose to spend last fall with a group of teens constructing a ropes course. His varied interests, which include computers and electronics, provide him with many choices. Mike asks:

> *How can I even try to plan my adult life when I have just barely started to live it? At this point, I'm trying to make choices that will let me explore life without cutting off any future opportunities.*

Some of the homeschoolers I know have contentious relationships with their parents, experiment with drugs, and wear hairstyles and clothing that alienate adults. Indeed, I

Homeschooled teens speak of life as an adventure—one that they both create and navigate.

would never argue that homeschooling is a panacea for all of society's ailments. But I have noticed in watching many of our kids grow up that homeschooling does foster a stronger, more influential connection among families and offers a chance for parents and teens to relate at a deeper level than usual simply because they spend so much time together.

Rebellious or not, homeschooled teens seem to bring with them a feeling that they create their lives and an inherent understanding that they are responsible for their own decisions. Erick, 20, who taught himself nineteen computer languages and moved to Silicon Valley to work as an automation engineer, makes the following observation:

> *I see more flexibility in life than most people do. I see an endless series of choices and opportunities. Life is what you make of it.*

In fact, the very process of being allowed to make important decisions about what to do with their time and what to pursue or ignore generates in homeschoolers both a love of learning and the impetus to follow their dreams. Holly, a Stanford graduate student in Classics who homeschooled until she went to college, affirms:

> *Homeschooling really taught me that whatever project I take on, I will only get out of it as much as I put into it. There's a certain freedom that comes with that kind of self-knowledge. Homeschooling allowed me the freedom to explore things that I may not have otherwise been exposed to, and to approach everything with my own questions.*

When they do not feel trapped in others' expectations or by their own perceived limitations, homeschoolers seize the opportunities that come their way and make the most of their lives. Each homeschooled teenager I know is living a life that she or he personally chooses. As Katie, 15, who loves soccer and singing and is training to be a counselor this summer at a family camp, explains:

> *By homeschooling I'm able to go and explore, just leave and go camping or on a work project, traveling, etc. even for long lengths of time. I think that I've learned to appreciate and live more consciously in this world because of that.*

Not only do they choose their own direction, often they are also passionate about their choices and unwilling to be pushed to do what they don't love. Diana, 16, who sings in a rock band and is interested in pursuing an acting career, explains:

> *Whatever I do, I know it'll be what I want—not what the school board or the theater president wants, not what my best friend or my lover or my teachers want—what I want. I want to do what I love.*

Homeschooled teens speak of life as an adventure—one that they both create and navigate. Their travels include inner journeys as well as world trips. As Rebecca—a nineteen-year-old homeschooler who is now studying art and writing in college—says:

> *I see my life right now as a time for intellectual, emotional, and spiritual exploration. It is a time for me to learn as much as I can about what I believe, what I love, what I reject, and what is important to me.*

Just as homeschool days do not begin and end at a specific time, education does not begin at age three with preschool, nor does it end with high school or college

graduation. My daughter Cristie, now nineteen, spent the summer working in a bakery in a Washington wilderness community, returned to her job in outdoor education last fall, and has helped lead several wilderness trips this spring. Soon she leaves for Europe to travel and to work on a French archaeology dig and an Italian service project. Eventually, she wants to write science fiction. Cristie felt restrained by a college schedule and made different choices about her life. She writes:

> *As a result of homeschooling, I feel unlimited at this point in my life. I have the freedom to explore my world, to keep learning, discovering and absorbing the incredible diversity of people, places and opportunities that surround me. And I'm excited.*

I am taken with this group of teenagers' unwillingness to compromise who they are. If there is a downside to their attitudes on life, it is their impatience with having their time wasted or with being given busy work. Paul, who is attending the university, is resisting the idea that he must take courses that fulfill general education requirements; he'd rather take the time to study a variety of sciences in depth than have to take speech and history. Perhaps he would be better off studying history at a time when it seems more relevant to his life. In any case, this struggle is his, and that reality illustrates what I think is the fundamental gift homeschooled teens have been given: personal responsibility. With this gift has come the freedom to follow their dreams, to discover what they love, and to be happy. These are not the dreams of spoiled, self-absorbed adults; they are the aspirations of people who understand the balance in life and who are willing to trade a desire for "the most toys" for a substantial and rewarding life. Rebecca captures this point in the following words:

> *I'm determined to do work that I love. A lot of folks get the idea that I'm being impractical, that I don't realize the importance of making a living. Truth is, I do realize it; I know that to keep a roof over my head, I'll be willing to do whatever crummy work I have to. But half of "making a living" is knowing how to live on the amount you make. It's both a skill—knowing where to find bargains or mend clothes—and a mindset—not caring that you don't have Nintendo or out-of-season veggies.*

If our teens are educated, follow their dreams, and support themselves, and if they are loving, compassionate adults, then I think that we have been successful in raising them. Are they prepared for real life? Rebecca answers:

> *The folks who say unschooling won't prepare children for life have a point: Twelve years of slaving for grades DO prepare them for a lifetime of slaving for paychecks. But I've had an upbringing that has prepared me for something beyond that.*

The Compassion Our Children Deserve

An Interview with Alfie Kohn

At a recent "Growing Without Schooling" conference, where Alfie spoke, our Executive Editor, Ron Miller, met with and interviewed him. We present below a transcription of that exciting and informative interview.

*A former teacher, Alfie Kohn is one of the foremost educational theorists writing today. His books span a range of topics, including the problems with reward-based education (*Punished By Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes*); the deleterious effects of competition in learning (*No Contest: The Case Against Competition*); and the naturalness of altruistic behavior in humans (*The Brighter Side of Human Nature: Altruism and Empathy in Everyday Life*). He has authored many articles, too, also on a wide variety of subjects, and has been interviewed in many venues, including the "Today" show and "Oprah." His newest book,* The Schools Our Children Deserve: Moving Beyond Traditional Classrooms and "Tougher Standards," *was published in September 1999.*

Ron Miller: If I read your work correctly, a central theme runs through your books. Step by step, you have been building a strong argument that American culture is too competitive, too individualistic, too materialistic, to be a truly humane and democratic society. In *The Brighter Side of Human Nature*, in fact, you claim that this is "one of the world's most competitive and un-generous societies." Your books draw upon extensive social science research and moral philosophies and point the way toward a more compassionate and cooperative culture.

Here's the question: Do you have still more to add to this argument or will you be turning to other topics in your future work?

Alfie Kohn: I don't know. There's no ten-year plan. If there is some conceptual continuity in my different books, it has to be retrofitted. In retrospect, I can see certain connections that were not planned when I set out. For example, the book on competition led to new questions, such as, if competition turns out not to be an inevitable part of human nature, what about other unsavory elements—such as selfishness or aggression? That led to *The Brighter Side of Human Nature*. Similarly, *No Contest* led me to realize that one of the reasons competition turns out to be counterproductive is its status as an extrinsic motivator—something outside the task—that's used as an artificial inducement to get people to do things. The question eventually suggested itself: What about other extrinsic motivators? Hence, the work on rewards was born. In the last nine or ten years, I've been gravitating increasingly toward education, and the last few books that I've done have been on that topic, trying to deal with both the academic and non-academic arenas, and trying to reach audiences of educators and the general public. I'm thinking these days about doing a book on parenting at some point, but I don't know if and when I'll end up writing that. I can only hope that whatever I end up writing next won't lead readers to say, "But hasn't he covered this territory already?"

RM: I'm struck by the hostile reaction that your writing provokes among some reviewers.

AK: Me, too.

RM: For example, last year, in *Phi Delta Kappan*, a widely respected professional education journal, one writer who claimed to be liberal basically accused you of endorsing a communist ideology because you dare to question the value of ruthless competition. And a recent review of your book in the *New York Times* calls your writing "hyperbolic," saying that your claims about what's wrong with our schools are highly exaggerated. And yet many of us find your analysis tremendously insightful and extremely well documented. So how do you explain the angry resistance to your ideas?

AK: You're right and they're wrong.

[Laughter]

RM: It just occurs to me that "red-baiting" is just about the lowest, most desperate criticism that one can make of another's ideas. So I'm wondering what it is you're saying that sends these critics into such a tizzy?

AK: The article in the *Kappan* that you're referring to was not really about competition. It was a piece called "Only for My Kid: How Privileged Parents Undermine School Reform," in which I talked about how affluent parents of high-achieving kids often unwittingly make common cause with the most reactionary elements in our society by supporting rating structures, awards, tracking, and certain kinds of pedagogy that are not intended to help all kids learn, but rather to help their own kids succeed at the price of others. That article netted me more hate mail than anything else I've ever written, mostly from people who vociferously denied that I was talking about them, and then proceeded to show that I was in fact talking about them. So that one really got under the skin of a lot of people.

But, you know, competition has been called our state religion, and the notion that you can and should control people by dangling rewards in front of them is every bit as central to the American ideology. One of the reasons I think that my stuff so infuriates critics is that I'm trying to ask the radical questions, and I use radical in the original Latin sense of the word, meaning that I'm trying to ask root questions. I'm not asking about whether one incentive plan is better than another, but what the effect is of any kind of reward system; I'm not talking about how we overdo competition, but rather about how there's something inherently problematic about an arrangement in which you have to fail in order for me to succeed. Also, in those two books and some of my others, I've tried to look across different arenas of society, at work, at play, at school, at home, and thus there are that many more people to be offended.

RM: Your books recognize the political dimension of our social and educational problems: The interests of powerful people and institutions are served by our remaining isolated from each other, by our being in competition with each other for rewards and personal success, and by our thinking that it is human nature to be this way. What is it going to take to make the cultural, political, and educational changes that we need? Is it enough for you and me and our colleagues to keep writing books and publishing magazines that show that a more humane society is really possible, or do we need something more drastic?

AK: Well, I don't know if it's enough. I'm not sure what else I can do, except to invite people to reflect on the dominant ideology, and to invite those around me, in turn, to bring others in on this process. I don't know what it will take. I try to take gratification from small signs of progress. If I thought when I wrote *No Contest* that ours would be a non-competitive society within the decade, you know, I would have been condemning myself to cynicism and depression. But we work to create pockets of resistance and sanity; we do what we can. We act as if our actions can make a difference. And that requires, I think, an emphasis on community. You correctly identify, I think, in my work a concern about an overly individualistic sensibility. I have little in common with many libertarians who are focused mostly on government as the enemy and the isolated self proudly carrying on the struggle against the big government, because I think that while that correctly understands the importance of autonomy, it overlooks the equally vital component of community.

I've been in some alternative schools, for example, where there's so much emphasis on freedom that there isn't an "us" to figure out how to be free together. And I think that's much of what's wrong with our whole society. We have to resist not only the movement towards privatization of public schools, but also this whole noxious movement to define democratic public schools as "government schools" and the demand for separation between schools and states. This is complicit with, I think, the worst aspects of what is oppressive in our society—that which divides

us from one another. So the communities need to be built within classrooms, within families, among families, and throughout our society, so that, as the later and more mature Camus said, "I rebel; therefore, we are."

RM: This is so important. I think that this sensibility does get lost. People are fighting so hard for their freedom that they lose the sense of social responsibility that needs to accompany that.

AK: Right.

RM: So people who, say, are turning to homeschooling, maybe out of desperation, maybe out of a sense that public schooling just does not nourish children, and that "I've got to take care of my children"—how does that fit into a democratic culture? What happens if we go that route?

AK: I'm certainly sympathetic with those who have just reached a point of utter frustration and see this as the best option for their own children. It troubles me, on some level, because I suppose I haven't reached a point yet where I've given up on public schools, and I want to put my energies into re-imagining public schools and expanding on exciting pockets of truly student-centered learning that exist in schools that I see all over the country. Nevertheless, if one is faced with a choice of a neighborhood school that is simply dreadful and teaching one's own, who am I to condemn that?

Nevertheless, the more I've come to understand about how learning happens, the more impressed I am with the importance of a well-functioning community within a classroom and a school, because we learn through conflict that is situated in a caring community. It's precisely from hearing that you read this play in a very different way than I had, or came up with your own theory about why dinosaurs became extinct, that helps me to reorganize my own theories. And that's something that may get lost if there aren't enough learners learning together. However, homeschoolers have been very resourceful, in many cases, at trying to jerry-rig their own community and taking advantage of certain courses and facilities that public schools offer, and sometimes making their own opportunities—not just to socialize, but to learn together, and I think that's all to the good. Then you might have the best of both worlds.

RM: Your line of thinking seems to follow directly from John Dewey himself and the whole "progressive" tradition. They strongly emphasize that the meeting of different ideas is really what generates critical thinking and creativity.

AK: That's right. And Piaget's sort of narrower, but more scientific vision, about what it means to construct meaning and how that ultimately happens in a social environment. Constructivists argue among themselves about a narrowly individualistic notion of cognition as opposed to a social interaction approach, and the Piagetians retort that, in fact, the social stuff is inherent in Piaget's original theories. Who gets the credit here, whether it's Piaget or Dewey or Vygotsky or somebody else, doesn't matter to me, as long as we recognize that it's not just *nice* to be hanging out with others, from a social point of view, but that the social element of learning is critical to making sense of ourselves and the world. So anyone who chose to homeschool one hopes would do everything possible to create a social environment in which that can happen.

Communities need to be built within classrooms, within families, among families, and throughout our society.

RM: I'm often struck by the paradox in working for democratic forms of learning in public education, because if our culture is fundamentally competitive, that's going to dictate what goes on in public schools. They almost have to reflect what the dominant forces in society want. So, it just seems paradoxical and very difficult to me to try to make the changes there; that's where the resistance is going to be.

AK: Well, you could make the same argument about families, which reproduce elements of the society at large. If it's possible for a family to escape or even subvert disturbing elements of the popular culture, it just might be possible for that to happen in classrooms as well. I don't have to speculate about that; I've seen it happen. I think I would say that a disproportionate number of progressive classrooms are in private schools. But that doesn't mean (a) that a disproportionate number of private schools are progressive—which is not the case—or (b) that there aren't also some extremely exciting counter-examples that somehow manage to survive in public schools.

The social element of learning is critical to making sense of ourselves and the world.

I suppose you could argue, with the grand sweep of history, that if the good stuff ever took root in enough places that some elements would rise up to prevent it from happening. I'm not some sort of historical determinist, in this sense, and I think it's vital to work with the public schools, not only because I think it's feasible to escape certain elements of the culture at large, but because if we don't do that then the schools are extremely effective at perpetuating these things and thus they become causal agents. I'm not willing to let that happen in an institution that educates 90 percent of American children.

RM: So one of the things that you have done recently to have some impact on public education is to set up a national network of activists in each state who are working to oppose the agenda of standardization and high-stakes testing. What are the goals of this network, and how is it working out so far?

AK: The goal is contained within your question. You're right: Educators and parents, I think, are increasingly frustrated by a top-down, heavy-handed, corporate-style, test-driven approach to school reform that speaks the language of tougher standards and raising the bar and accountability, all of which I believe are squeezing the intellectual life out of classrooms. There are lots of people, especially educators, who are sickened by this, and the question then is, how can we best activate them, organize them, mobilize them, help them work with parents to see that this is not in the best interest of their children?

> We're in a very dark period in American education, in which teachers have to find their voice.

I don't have any staff, and I'm not affiliated with any organization, so all I've tried to do is, through my website, create an area where I offer a rationale for opposing this and practical strategies for doing things that range from meeting with your local newspaper reporters to tell them that every time they publish a chart with their local schools' test scores they're making our schools a little bit worse, all the way to organizing boycotts of a standardized test. And another part of the website has a list of the state coordinators. But it's not like I have the ability or time to oversee operations; I've just had people say, "I'd like to be the coordinator for my state," and that's good enough for me. If they want to take this on, I send them a message suggesting some things they might do: set up their own state websites, create lists through phone trees and listserves, and so on—and then go to it. I provide some encouragement periodically.

Most of the people who are truly active, whose names are on this website, were already active, and I'm just sort of plugging into things that they've already been doing. There are a couple of moms in Columbus, Ohio, who have been enormously effective at opposing that state's proficiency test, and a coordinator in Michigan is a fellow at Wayne State University who's put together something called the Rouge Forum, which is all about social change, as well as boycotting the Michigan state test. And then other people who've been active—and I mean truly an interesting conglomeration of people—parents, teachers, administrators, university folks, and others. If other people are doing this independently, as seems to be the case—parent groups in Wisconsin and Virginia, people in the whole language movement around the country—that's terrific. I just want to make sure we're not duplicating our efforts and that we're learning from each other about how best to become politically effective.

What's strikingly important to me is that we not view this tougher standards movement as being like the weather, something to which you simply have to accommodate yourself, but rather that we see it as a series of political decisions and institutions that are imposed and therefore can be *opposed*. For example, when I go crusading about the country, I like to quiz people by asking them how many standardized tests Japanese students take before they're in high school. And the answer is zero. What's really interesting is why the answer is zero, and that's because some years ago, the Japanese teachers, through their union, simply refused to take part in a testing program that the government was about to impose—and the Japanese do not have a reputation, collectively, for being troublemakers, either. They in effect said, "It's not that we're afraid of being held accountable or putting in more time; it's that this is patently destructive to students' learning, and we will not be part of it." There was a similar boycott in the early 90s in Great Britain. The question is, how do we rise to the occasion as necessary?

RM: It amazes me that we haven't. We have the model of the civil rights movement and the free speech movement in the 60s, and I wonder why. It seems to me that, in the United States more than anywhere, we should have a massive civil

disobedience movement, an educational rights movement, and I just don't see it happening; maybe you do.

AK: Well, the civil rights movement took a long time; that's the first fact to console ourselves with. If you start your clock in 1959, it looks as if things sped into action immediately. If you start with the Civil War, look how long it took. The second point is that teachers are remarkably apolitical in many cases; they have been systematically de-skilled and are, in many cases, simply too busy, as they see it, to become active in this sort of thing. A third concern is that, while there was the civil rights movement in the U.S., what strikes me is the difference between American unions and unions in, say, Europe—the latter often leading the fight for social justice, whereas American unions, across the board, are often mostly about putting a little more money in their members' pockets. You know, in other countries, they have their own newspapers and political parties. Thus, I guess it shouldn't be that surprising, even though it's frankly sickening, to see the American Federation of Teachers—especially under its previous leader, Al Shanker, whom one person referred to as the Rush Limbaugh of education—sounding themes that are indistinguishable from corporate groups on pedagogy, even though they differ slightly on some issues like vouchers, for example.

So, I think we haven't hit bottom yet. We're in a very dark period in American education, in which teachers have to find their voice. They're already on the defensive—especially when people are ready to bash unions, to the point that unions have censored themselves. And without unions, it's very hard for teachers to organize themselves. For example, a teacher stood up last year in Massachusetts and refused to give the Massachusetts standardized test, the new one; he did this all alone. He just said, "I can't be party to this," and made very little impact, positively or negatively. He wasn't penalized for it, but neither did it start up a real conversation, not nearly as much as the effort of some parents and students to boycott the test. But, immediately I dreamed of, say, 60 percent of the faculty at a given school saying we will not break the shrinkwrap on these standardized tests. As we know, you feel alone or helpless when it's just one or two of you, but there is enormous power in collective action.

Teachers already understand how destructive these tests—and the whole tougher standards sensibility that gives rise to the tests—really can be. So I don't think we want to wait for history to unfold itself, but I think we have to be patient with some of these things, too. Some educators I know repudiate the notion of a pendulum swing in education, because they argue that things are getting better, that if you look over the decades, each time the pendulum goes back, elements of progressive learning have been incorporated and have suffused the system. I would desperately like to believe that; I'm not sure it's true, because American schools have been remarkably traditional, even during the periods like the late 60s and early 70s, when they were thought to be havens of progressive extremists. Holt himself said that in interesting ways.

Alfie Kohn

RM: Actually, I've just finished a manuscript for a book on the free school movement—how it evolved into the public alternative school movement, and public schools of choice—and it was very clear that these ideas blossomed and were then immediately put down, that they really had very little substantial impact on American education.

AK: Even during the time when they were at their peak, they didn't affect that many students.

RM: Right. They made a lot of noise, the press thought it was interesting for a couple of years, and then they got bored with it and that was the end of it.

AK: So, what's your theory of why that was the end of it?

RM: Well, several scholars talk about the "conservative restoration." Nixon came in, and there was a deliberate effort to reorient public opinion away from liberation, and radical education, and freedom, and all these things they were talking about in the 60s. "Put your nose back to the grindstone because you've got to make sure you get a job." That was the beginning of the back-to-basics movement.

AK: Well, that raises the question, though: Why would these conservatives even have taken note if it hadn't made a substantial impact at the time?

RM: Well, it was disruptive. The 60s and very early 70s caused a lot of disruption, but it was an active minority that was doing it. The silent majority was in favor of repressing this and going back, as I read it.

AK: Because we're talking, on the one hand, about the big social movements, which did in fact make a substantial impact on American culture, much of which, like feminism, has continued, and, on the other hand, we're talking about what goes on in classrooms, and the extent to which you have less teacher-centered learning, which I don't think has ever changed that much.

It's interesting. I mean, in *The Schools Our Children Deserve*, I also argue that good teaching is very difficult to implement effectively and sustain. I think there's an inherent problem; the playing field is not level, because, frankly, any moron can stay one chapter ahead of the kids in a "bunch-o'-facts," textbook-driven lesson, whereas, to help kids become thinkers, the teacher has to be able to do some serious thinking and to be willing to give up a lot of control. That asks a lot. So, we're always going to be at a disadvantage for the kind of pedagogy that's most effective.

> Educators and parents are increasingly frustrated by a top-down, heavy-handed, corporate-style, test-driven approach to school reform.

RM: That's a big part of the problem.

A couple more questions. We've been talking about these big social and political issues. A lot of your work, though, is really about the intimate details of parenting and the kinds of interactions that are most healthy for children, that will help them develop into autonomous and self-confident human beings. For readers of our magazine who may not be familiar with your work, can you briefly summarize what your findings are and what you recommend to parents as a style of being with children that truly encourages their healthy development?

AK: Well, I recommend taking children seriously. This sounds like an unobjectionable cliché, but in fact in actual practice it's not all that common. It means looking at things from the child's point of view, and questioning one's own requests and demands, instead of looking for slightly nicer ways of getting compliance. I make the distinction between "doing to" and "working with." And then I go the next step to suggest that a lot of common practices are just versions of doing-to, although they're sometimes gussied up as though they were really more humanistic or democratic than they are.

For example, we like to refer to punishments as "consequences"—in particular, "logical consequences," which I like to call "punishment lite." This allows us to continue punishing, but with impunity. Similarly, a lot of parents and teachers seem to believe that dangling goodies in front of kids to reward them for compliance is appreciably different from threatening them when they don't comply, whereas I think that punishments and rewards are two sides of the same coin. And that coin does not buy very much. This includes offering verbal doggy biscuits to kids when they jump through our hoops, in the form of saying "Good job!" which frankly for me is like nails down a blackboard, this constant need to judge kids and tell them how to feel, in order to manipulate them, in many cases. Not all praise is distinctly manipulative, but even the kind that is more innocuous in the motive that drives it may, nevertheless, be less than ideal in terms of its effect on the child.

In another book *[No Contest]*, I talk about the importance of rethinking the attitudes and institutions that lead kids to try to beat their peers. I have people come up to me all the time and say, "We only ask of our Zachary that he do his best." I respond, "You're not fooling Zachary!"—not if you offer more attention, approval, and affection when he comes home and says, "I was number one in class" than when he comes home and says, "I did my best." Often, there's a hidden motive; we want triumph more than collaboration or even excellence. So, we have to introspect about the effects of, on the one hand, ways we perpetuate competition—"Okay, kids! Who can get into their pajamas fastest?"—and, on the other hand, the respects in which we use groovier versions of carrot-and-stick control. A lot of it comes down to our willingness to give up some control and to treat kids, not as equals, but as people deserving of trust and respect such that our own convenience is not the only thing driving our interactions and interventions.

And that's hard to do! You and I are both parents. We know the incredible temptation to resort to clever techniques for getting kids to do what

we want them to do. The question is, even when it works in the short term, what is the long-term cost to kids' sense of autonomy, their commitment to being decent people?

For example, two recent studies show that kids who are frequently rewarded and praised by their parents are somewhat less generous than their peers. If we adopt a sort of mindless Skinnerian approach of reinforcing even really important values like compassion, let alone obedience to adult-generated rules, the question becomes whether these traditional approaches are likely to be effective in the long run. And I mean effective at even our own goals for kids, which is why, in seminars with parents and teachers, I almost always begin by asking, "What are your long-term goals for these kids? How do you want them to turn out long after they've left you?" All around the country, parents and teachers, elementary and secondary, urban and rural, private and public, all say the same kinds of things. They want them to be responsible, respectful, caring, happy, decent lifelong learners and problem-solvers, and so on. Then what I do—and this, I again realized in retrospect, has become kind of a *modus operandi* for me—is to say, in effect, "You say you want this, so how come you are doing that? Your day-to-day practices with kids, at home or at school, actively impede the realization of your own goals for kids. You say you want them to be responsible, and yet here you are, giving them stickers or time-outs, which undermine responsibility. Just as I say to teachers, you say you want kids to be lifelong learners, and here you are, giving them grades, which research indicates undermine their interest in the learning itself. So something's got to give once there is a kind of dissonance that's created here."

RM: Yeah, but I want to follow up on one statement you stuck in there, very quickly, about how difficult it is to do this. As a parent myself, I feel a tremendous tension between everything I have studied and believe in about alternative education and freedom for children and all of what you're saying, on the one hand, and the day-to-day realities of living with very active children and the stuff that it brings up in me that is not entirely rational. So, I don't want to leave parents with the impression that "You should be doing this, because it is better." It is very, very tricky.

AK: But just because it is tricky doesn't mean it's not better.

RM: It's the *should*, I guess, that I'm looking at here.

AK: Well, if the *should* seems not just prescriptive, but rigid or unforgiving, then that's not the impression that I mean to communicate. But there's a big difference between forgiving yourself for an occasional lapse, as a parent, which I certainly need to do for myself, and on the other hand not even recognizing that it is a lapse. There are parents who find themselves occasionally threatening their kids—"If you don't do this, I won't let you do that"—and feeling bad about it and really thinking about whether there was something else they could have done. There are parents who say, "Good job," and then reflect, "Is that because the kid needed to hear it or because I needed to say it?" I have no problem with parents who are thinking through this stuff.

> To help kids become thinkers, the teacher has to be able to do some serious thinking and to be willing to give up a lot of control.

I have a problem with parents who never even dreamed that there was something wrong with this. Or parents who demand respect from their kids, and you watch them for two minutes, and you can see how disrespectful they are to their own children. They interrupt their kids but demand that their children never do the same to them. They announce suddenly that it is time to leave the playground, in ways that are just absurd. They berate their kids.

Haim Ginott [the author of *Between Parent and Child*] asked us to imagine what it would be like to talk to our friends the way we talk to our kids. You know: Our friend forgets an umbrella. We start chiding him: "Why are you so forgetful? You'd forget your own head if it wasn't attached!" You'd never dream of talking to a peer this way, but we belittle children. Even basically loving parents do. Sure, it takes time, and care, and skill and effort, and above all, courage, to see misbehavior as a problem to be solved together, to effect a "working with" relationship. By contrast, to say "Good job" when your kid does what you want or "You can watch extra TV if you clean up your room" or "If you disobey me one more time you are grounded this weekend"—these things take no time, no effort, no skill, and, above all, no courage.

So, it's a demanding business, and it is more

demanding for parents who have dead-end jobs at which they're controlled all day and come home exhausted and dispirited. I'm not a purist, in that sense, but I don't think that either realism or empathy should prevent us from distinguishing between basically good and not-so-good ways of parenting or teaching.

RM: It seems analogous to the situation in schools; the kinds of teaching that we want to see happen are much more difficult. The kind of parenting that we are talking about here is more difficult. But we need to make the effort.

AK: It begins with the courage to question one's own request. Or, in the case of classrooms, not only whether the teacher's request for how kids are acting makes sense, but also expectations regarding what the kid is doing. You know, there's a buzzword in educational circles of "on-task" and "off-task," and teachers often complain that their kids are "off-task." And when they do that, an army of consultants stands ready to give them techniques for getting kids back on task. Those techniques often resolve themselves into variations on bribes and threats, of course. But if a teacher comes to me and says, "My kids are off-task," my first response is going to be to ask, "What's the task?"

And I tell the story of a year when I was teaching, sometime ago, when I had a class of kids who must have gotten together at night to figure out how to make my life a living hell, because they couldn't have been that good at it spontaneously—it was awful!—and had an administrator asked me whether or not I needed anything, which, incidentally, no one ever did, I would have responded, "I need some kind of classroom management program, because my class is out of control." Back then I thought that a good class meant one that was in control. But it took me several years to realize that the kids weren't trying to make me miserable; they were trying to make the time pass faster. And when I look at what I was giving them to do in class, I don't blame them. I had units that might as well have been called, "Our Friend the Adverb." You know, there is no member of our species who would find this stuff intrinsically motivating. *Of course* they were acting out! But how much more convenient is it for me to take the advice of classroom management specialists, most administrators, or, in a different context, discipline consultants for families, and assume that whatever I wanted them to do was the point of departure, as opposed to having the courage to look in the mirror and ask whether the curriculum—or the extent to which I had succeeded or failed at creating a sense of community in the classroom—might have had something to do with the kids' behavior?

RM: This leads into my final question. Can you tell us more about your career? How did you evolve from a classroom teacher into an author who has written some very important books? Were you already thinking along the lines of these progressive and radical questions when you were a teacher?

AK: Not really, not in pedagogical terms. You can find in universities lots of dyed-in-the-wool lefties, the content of whose courses are all about social justice and oppression and patriarchal hegemony and liberatory praxis and all the rest of it. When you look at how they run their classrooms, though, you discover teacher-centered traditionalism. It is interesting to speculate on why this is. It may tell us something about these individuals psychologically and their need for control, or it may simply say that many instructors, especially at the college level, have never been invited to think for two minutes about how people learn, or what a good classroom looks like. Dewey said that even if teachers go through great education training programs, those teachers don't teach the way they were taught to teach. They teach the way they were taught. And as soon as you have trouble with these new-fangled techniques, you slide back into those old comfortable shoes where you're the teacher and you make all the decisions, and where it is basically didactic in form, and so on.

So, I did one thing I'm proud of, toward the end of my teaching career. That was saying to the students, "I have to give you a grade at the end, which I detest, but one thing I cannot do in good conscience is put a grade—a number or letter—on anything you do in here, and I won't. I will write you a comment, if I have time, or, better yet, sit down and talk with you. That, of course, is even better than a narrative assessment, because it has the potential of being a two-way conversation."

At the time, I was teaching kids in a college prep program, the sort who have been prepared since they were infants to get into Harvard, a process I have come to call

"Preparation H." And I realized that, by not giving them grades day-to-day, I might be having the opposite effect of what I had intended—namely to make them think about their grades all the more, since they couldn't see them. So I said, "If you absolutely have to know what grade this assignment would get, come up and talk to me and we will figure it out together." The amazing thing was that, even at the secondary level, and even with these Preparation H kids, I found that, when I took responsibility for not pushing grades into their faces, they stopped asking and started becoming more engaged in the subject matter.

That anecdote also speaks, I think, to the earlier question about making change in microcosm, even when there are elements of the system itself that seem to be pushing toward something far less beneficial. Most of the time, though, in class I was not doing stuff that I was altogether proud of even then, and much of it makes me wince even more in retrospect. I took time off from teaching and was writing on broader issues, not just on education—the book on competition, the book on altruism, the book on rewards—and then I started finding myself thinking even more about the application to the classroom. I learned much more about education from watching teachers who were more talented than I was, as well as from reading research, and listening, and reading the ideas of other educators. So it is not a clear line of sight between what I was doing in the classroom and the ideas that I have been writing and learning about more recently.

RM: Do you think you will go back to teaching? Do you miss that contact with young people?

AK: I miss the ability to develop ideas and relationships over time, as opposed to doing shorter seminars, which are like one-night stands. But I like the idea of having at least the possibility of having some impact on a much larger number of people. And so when I think about changing classrooms as a way of helping to change society, it's possible that I am using whatever talents I have in the most effective way by talking and writing to more people who might then take back some of these ideas into their own classrooms and families. I'm not ruling out the idea that I might teach another course, but for now I'm content with what I'm doing.

RM: Well, I hope you continue doing it. It has made a great impact on a lot of us. Thanks for your time.

The Handwringer's Column

BY BARBARA ALWARD
AND DIANE KALLAS

Dear Handwringers,

I made the mistake of reading Alfie Kohn's Punished by Rewards. Now I find myself terrified of influencing my children at all. I worry that hinting that they spend time reading, writing, or arithmeticking will ruin their internal motivation and their lives. How do I impose my will on them without destroying theirs?

Enid Erewhon

Dear Enid,

You're not the first homeschooler to be punished by Alfie Kohn. I was smug when I first read Kohn's intuitively obvious, though startling, book. My children are immune to bribes. They wouldn't eat broccoli if their reward were a vault of M&Ms, so I felt superior to those who used dessert as the light at the end of the vegetable tunnel. I knew that all they were teaching their children was to hate vegetables. Ha ha, my children already hated vegetables; they were, in fact, gifted vegetable haters.

But soon, this wasn't enough to put me ahead in the parenting competition. To win the next round, I needed control and to avoid reading Kohn's *No Contest* even if it followed me home from the library. Punishment, at least the intentional kind, wasn't an option. Alfie had shown me that neither is praise. But is it praise or just conversation if you tell your child she is the da Vinci of stick figure rendering and truly mean it?

I still believed Alfie's premise. After all, Van Gogh was a starving, unrewarded, internally driven artist whose work has graced decades of calendars. Bill Gates is showered with gold every nanosecond and Windows has crashed several times as I write this sentence. Whose footsteps would you rather your children follow on the path toward excellence?

And yet, I worry, fret, and rarely, but no doubt devastatingly, nag. Left with a policy of non-interference much stricter than Star Trek's similarly intentioned Prime Directive, I have no hope of pressuring my children into performing. Panicked when I'm not interfering, guilty when I am, Alfie has convinced me that the only option open to me is, well, handwringing.

Alfie said that relying on extrinsic rewards may get a job done but it isn't learning. Pavlov, Watson, and Skinner invented this form of learning, naming it behaviorism. They spent their time watching rats run around in mazes, concluding that humans are rats. Maybe they just needed glasses, to better negotiate the mazes. Behaviorists declared that humans are the blankest of blank slates, who, if not encouraged with whips, bells, and chocolate treats, would sit like stones from birth to death. Behaviorism seeped from lab to schools, inspiring an early educational theorist to say, "It doesn't matter what you teach a boy as long as he doesn't want to learn it." This degrading belief system still flourishes in your mind so that when you hear a school bell or see a gold star you have an irresistible need to drop some pellets at the end of a maze and see if your pigeons can dance. Don't fight it; it's your brainwashing.

Speaking of washing, let's not be hasty in accepting Kohn's theory that all extrinsic rewards are damaging. Why just last week I was sitting stone-like, staring blankly at eight loads of smelly laundry, when I remembered the chocolate bar in the back of the fridge. I told myself if I did all the laundry (folding and putting away not included; it was a small chocolate bar, not a pound of See's) I could eat the chocolate. You should have seen the clothes flying, some actually ending up in the washing machine! Cleared a path to the back of the refrigerator as well.

Truth is that all theories, no matter how warm, fuzzy, or intuitively obvious, interfere with relationship. To have no theories is the challenge, to say yes to the moment, to go where no one has gone before, space...the space between humans...the final and only frontier. Be brave.

The Handwringers

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Summerhill in Crisis

An Update on the Status of the Paradigmatic Democratic Free School

BY JERRY MINTZ

Jerry Mintz has been a leading voice in the alternative school movement for over 30 years. In 1989 he founded the Alternative Education Resource Organization which he continues to direct and is the editor of its networking magazine, The Education Revolution *(formerly* AERO-GRAMME*).*

Summerhill! To those of us who have worked for a long time toward educational reform or revolution, that one name speaks volumes. Summerhill, a small school based on democratic process and non-compulsory class attendance, founded by A.S. Neill in 1921, has inspired millions to reexamine their ideas about what education should be. Neill wrote many books, beginning when he was a schoolteacher, even before he started Summerhill. But when the book *Summerhill*, a compilation created from many of Neill's works, was first released in the United States in 1960, it hit like a bombshell. Inspired by the book, thousands of "free schools" were created, some of them surviving to this day. This groundswell of grassroots activity, in turn, led to the "alternative school" movement with public alternatives, and the modern day homeschool movement, the popularity of which has led to the charter school movement. This, in a nutshell, describes the historical significance of Summerhill and why we should all be furious and shaken by the current attack by the English educational establishment on Summerhill (which is now headed by Zoe Readhead, Neill's daughter).

In July of 1999, we had a meeting of the International Democratic Education Conference at Summerhill School. Students, parents and teachers attended from more than fifteen countries. Much of that meeting was devoted to strategies for preventing Summerhill from being closed. Following this article are excerpts from a report on the conference, in which the reader might catch a glimpse of Summerhill's success and of the strong support that it attracts. But first, a bit more background.

A. S. Neill was born in Forfar, Scotland, in 1883, the fourth of thirteen children. He was son of the village schoolmaster, or "Dominie," a stern, puritanical man who ruled his classroom with a rod of iron. In those days the strap, or "tawse," was commonly used in schools in Scotland and when, at the age of fifteen, Neill was taken on as a pupil teacher by his father, he was expected to use it on the other children. Perhaps it is ironic, or perhaps it is as a result of this early experience, that Neill and Summerhill have come to represent the antithesis of this approach. They assume not an essentially problematic nature of children, but rather the essential good nature and natural learning ability of all children.

At the age of twenty-five, Neill went to Edinburgh University and took a degree in English. Afterwards, he became a journalist, and later the head of a small school in Gretna Green. It was there that he wrote his first book, *A Dominie's Log*, and began to form his ideas on freedom for children.

In 1917, Neill visited Homer Lane's "Little Commonwealth," a community for delinquent adolescents, and saw self-government at work. Lane, an American, was a firm believer in the innate goodness of children. He acquainted Neill with Freud's "New Psychology" and later became Neill's psychoanalyst, although Neill was also strongly influenced by the work of Willhelm Reich. Lane introduced Neill to two elements that were essential to the founding of Summerhill: the self-government meeting and the importance of a child's emotional well-being over academic development.

Neill's first school was founded in 1921, in Hellerau, a suburb of Dresden. There were wonderful facilities there and a lot of enthusiasm, but

over the following months Neill became progressively less happy with the school. He felt that it was run by "idealists," who disapproved of tobacco, foxtrots and cinemas, whereas he wanted the children to live their own lives. He said:

> *I am only just realising the absolute freedom of my scheme of Education. I see that all outside compulsion is wrong, that inner compulsion is the only value. And if Mary or David wants to laze about, lazing about is the one thing necessary for their personalities at the moment. Every moment of a healthy child's life is a working moment. A child has no time to sit down and laze. Lazing is abnormal, it is a recovery, and therefore it is necessary when it exists" (from Neill's early writings, as quoted from the Summerhill website).*

After first moving the school to Austria, in 1923, Neill brought it to the town of Lyme Regis, in the south of England, to a house called Summerhill. The school continued there until 1927, when it moved to its present site, at Leiston, in the county of Suffolk. Neill continued to run the school—later with the help of his second wife, Ena —until he died in 1973. Ena then ran it until her retirement in 1985, when their daughter Zoe, the current head teacher, took over.

Today, the aims of Summerhill remain what they were when Neill founded the school over seventy-five years ago; these aims could be described as the following:

- ▲ To allow children freedom to grow emotionally;
- ▲ To give children power over their own lives;
- ▲ To give children the time to develop naturally;
- ▲ To create a happier childhood by removing fear and coercion by adults.

Summerhill is a private school that depends mostly on tuition. A proprietary school, it is technically owned by the Neill family. This is important to note, because Zoe feels that, if it were a non-profit school governed by a board, Summerhill might have long ago succumbed to the pressure from the state to water down the freedom that the students have at the school.

Although most of the students are boarding and come from all over the world, some families have moved nearby in order to send their children as day students. All lessons at Summerhill are optional. This is a striking central tenet of the school. A second particularly unusual feature of the school is the weekly meeting, at which the school laws are made or changed. These laws are the rules of the school, and the meeting is attended by all members of the school. Changes to the laws are made by democratic agreement; pupils and staff alike have exactly one vote each.

As a school far ahead of its time, Summerhill has always been under attack. One of Neill's earliest books was called *That Dreadful School*, a title that speaks for itself. Neill often liked to refer to Summerhill as "possibly the happiest school in the world." Taking off on that well-known quote, which is even on Summerhill T-shirts, a recent article by former staff member Matthew Appleton was entitled "Summerhill: The Most Inspected School in the World."

Why has the school been so scrutinized, inspected and attacked by the education establishment? In essence, it may be because, if Summerhill is found to work, to be effective, it flies in the face of all of the theories of the educational establishment—that students have to be forced to learn, that they have to be "motivated," or else they cannot be educated.

In a recent radio interview that I did with Zoe Readhead, I asked on what basis Summerhill was being attacked in the latest round of inspections and threats of closure. She responded:

> *It seems crazy. Most of all they have gone after the non-compulsory lessons. It's easy worldwide to think that this is Summerhill's problem and England's problem. I feel that what happens here today could happen somewhere else tomorrow. It's very worrying, the trend toward this very high-powered, academic education with absolutely no room for humanity.*
>
> *Summerhill is still seen as a kind of beacon. One problem is that the report tries to discredit Summerhill. So, not only are they going to try to close Summerhill, but [also] they're going to try to make it look as if Summerhill is a failing school. I think that's going to make waves throughout the world in democratic schools. If they manage to depict Summerhill as a failing school because it's a democratic free school, it could be really damaging to other schools here and in other countries.*

Summerhill, a school of only sixty students, was most recently inspected last March by a team of eight school inspectors, who then wrote a report which has been described as at best unprofessional and damning. Following the report, the school was issued a legal document called a "Notice of Complaint." This gives a list of the demands the school must comply with in order to stay open as a registered private school. The school refuses to comply with three of the six demands in the notice. The important two require that the school change its philosophy by requiring students to attend class and be continually assessed. However, as Michael Newman, the Summerhill math teacher, says:

> *As a school founded on the philosophy that children can choose to learn, academically, when and what they want, we provide them with a high quality choice of lessons and subjects, with specialist*

teachers and classrooms, with appropriate guidance, but we do not impose any choices on the children. We provide a broad and balanced curriculum but do not ensure it is received. Children do not have to study science, or math or anything else, unless they want or feel they need to. To change this would redefine the relationship between teacher and child, and child and classroom. We also believe that assessment is a vital part of learning, especially when being taught, but we do not think that assessment should be allowed to define what is important, what should be learn[ed] at each age. We therefore use assessment as a teaching tool and nothing more.

The inspectorate (Her Majesty's Inspectors, OFSTED, Office for Standards in Education) is not saying that the school must close, but rather that, unless it changes, it will be closed. The school has responded by saying that it will not change those aspects of the school that it considers essential to Summerhill's philosophy.

Not unexpectedly, the school is appealing the Notice of Complaint. The school is also compiling a complaint against the quality of the inspection and subsequent report. It has employed one of the best lawyers in the country, Mark Stephens. The appeal should be heard by the Independent School's Tribunal in February 2000. If the appeal does not succeed (there have been three successful appeals in the history of the tribunal), then the school will take the matter to the High Court, to the Lords, and then to the Europe court. They have launched a fund to support the cost of that process; £25,000 has been raised so far.

An independent "inspection team," or commission, is being created by Ian Cunningham, a visiting professor at Middlesex University, who runs Strategic Developments International and the Centre for Self-Managed Learning. The group that he is heading will be comprised of eminent educators, social workers, psychologists and business people, who will inspect the school and publish an independent report.

The basic conflict stems from the English national curriculum and the very narrow way in which it is interpreted—incrementally, rather than in the long view. If a Summerhill student at age nine does not read at a certain level, for example, that is seen as a failure, despite the fact that the older students have generally glowing results. In fact, Summerhill's graduates include London University mathematics professor Michael Burnal, artist Evelyn Williams, architect Keith Critchlow, medical science lecturer Dane Goodsman, nuclear physicist lecturer Cecil Waddington, music producer Gus Dungeon, and film actors Jake Weber and Rebecca De Mornay. Ms. De Mornay, who was appalled to hear that her *alma mater* faced closure, sent a statement of support for Summerhill. Within it, she states: "I spent roughly two years of my earliest education at Summerhill School in the sixties. For me, it was not only an overwhelmingly positive experience, but a powerful influence on the rest of my life."

We have publicized the Summerhill situation on AERO's alternative education listserve, and on our new Alternative Education Alumni Association listserve. Many on the list have sent protest letters in support of Summerhill to David Blunkett, the Secretary of State for Education. Most have seen stock replies, but email can be sent to Blunkett at dfee.ministers@dfee.gov.uk.

For us in the United States, the fact that the English national curriculum is now impinging upon totally private schools such as Summerhill is an important portent. The movement toward "standardization" is only a step away from a *de facto* national curriculum here. In England, such a movement has already virtually destroyed the public alternatives. I alerted the English homeschoolers of this situation through their listserve, and many of them participated in protests which Summerhill mounted, first by having a demonstration democratic meeting at the House of Commons, and later, when they handed in a petition for the Prime Minister at 10 Downing Street.

It is important to realize that in the United States there seem to be two strong movements occurring at the same time but going in opposite directions. In reaction to the failures of the current system there has been an explosive growth in homeschooling and charter schools. On the other hand, from within the system there has been the push for standardization, implying that all that was needed was more of the same—more homework, more hours of school, more tests, more teaching to the test.

It seems obvious that, when its ineffectiveness is bared, this movement toward national standards will eventually go the way of the "back to basics" movement of the 1980s. The only question is how much damage it will do before it runs its course. Ironically, there was a previous national curriculum in England, around the turn of the century. The chief school inspector of that time, Edmond Holmes, finally realized the futility of the system, which was abandoned soon after. At the time, he was quoted as saying,

*In nine schools out of ten, on nine days out of ten, in nine lessons out of ten, the teacher is engaged in laying thin films of information on the surface of the child's mind and, after a brief interval, he is skimming these off in order to satisfy himself that they have been duly laid. (*Education Now, *Autumn 1999, in an article written by Chris Shute.)*

Summerhill in Crisis

For six years, we have been having an annual meeting of the International Democratic Education Conference. The conference has served to provide internal support for democratic schools trying to survive in sometimes hostile environments. In the last two years, we have chosen our sites to provide external support also. This year, we decided to have the conference at Summerhill School to show that the school has strong international support, and to showcase Summerhill in the face of the attack on the school by the English educational bureaucracy.

The 7th Annual International Democratic Education Conference was thus held at Summerhill School in Leiston, England, July 23-26.

I arrived a week early, before the term was over, so that I could visit the school while the students were still there. On the last leg of the journey Mrs. Gull, the taxi driver, drove us from the Saxmundham train station to the school. Knowing about the recent attack on the school, she said that she and her husband would be glad to testify at any time about the wonderful changes they had seen in the students as they drove them periodically to the train station and airport. She was quite aware that the school was under severe attack by the education authorities.

Many of the students and staff had just participated in a march on 10 Downing Street to protest the treatment of the school by OFSTED, the office of inspection. Among other things, the school had been told that its non-compulsory lessons conflicted with the imposition of the national curriculum. A pile of protest letters was given to Prime Minister Tony Blair's office. The Summerhillians were accompanied by many supporters, including English homeschoolers who realized that, if Summerhill were discredited, they would be next.

At the end of each of the three yearly terms, Summerhill has a big End of Term Party. Actually, I missed most of this because I was doing a radio show on the Talk America Network from the school office, interviewing Carmen and Nathan, 14-year-old Summerhill students who had participated in the march on 10 Downing Street, as well as in a demonstration of the Summerhill meeting that took place at the House of Commons. I also interviewed Susan,

Nathan's mother and a strong supporter of the school.

I met several Summerhill alumni at the EOT. One of them was a soft-spoken Japanese boy, named Yoshiki, who helped us repaint the lines on the tennis court. He told me that he had just been accepted into the Royal Scottish Academy of Music. At my request, he then played a very difficult and beautiful selection from Ravel on the piano. He said he learned music at Summerhill, which had arranged private lessons for him. I met another former student, who is now running his own photographic studio in Amsterdam, and a third, an American, who has a Japanese restaurant called Saga in a very fancy part of London.

William Smith, an American filmmaker, was at Summerhill making a documentary about the school. We helped him find funding so he could continue his project and release a film giving an accurate picture of Summerhill, one that we all hope will help to counteract the slanderous accusations made by OFSTED.

Returning to Summerhill for the IDEC on the evening of the 22nd, I met some of the first attendees. Many of them were AERO-related. One of those was David French, who had first emailed AERO from Poland, where he wants to start a democratic school. Another was Christos Voulis, who originally contacted us from Greece, where he wants to start a school.

Tokyo Shure arrived from Japan with a group of fifteen, including twelve students. Jim Connor arrived; he is a board member of the National Coalition of Alternative Community Schools.

The next day, the conference opened. It was governed in the style of the Summerhill democratic meeting, with a Summerhill student chairing. We talked about how decisions were going to be made during the conference. Decisions were made about quiet times, smoking, etc.

There were a total of 167 people at the conference, made up as follows: 123 delegates, 19 Summerhill students, 16 other students/children and 9 Summerhill staff. They came from nineteen countries: Austria, Belgium, Canada, France, England, Germany, Greece, Holland, Ireland, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, Palestine, Poland, South Africa, South Korea, Taiwan, the United States, and Wales.

Nineteen Summerhill students participated in the conference, and their involvement was strong. One great workshop involving students was led by David Gribble. Democratic education was discussed from the student point of view, with many questions for the students coming from the audience.

There were several workshops specific to the crisis that Summerhill is facing. One, concerning how alternative schools should be inspected, involved discussion of creating standards that would make sense to democratic schools. For example, one standard could require that a large majority of the students vote that they like going to their school; another could require empowerment of students.

Derry Hannam was one of two school inspectors to attend the conference. He gave a very well documented talk about why schools that empower students and are learner-centered are more effective than are traditional schools.

One of the first keynote speakers was Gerison Lansdown, who presented the case for children's rights and discussed her work with the United Nations. Also, Roland Meighan from *Education Now* talked about the "Next Learning System." He said that it is an extension of the learner-centered approach, which recognizes individual learning styles we all pioneered, starting in the 60s, but that the best way to present it is to say that it is the system of the future. Among other things, he showed us a cartoon of a line of animals including a monkey, squirrel, elephant, and fish, with the following instruction: "To be fair, each of you must pass the same test—climb the tree!"

That evening we organized a benefit auction that raised almost 300 pounds for the defense of Summerhill.

Michael Newman, the Summerhill staff member who helped coordinate and moderate the conference, somehow managed to always keep his good sense of humor throughout. He and other Summerhill students and staff members worked hard through the whole conference to make it a great success. The students were an important presence.

To join the IDEC listserve, or for further information, send email to Jerryaero@aol.com.

Students, Parents, and Teachers Say, *"Take this Test and Shove It!"*

BY JOHN SPRITZLER

More and more public school students across the country are refusing to take the new "high stakes" standardized tests, and parents and educators are sharply criticizing these tests, which will soon bar many deserving students from promotion or graduation. A boycott of the Michigan high stakes test has reached 90 percent in some school districts. In Virginia a school board member in Bedford formed a parents' organization that has signed up 1000 people against the Virginia test. The New York City Board of Education had so many complaints from parents and principals about excessive testing that they canceled the second grade reading test. Wisconsin state legislators recently killed the new high school graduation test after being deluged with calls from parents threatening to hold them responsible if their child failed and could not graduate. In Chicago students at the Whitney Young High School intentionally failed the test and then organized a demonstration outside the board of education offices. Chicago teacher George Schmidt, editor of S*ubstance* magazine, has been suspended without pay and is being sued by the Chicago school board for $1 million for publishing the Chicago high stakes CASE test after it was administered.

In Massachusetts the high stakes test goes by the name MCAS, the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System. Among those refusing to take the MCAS are 17 Cambridge public school students, including 12 honors students at the Cambridge Rindge and Latin school, where 200 students signed a petition against MCAS, and 7 tenth graders at Danvers High School, where 58 students signed a petition against the test.

At Danvers High School the crackdown was swift and harsh. The principal suspended all seven students for three days. School officials and town police falsely accused one of the seven students, Curt Doble, of making bomb threats—a felony. Police went to Curt's home, told his mother to stop "hiding her son," barged in without showing a warrant, handcuffed Curt, jailed him overnight, and set bail at $10,000 cash. The next day a judge declared there was no evidence and no probable cause for arrest, and wondered out loud how the warrant was issued in the first place. But the prosecutor continues to press charges, even though the only "witness" is another student who signed a statement that she never heard Curt make any threat, nor did she ever tell anyone he had. (You can help Curt's family by sending a contribution to the Curtis Doble Defense Fund, c/o John Spritzler, PO Box 427, Boston, MA 02130.)

John Spritzler works at the Harvard School of Public Health and is an editor of the magazine New Democracy. *He lives in Boston where his three children have a combined experience of 27 years in the public schools.*

Students and their Parents Confront the Authorities

Students at Danvers High School who refused the MCAS and their parents confronted the principal, superintendent, and assistant superintendent after the students were suspended. The parents and students gave the administrators so much heat that the officials said that they would meet with only one family at a time. One parent, Gene Sommerfeld, reported,

> *I refused to sit down. I went in the room and told them that my son is not going to take the test when the next round begins on May 17. Why? Because now the father has learned from the son. I said I know my 16-year-old son is just a piece of garbage in your eyes, but he's standing up to you and saying, 'I'm not going to take it.' I'm his father but I knew nothing about that test until my son went out and got a body of knowledge and educated me. My position has changed. Before I urged him to take the test but supported him when he refused. Now I urge him not to. MY SON WILL NOT TAKE THE TEST. The father didn't know. I've got a Ph.D. in chemistry, but it took a 16-year-old boy to make me understand. No form of punishment is acceptable, not suspension, not alternative service, not anything else. He has done no wrong, he cannot be punished...*

When the superintendent asked each child's parents if they would convince their child to take the MCAS, they all refused. The mother of the boy arrested for being a "bomber" told me that she has gained even more respect for her son than she had before and sees him in a new light. She said one of the good things about this frightening experience is how it has brought people together with their children and with each other.

High Stakes Tests in Perspective

High stakes tests consist typically of a state-mandated tenth grade test students must pass in order to be able to graduate high school. They are called "high stakes" because a student's entire high school career rides on this one test. If he or she fails the test, it doesn't matter whether he's gotten all A's in everything else and had perfect attendance, he still can't graduate. Similar tests are now being imposed in earlier grades as well, such as the fourth and eighth grades, as "gateway" tests; a child must pass them to advance to the next grade, no matter what the quality of his schoolwork.

High stakes tests are being imposed in state after state in the U.S. and around the world as part of corporate-led education reform. Countries in Latin America are being required by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to impose education reform and high stakes tests as a condition for continued loans. South Korea, Indonesia, and other Asian countries have embarked on similar testing programs.

These tests are educationally very destructive. The Chicago Assessment System Exam (CASE) that teacher George Schmidt exposed is a good example. The social studies and literature portions of the exam are superficial and confusing; the math portion tests students on mathematics far above the tenth grade level. The CASE test, in other words, is designed to drive the curriculum toward an education that is "a mile wide and an inch deep," and at the same time to force many students to flunk out of school.

High stakes testing is part of the overall attack on working people in our society. For the last twenty-five years workers in the U.S. and around the world have been subjected to lay-offs, speed-ups, and other assaults designed to weaken people's resistance to elite power and to whip them into shape. One of the most sophisticated means of management control has been "management by stress" or "continual improvement." High stakes tests are a management strategy whereby young people and teachers continually have the bar raised that they have to jump over, the standards raised that they have to meet. In this way millions of young people are being set up for failure, and successful and unsuccessful students alike are being told that education consists of changing oneself to meet the needs of the corporations.

These tests are not an aberration from the official education reform movement but part and parcel of it. In state after state and many countries, education reform has consisted of virtually the same programs and is intended to achieve the same goals. Privatization, raising standards, "school to work," school-based management, assaults on teacher tenure, merit pay, and other programs are intended to make public education more stratified and more intensely competitive, and to force students to accept their places in a more unequal, less democratic society.

Open resistance to high stakes tests is an important development: it can be the first step in a movement uniting students, teachers, parents, and others against the corporate assault on public education and for a democratic society.

Note: A commentary on this article with suggestions for further study can be found on the web at <http://www.great-ideas.org/guides.htm>.

IMAGINEERING FUTURE LEARNING DESIGNS

BY DON GLINES

Don Glines is the Director of the Educational Futures Projects, which is located in Sacramento, California. He has combined a concern for global futures with the need to replace current schooling rituals by creating entirely new learning systems based upon existing and new research, common sense, and visions of the future. His latest three volumes, the Educational Futures Trilogy, *document the need for and methods of transitioning education for coming generations. He may be contacted by mail at P.O. Box 2977, Sacramento, CA 95812, or by phone at (916) 393-8701.*

Imagineering—Imagining, Inventing, Implementing—is the key to development of the new lifelong learning systems essential for future generations. The education structures which currently exist worldwide, whether European, Asian, North American, or other global models, are not appropriate for now, and certainly not for the decades ahead. Indeed, they have not been defensible for the majority of citizens for the past century.

Significantly different visions of what could be are needed for the immediate, near, and far futures. Truly creative change processes are required to overcome decades of neglect. More important, though, than the mechanisms, emerging technologies, and step 1-2-3 how-to-do-it recipes is an open-ended, individualized philosophy that reflects both total dissatisfaction with the present forms and outcomes of schooling and the need for person-centered learning. This belief must lead to bold actions that unleash the potential for breaking the existing lockstep, discontinuous, iron-cast patterns.

Article 10 of the Declaration of the Responsibilities of the Present Generations Toward Future Generations states: "Education is an important instrument for the development of human persons and societies. It should foster peace, justice, understanding, tolerance, equality, and health for the benefit of present and future generations" (1998, 16-17). These lofty goals cannot be accomplished at their desired levels under the competitive, repetitious, cognitive focused, group-paced, twentieth century structures that dominate nations. Current schooling systems continue to widen the gap between those who master the demands successfully and those who do not adapt well to the conventional rituals.

Figment (the guide through the Journey into Imagination, Disneyworld, Florida) would philosophically state: "If schools are to be significantly better, they must be significantly different." Futurists would add: "It is time to do the impossible; the possible is no longer working." Major industries spend 10 percent on research and development (R&D) while smaller companies allot 5 percent. Educators spend only one-fourth of 1 percent on R&D. Most of what is claimed in that category is only for questionable "standardized test" assessments. It is no wonder that schooling—not learning—yet dominates. There are limited opportunities for true innovation and experimentation. The few improved approaches that are developed, usually through university led studies, are not widely adopted. The often significant research from the past, such as the advantages of nongraded schools, is rarely used. Tradition prevails!

There are at least forty possible societal futures, twelve of which are most probable, but only three of which are most preferable. If there are to be preferable futures for coming generations, macroproblem—the combination of multiple global dilemmas—must be addressed and resolved (*Forty-One* 1977). Each topic, such as natural resources, pollution, nuclear weapons, poverty, and crime, can no longer be isolated by one-at-a-time solutions, for sustainable existence requires interdependence. Education, as one of the multiple categories, can do more than independently promote technology, economic competition, and basic literacy. Suicide rates have remained high in many Asian school cultures. Eleven plus examination syndromes in Europe have resulted in an educational have and have-not separation. Comprehensive plans found in North America have maintained an assembly line mentality without individual deviations; they have maximized the outcome potentials for at best 15 percent of the learners. Thirty percent still receive failing or unsatisfactory evaluations; 40 percent are

rated mediocre or satisfactory—they are not excited over school learning. Only 30 percent attain praise, and half of them, though conventionally deemed successful, are bored with their studies.

Politicians and educators need to be sent startling messages related to educational futures: "In a world full of copycats, be an original," and "Have your head in the clouds and your feet on the ground." Unfortunately, the global preparation of teachers and administrators, the established bureaucracies designed to maintain traditional patterns, and the changing swings of political pendulums have blinded potential visions of what should or could be and have limited reform efforts to rearranging the now too familiar deck chairs on the *Titanic*. The problem may best be illustrated by the famous American comic strip *Peanuts*, by Charles Schultz. Lucy, a friend of Charlie Brown, acting as a psychiatrist, asks Charlie a most profound question. "Charlie Brown, on the cruise ship of life, which way is your deck chair facing?" Charlie ponders, and then replies, "I don't know; I've never been able to get one open." School people, like Charlie, have had an inability to open their educational deck chairs.

In another philosophical discussion with Charlie, his friend Linus says, "I guess it's wrong always to be worrying about tomorrow. Maybe we should only worry about today." Charlie Brown replies, "No, that's giving up; I'm still hoping that yesterday will get better." The majority of current politicians involved with education policy, and educators mired in the bureaucracy of survival, still hope that somehow "yesterday will get better." More creative futurists, concerned over tomorrow, must begin to apply mounting pressure for change in their communities, for schools as they exist cannot improve.

The majority of current politicians involved with education policy, and educators mired in the bureaucracy of survival, still hope that somehow "yesterday will get better."

For future generations, finally opening the educational deck chairs is a *global priority*. The "how" requires a focus on the key—Imagineering. Futurists of all walks of life are almost required to help communities with envisioning. Education today is not learning; it is politics. Governments and local school controls have chorused the whims of those who sing loudly for "accountability" or other trendy popular voter tunes that will keep them in power. It is time to help the majority unlearn what has been before helping them learn what needs to unfold. Educators and community leaders must be *disoriented* before they can be *oriented*. They must "unlearn" how schooling has been conducted during the past century before they can "learn" how to envision the possibilities for the future.

To be sure, there have been some exciting, successful, creative renewal efforts in the past; there are even a few in the present. Unfortunately, all have operated as a minority; they have never been able to overcome tradition on a large scale, as illustrated by the 1907-1937 Gary, Indiana, program (Glines and Wirt 1995). This was a model work-study-play philosophy and platoon scheduling total community (children and adults) school system, open fifty weeks a year, twelve hours a day, seven days a week, at the same cost as and with better student retention than comparable Indiana districts. When the superintendent passed away, World War II arrived, and Gary demographics changed; this exciting, successful innovation died, too.

Ironically, the reliable research that is available overwhelmingly supports moving away from the "regular" practices toward easy to implement, previously studied, non-traditional methods (Jennings 1977). Though not "futuristic," these starting points are a foundation for what could be, and include the following:

- nongraded environments
  (versus grade level schooling)
- individualized instruction
  (rather than group-paced assignments)
- personalized curriculum
  (versus mandated curricula for everyone)
- continuous progress
  (versus limited or unattainable expectations)
- self-directed evaluation
  (not letter or number "report cards")
- twelve-month opportunities
  (rather than restricted calendars)
- affective and psychomotor domain focus
  (as opposed to cognitive concentration only)
- all day caring, food, and clothing needs
  for youth in poverty
  (as opposed to limited social services)
- personalized rehabilitation plans for
  discipline cases
  (as opposed to blanket suspension and
  expulsion practices)

To achieve these and yet-to-come twenty-first century visions, communities should turn to creative educators; there are a few. Persons preparing to be future leaders should take "classes" in envisioning, which would be more important than budget and management training. Creativity is a talent to be cultivated (Michalko 1998). This may be easier to state than accomplish, but unless the current lockstep training programs are abandoned, there will be little hope. If this goal is to be achieved, the future beyond 2000 demands the invention of long discussed but seldom implemented, completely different university preparation and staff development plans; huge doses of creativity are essential. Not all educators can be visionaries, but those who are pied pipers can lead followers. Pioneering

communities should focus on hiring the leaders and teachers who can help disorient and then orient the populace out of the existing dark ages of schooling into the light of potential *learning* systems for future generations.

Imagining is not enough; Imagineering is required. One illustration from the 1960s provides the documentation that Inventing and Implementing must combine with Imagining to equal Imagineering. The United States government provided extensive funds for a project titled Designing Education for the Future.[1] Eight Rocky Mountain states (Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico, Idaho, and Montana) received money to design and create new and/or improved learning systems for the region. The project staff enlisted many of the brightest education minds of the times; involved most all the eight-state school board members and government officials; catered to the local school trustees of major cities; produced five book volumes on what to change, why, and how; and conducted numerous major regional conferences focused on what could be and the processes needed to achieve new directions. Almost forty years later, nothing has changed in the schools of those eight states (except for the addition of computers). Education in that region is still as traditional and rigid and "copycat" as it was before the project. A carefully planned, documented, financed proposal to create change was ultimately rejected by "experts" and others who lacked vision and creativity; they maintained their python grip on convention.

Not all educators can be visionaries, but those who are pied pipers can lead followers.

To overcome continuing repetition of such disappointments in education, communities can reflect upon a variety of successful improvement models. One is the creation of industry-style research and development centers. The space program, as illustration, has its volunteer astronauts, Endeavor-type craft and the new X-33, design and launch sites, and mission support personnel. This coordinated design has transformed the concept of space and has improved communications, air travel, weather projections, and energy use on earth.

Research and development centers of a critical mass proportion can provide local systems, states, and nations the opportunity to support educational astronauts who are willing to explore new horizons. Though the space industry received a special budget—such would be desirable for creating new learning systems as well as rockets meant to reach the moon—the fact is that the leading education communities can achieve significantly different and significantly better learning environments on their existing budgets. They can use school-within-school plans, magnet schools, cluster school choices of diversified learning environments, community learning centers, laboratory school concepts, schools-without-walls, and prototype alternative experimental designs. Rigid state and national mandates usually can be waived through permissive statutes when sound proposals are submitted. Such R&D centers should be staffed with creative, inventive, imaginative, take-a-risk, envision-the-alternative-futures personnel. They would enlist a cross-section of pioneering volunteer students. Families willing to assist the development of new learning approaches would enroll their children and participate in the ongoing designs evolving from continuous Imagineering. The process involves implementing well researched successful practices; testing experimental but potential additional methods; providing alternate means for evaluation; and offering parents, students, teachers, and administrators immediately available optional programs and learning climates.

R&D futures-focused visions can be both dream and reality, as was almost the case in the state of Minnesota, where plans were drawn for the Minnesota Experimental City (MXC), a joint government and private capital venture. The MXC was to be the most *experimental*, not model, city in the world. It was designed for 250,000 people of all ages and was to be constructed on 60,000 acres of almost virgin northern Minnesota land. Only 10,000 acres were to be cemented, with the other 50,000 available for open preserve, wildlife, agriculture, play, and recreation. It was to be partially covered with one of the Buckminster Fuller geodesic dome configurations; featured were waterless toilets throughout the city. No automobiles were allowed (they were parked outside in an area reached by an automated highway), as they were being replaced by an extensive people mover system throughout the city boundaries. The central "core" of the MXC contained common services and facilities. People were to live in satellite cluster villages to conserve energy and create shared outdoor commons. Everyone was to have access to all the latest available technological equipment.

The exciting phase for education was that the city was to be constructed with no schools or universities. And yet more learning was projected thoughtfully, humanely, inexpensively, and efficiently for more people than ever before. Everyone was to be a learner; everyone was to be a teacher. Learners and facilitators were to be connected in person, but initially often through the LORIN system (a computer-based resource network). The city was to serve as a lifelong learning laboratory.

As outlined by Ronald Barnes,[2] MXC Director for Educational Planning, the system was based upon almost reverse principles when contrasted with conventional systems. In the MXC, learning was conceived of as life itself; it was never to stop. Learning was to occur everywhere, for people could learn on their own. Everyone was important regardless of how much he or she knew. Learning was a lifelong process tailored to individuals. People could make their own decisions regard-

ing what and how to learn, and could form positive social networks on their own without schooling.

Although there were to be no "school buildings," the system did involve places for people to come together and share. Existing facilities such as homes, businesses, and public places were to be used. Beginning Life Centers were to offer a creative environment for very young children. Stimulus Centers were to offer films, tapes, sounds, and smells. Gaming Centers were to allow for the study of complex realities in a simple fashion. Project Centers were to provide persons with opportunities to work on experiential outcomes. Learner Banks would store tools, equipment, and non-print and print materials. Family Life Centers were to encourage the family to learn together and to communicate openly. Learners would use these sites whenever they needed or desired to do so, and not because they were required to do so, especially on a daily scheduled basis. The learning and every other system in the MXC were to remain experimental, fluid, and open to change.

To help with the transition toward potential learning futures, the Wilson Campus School at Minnesota State University, Mankato, piloted many of the MXC concepts (Long 1992). This well documented and, at the time, most innovative, open, flexible public learning system in America proved conclusively that there are better, nontraditional approaches than those currently in use for enhancing growth of spirit, mind, and body for many youth and adult populations. Initially, Wilson made sixty-nine deviations from the conventional school patterns. These involved nongrading, individualizing, personalizing, eliminating requirements, eliminating compulsory attendance, creating an infant through college and senior citizen mix under one roof, having a lighted community center, introducing teaming and suites rather than classrooms, incorporating self-evaluation, stressing self-direction and responsibility, considering everyone both a learner and a facilitator, focusing on urgent studies and global dilemmas, volunteering and tutoring where needed, spotlighting the affective as the priority domain, employing caring self-selected advisors and facilitators, encouraging community service, and instituting year-round continuous learning.

Wilson proved that the proposals for the MXC were viable —that students of all achievement levels and economic backgrounds could improve toward their potential, and that new learning systems were possible. The program was achieved through creative Imagineering. The staff imagined what they wanted, invented ways to create reality, and implemented their dreams. Though a beautiful environment for people, documented by ten years of student success, Wilson fell prey to a political process. In a tight budget year, the legislature closed all university laboratory schools to provide "new" college buildings without additional construction.

Monumental efforts were made to keep Wilson open, but to no avail. As consolation, the legislature did recommend that each major district should have its own laboratory program to continue educational research and development in Minnesota. Unfortunately, though, they did not mandate a plan or establish a consortium of volunteers. In the era of conservatism that followed, and without visionary leadership, the required Imagineering never reached fruition. Thus ended one of the most noble education experiments of the twentieth century.

Learning will not be better worldwide if it remains a practice of schooling. The publications from *Education Now* and the Education Heretics Press currently best document this conclusion.[3] In envisioning the decades ahead, leaders must focus not only on the creative designs of new learning systems and environments, but also on how communities might implement the new concepts (perhaps through the astronaut-style research and development centers), and, most of all, on how educators might disorient communities so that they understand what is currently wrong and thus become receptive to helping envision, create, and maintain the impossible!

Imagination is crucial. Imagine being on a trip to see the MXC, the most experimental city in the world. What would be seen from a distance? Would the city have tall buildings? Would it be underground? Would the central core be covered with a climate-controlled dome? What would one see upon arriving in the city? What would the MXC justice, health, employment, transportation, recycling, housing, and communication systems reflect? What, in short, would be the format for the most experimental learning plan in the world? The wonderful, general statement of Roald Dahl regarding dreams and realities which he makes in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1994) speaks very well to the specific possibilities articulated in each of these questions: "We make realities out of dreams and dreams out of realities. We are the dreamers of the dreams."

Creative change processes can evolve in most communities if imagination is released and supported.

Artists paint a picture with drawings. Authors paint a picture with words. Educators now must paint creative processes and programs with visions of "Pure Imagineering." Education can be changed if communities will 1) educate the constituents on the need for new societal and educational paradigms; 2) begin a process of disorienting away from the old school structure while orienting toward the new; 3) develop a philosophical base for education that is person-centered, not group-paced and aged-based; 4) establish R&D learning centers with volunteer participants; 5) Imagineer what is desired, invent how to do it, and then implement the imagined prototype; and 6) hire inventor leaders and pied piper staff.

Creative change processes can evolve in most communities if imagination is released and supported during the efforts to

both transition into and transform global learning systems. In this regard, Jonathan Swift spoke for all futurists, including educational futurists, when he stated in *Gulliver's Travels*, "I have seen what others can only dream...I know these descriptions are true...for I have been there" (1996). If the aerospace industry has the technology and intelligence to place humans on Mars in the next twenty years, then certainly in a two-decade span educators can learn how to eliminate the seventh grade.

In reflecting upon the proposed Minnesota Experimental City, the seventh grade was in fact abandoned, along with all other grade levels, as well as buildings called "schools." For three years, the state legislature supported the creation of the MXC to explore new dimensions for urban living, not as a model, but as truly the most experimental city in the world. However, surprise election results again changed history. The conservatives, whose leaders had supported the MXC project, lost control of the house, senate, and office of the governor. They were replaced by Democrats who then let the final approval process die without a vote, only one year before the planned groundbreaking ceremony.

It is time for politicians finally to set aside partisanship when societal futures are at stake. Among similar views of many authors, in *Turning the Century* (1992) futurist Robert Theobald clearly outlines the need for and process of bringing community leaders together to rethink the coming decades and the interdependence of all global systems. In transitioning education, we must seek creative people who will not maintain for everyone the existing structures of schooling. Instead, they will envision the possibilities, design new proposals—as exemplified by the MXC—and constantly self-renew to ensure continuous improvement. Through Imagineering, significantly different and significantly better learning systems truly can evolve for the benefit of both present and future generations.

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2. Barnes, Ronald. Transitions Inc. 639 Pueblo Lane, Prescott, AZ. 1972.
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Community Learning Center

The Community Learning Center (CLC) International Ad Hoc Committee would like to invite any and all educators to serve as committee members. If you are willing to discuss the idea of the community learning center via e-mail or Internet, can meet semi-annually for seminars and/or workshops, willing to learn new ideas, and to experiment and test the new ideas within your community, then the CLC International Ad Hoc Committee is for you.

For more information or to join, please contact

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Tel: +81 76-248-1100 Ext. 2226; **Fax:** +81 76-294-6701.
E-mail: <reber@neptune.kanazawa-it.ac.jp>.
Committee website: http://www2.kanazawait.ac.jp/englishd/reber/clc1.htm>.

A Shadow

BY RODRIGO H. FLORES

Rodrigo H. Flores was born in El Salvador in 1979. He is currently a student at Irvine (California) Valley College where he wrote this essay for a college writing class.

I walk on in the summer heat of the ghetto. The sun shines differently here. The romanticized California of so many postcards, with its beachside condos, its numerous skyscrapers, and its spectrum of sunsets, is nonexistent. Here, the flat land provides poor panoramas; the short bungalows give shade only to their inhabitants; and the colored sunsets only remind our lungs that the air is toxic.

Today, I walk in an especially dry air. Even though the heat distortion blurs the next block, I still notice several dogs feeding from a fallen trashcan. Others like them waste and stain the forgotten alleys and streets of South Central in packs of up to fifteen. This pack has only seven barking territorialists. Since their behavior is natural and approaching them is dangerous (especially in this maddening heat!), I cross the street and grant them the space they demand.

It is not long before I run into more distractions, however. Not more than two blocks past the hungry dogs, sweaty men huddle on the front porch of a windowless, iron-barred house and take turns smoking a marijuana cigarette. Around them, copious empty bottles of beer and hard liquor lay scattered and shattered on the lawn. After scanning me, they offer me five dollars worth of marijuana or crack. They offered hemp many times before but never had they blatantly offered crack. Do I look like a crack-head that they offer so assuredly? I ignore them but leave with added angst, suspicion, and doubt about my surroundings.

The sun is behind me as I walk (where I live, I always walk away from something). Lost in thought about my lot in life, I look at the floor to ignore my surroundings and then spot my incessant companion—my shadow. I ponder my distinct, broad skull; my grizzled beard and spectacled face; and my young, able body. Inevitably, since I look so much like him, I think about my father.

I think about my father when I feel doubt about life and I am looking at myself. Sometimes, when I feel unprepared for an important occasion, I look at the mirror and imagine him staring back. Right now, after having passed so much misery in the form of stray dogs, drug dealers, and rampant poverty, I remember him. I do not blame him for these things but I realize that because there are so many like him in South Central, their legacy propagates much of the poverty, unkempt lawns, wasted time (in alcohol and drugs), and lack of education. Their legacy is one of absenteeism.

How can a poor, single mother raise her children correctly if she provides the only income (an income that is generally gender biased—men make more than women) and in so doing, sacrifices her parenting time for food on the table? Who sets a good example to the children that hang out in decrepit streets and see drug dealers as their only male role models? Even when fathers are around, they are often victims themselves and therefore have no idea how to be fathers—sometimes they are the drug dealers!

I have not seen my father in over twelve years—I am only twenty years old. I blame him for the simple fact that I do not know him. I know I look like him and I regret that he is only a shadow in my life. As I walk, I realize that he is the same shadow that reminds thousands in the ghetto that they do not completely know themselves because they do not know their fathers.

The Empty Child

A Schoolteacher's Intuition About the Problem of Modern Schooling, An Essay in Twenty-two Parts

BY JOHN TAYLOR GATTO

REVIEWED BY MARY M. LEUE

John Taylor Gatto, whose name might not be known to some *Paths* readers, is a name to conjure with and a towering figure in the lives of countless American families who are struggling with the issue of making educational choices for their children. "Gatto consciousness" burst into my life in 1991, when I read his acceptance speech for the 1990 New York City Teacher of the Year award in the Summerhillian periodical *A Voice for Children* and reprinted it in my quarterly journal *SKOLE* in the Summer 1991 issue.

John had been a public school teacher in New York City for twenty-seven years. In 1989, he was named New York City Teacher of the Year by the Council of Chief State School Executives and the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and in 1990, New York City Teacher of the Year by a state senate resolution. In 1991, he was named the New York State Teacher of the Year, a title awarded by the New York State Education Department. In that same year, he was named New York City Teacher of the Year by the New York Alliance for Public Education.

In my introduction to the acceptance speech of John's that I reprinted in the Summer 1991 issue of *SKOLE*, I said of John, "But, you know, all this is merely data. The real thing about John is how you feel when you are with him. He makes you want to sing and write poems. He makes you want to surmount tall buildings in a single bound! He is an inspirer—and he writes like an angel!"

And then we get onto the extravaganza he called "The Exhausted School," in which John, ably abetted by his stalwart wife Janet and his associates in the Odysseus Project, masterminded hiring Carnegie Hall in New York in 1993. Dan Greenberg (of Sudbury Valley School); Dave Lehman (longtime principal of Alternative Community High School, a public alternative high school in Ithaca, NY); Pat Farenga (of Holt Associates' *Growing Without Schooling*); Kathleen Young (headmistress of Hawthorn Valley School, a Waldorf school in the Hudson valley); Roland Legiardi-Laura (ex-student, founder of the Poets' Cafe, in Manhattan, and cofounder of the Odysseus Project); a number of John's other remarkable ex-students, and I all spoke at this gathering. It was an astounding grassroots event, unabetted by anyone in either the press or the educational establishment!

Ever since he finally had to resign from his public school teaching career post, John has been crisscrossing the entire country—and, in recent years, the faraway reaches of the earth—speaking his heart and his mind to and on behalf of beleaguered families. *The Empty Child*, his *magnum opus*—of which this is a review—is a brilliant summation, as yet unpublished, of his life's work.

If one wished to attempt to sum up John's message to the families who comprise his passionately dedicated audiences around the world, one could hardly do so better than by citing from the first two pages of the manuscript, on which the author outlines his basic theme as follows:

THREE OUTLOOKS ON THE HUMAN CONDITION,
EACH OF WHICH DEMANDS A DIFFERENT KIND
OF SCHOOLING TO ACHIEVE:

I. The Behaviorist

II. The Scientific Humanist

III. The Human Being

Guess which one John favors! *The Empty Child*, John Gatto's masterwork, ten years (or more) in the shaping, is an elaboration of his thesis that the only sane, democratic, and human society we can hope to create (or recreate) is one that values the human being as an individual from whatever stratum of society he or she may arise, and under whatever circumstances she or he was born or brought up.

In his looking back at the history of America, Gatto clearly places the traditional values of "the common man" in America—which I would characterize as a belief in the Ten Commandments, the Golden Rule, and the Declaration of Independence, plus a touch of the

Mary Leue is the retired founder and director of the Albany (New York) Free School and the founding editor of both SKOLE: The Journal of Alternative Education *(the precursor of* Paths of Learning*) and the* Journal of Family Life.

humor of Abe Lincoln and the wit of Will Rogers—higher on his scale than he does our currently fashionable emphasis on group labels based on seemingly anything and everything, including prestige, culture, categories of classification, success/fail grading, and/or political correctness.

John believes that we have been tricked into accepting a model for learning superimposed on our natural human, developmentally adaptable capacities, and he reminds us that the leadership qualities of so many of our American heroes and institutional initiators came not from the classroom discipline offered by public schools, but, rather, from a childhood in which the love of learning for its own sake was accepted as a natural growth of the mind and heart of every human being—and was pursued as such.

Gatto believes our public school model of learning to be a kind of character training system not unlike army training, which is largely imposed upon children by a top-down power structure that runs through the entire chain of command from the superintendent of schools down to teachers, who are judged primarily for their ability to administer school rules, to create disciplined and smoothly functioning classrooms, and to report extensively on the attendance and behavior of their students. Successful teachers are those who can report successfully disciplined classes. Many studies have shown that most teachers view creativity among students as having a very low, or even negative, rating on the scale of student success. They measure "success" more in terms of successful self-discipline than in terms of creativity or even intelligent learning.

Gatto describes in eloquent detail the historical significance of this model of education, which originated in nineteenth-century Prussia under Kaiser Frederick the Great and was primarily designed to fit Prussian youths for army service in a disciplined national state. Americans greatly admired the scientific, cultural, and entrepreneurial achievements of the Germans at that time. Sending our most promising young men over to Germany to study German philosophies, scientific advances, methods, and institutions was a popular practice.

Gatto surmises that, additionally, the "eugenics" movement, both here and abroad, which presents pseudo-scientific support for fostering the selection for biological reproduction of human beings who represent the best and brightest of the race—and the discouragement of the "inferior" races and types—gave incentive to our scientific, social, and political leaders for pursuing their own aims, and not for the fostering of learning for all. To back up his claims, he offers many telling quotations from leading opinion leaders of the time. The end result, as pictured by Gatto, is a system that operates as though learning were best achieved through imposed curricula, regular drills, rote memorization, enforced "discipline," and the substitution of group activity under teacher direction for the individual initiatives of self-directed students. This result, he says, is particularly disastrous for our racial and ethnic minorities in the cities, as he discovered for himself when he was a teacher. He believes that it is equally disastrous for all children in the long run, and that the American educational system, developed according to the Prussian model, has been and is turning out a nation of passive, incurious, rule-oriented, and dogmatic Americans.

The American educational system is turning out a nation of passive, incurious, rule-oriented, and dogmatic Americans.

It has long been a shibboleth in American society that "a good education" is the keystone of a successful adult life, morally, culturally, intellectually, economically—even matrimonially. But there is a growing awareness that something is seriously amiss in our public education system for all too many of America's citizens, and not just for a few "disadvantaged" ghetto dwellers who fail because of their lack of capacity for formal learning. The tragedy at Columbine High School happened not in the ghettos of New York or Chicago, but in a prosperous Colorado community. Common acceptance of the moral and intellectual inferiority of "the masses" in our ghettos is still widely held, however, and, until recently, the idea that the origin of this belief might be the result of deliberate cultivation by our cultural and professional leaders has only been toyed with by the "misfits" in our midst—poets, artists, dreamers, political dissidents, failures.

This fact, says Gatto, stems from the appeal by our opinion leaders—echoed in the media—to the language of the religions of "gentility," often equated with "civilization." One might even say that the pursuit of this spurious "gentility," which mandates classless cultural uniformity hidden beneath the American fashion of jeans and T-shirts and held in place by the making of money, has become a way of life in America that often goes even deeper than our religious affiliations.

Tragedies like the Columbine shootings, which point to a far deeper and more mysterious origin for the outbreak of such appalling violence in an apparently successful school, may now create a space for Gatto's deeply held belief that our cultural leaders were not acting out of an altruistic belief in universal education, but, in actuality, were pursuing a strategy, mainly for their own benefit, to tame the older, basically unregulated social structure of free individuals in a free society.

Gatto says that this strategy was promoted primarily by what he calls the "four great coal powers of the twentieth century"—the United States, Great Britain, Germany, and France. "School as we know it," he adds, "was the creation of four great coal powers whose ingenious employment of the coal-fired steam engine shrank distance and crippled local integrity and the credibility of local elites." According to Gatto, our current

educational situation represents the end result of a gradually accelerating upward curve beginning with the end of the Civil War, which has, with the turn of the century, been imposed on the society as a whole with increasingly systematic efficacy. Gatto sees this accelerating process as having been defined and ushered in—in effect, legitimized—by a series of scientific, religious, and corporate leaders who viewed the "lower orders" as a threat to their supremacy, who saw eugenics as a solution to the dangers of miscegenation, and who imported compatible ideas about education from Europe as the most effective means for accomplishing their own social and economic aims.

Gatto sees the ordinary person, by contrast, not as a member of a "mass" to be regulated and guided through a systematic approach to problem-solving, but, rather, as a sacred entity unto himself, to be respected and listened to by his peers and by our social and governmental leaders. He sees the entire historical period leading up to the present day as a process of denigrating the integrity of the individual in such a manner as to reduce his original status as a balanced, self-governing American to his current position as a relatively helpless, incompetent unit in a world governed by the illusion of social homogeneity and individuality. In actuality, money and privilege have divided the members of the social classes so totally that they no longer view each other as members of the same world, even though they pursue the same American goals and dreams.

It is time to take back our power as ordinary human beings!

Gatto views children both as supremely themselves and as the adults of the future they will become, and he sees the task of the school and the teacher as offering inspiration to them through the teacher's own passion and know-how, supporting their individual genius or daemon, providing as much space as possible for experimentation and practice with their future adult roles, and as supporting and protecting them from the adults who have been assigned the job of indoctrinating them with the mores of the culture.

For Gatto, it is the personhood of the adults who shape children's primary environment that makes the crucial difference in the adults these fledglings will become. "We teach who we are," as the saying goes—and our children look to us as their inspiration, whether positively or negatively.

The five hundred thirty-two pages of his as yet unpublished manuscript are Gatto's detailed and extensively documented argument in aid of his belief that we need to take back control of our children's education. The scope of this work is enormous, and its style is eloquent and eminently readable. His writings stand virtually alone in his understanding of the need for (and of the obstacles to) educational reform and the devastating effects of our current power stalemate on the lives of children. As he says, the time is short. We are overdue for acting on our growing awareness that it is time to take back our power as ordinary human beings!

Directory of Resources for Educational Alternatives

Alliance for Parental Involvement
in Education (ALLPIE)
P.O. Box 59
East Chatham, NY 12060-0059
518-392-6900
allpie@taconic.net

The Alliance for Parental Involvement in Education is a parent-to-parent organization which assists people who wish to be involved in their children's education—public, private and home schooling. Services include a catalog of resources, workshops and conferences, a mail-order lending library, phone consultations, and ALLPIE mailings.

Alternative Education
Resource Organization (AERO)
417 Roslyn Rd.
Roslyn Heights, NY 11577
(800) 769-4171
http://www.edrev.org

The major clearinghouse for information, contacts, and consulting on alternative schools of diverse types, community learning centers, home education, and international alternatives. Produces a nationally distributed radio talk show, *The Education Revolution*, an informative newsletter, numerous videos, and the most comprehensive directory (over 300 pages) of alternative schools and learning resources.

Antioch New England Graduate School
40 Avon St.
Keene, NH 03431
(603) 357-3122
http://www.antiochne.edu

Graduate programs in education include specialties in environmental education; Waldorf education; and the Integrated Day, a progressive approach that makes connections between the life of the child and the life of the classroom.

Association of Waldorf Schools of North America
3911 Bannister Rd.
Fair Oaks, CA 95628
(916) 961-0927
http://www.waldorfeducation.org

The major organization linking Waldorf (Steiner) schools, teacher education programs, publications, and other resources. Publishes *Renewal: A Journal for Waldorf Education*.

Association for Experiential Education
2305 Canyon Blvd., Suite 100
Boulder, CO 80302
(303) 440-8844
http://www.aee.org

Promotes experiential learning in numerous settings, especially through outdoor adventure programs. Publishes books, directories and the *Journal for Experiential Education*. Sponsors conferences.

Autodidactic Press
P.O. Box 872749
Wasilla, AK 99687
(907) 376-2932
http://www.autodidactic.com

A small press and website advocate for self-education and lifelong learning. Dedicated to the proposition that lifelong learning is the lifeblood of democracy and a key to living life to its fullest, and to the autodidactic philosophy that an education should be thought of not as something you get but as something you take.

Center for Education Reform
1001 Connecticut Ave. NW, Suite 204
Washington, D.C. 20036
(800) 521-2118
http://edreform.com

A nonprofit advocacy group supporting fundamental reforms in schools, with an emphasis on high academic standards, more parental choice, and greater local control. Provides numerous resources on charter schools, including research, state-by-state reports, and materials for planning new programs. Offers a comprehensive database on educational reform and several publications, including *The Education Forum*.

The Center for Inspired Learning
http://www.inspiredinside.com/learning

A website created to help people connect with other people and ideas related to more holistic and community-based forms of learning. Contains links to pages describing different types of schools, a library of reflective articles, and more.

Designs for Learning
1745 University Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55104
(651) 649-5400, ext. 3009

Coordinated by Wayne Jennings, director of five charter schools and the originator of the St. Paul Open School, this contact has research on principles of learning and charter school designs, relevant to creating alternatives in both the private and public sectors.

Down to Earth Books
P.O. Box 163
Goshen, MA 01032
http//www.crocker.com/~maryl/index.html

Publisher and online bookstore specializing in education, psychology, spirituality, poetry and other topics. Titles include back issues of *SKOLE* (the journal of alternative education that preceded P*aths of Learning*) and the three volume *Challenging the Giant: The Best of SKOLE*, along with *Making it Up as We Go Along*: *The Story of the Albany Free School*, and *Real Education*: *Varieties of Freedom*, a book from Great Britain not readily available in the U.S. Website also features reviews and articles.

Directory of Resources for Educational Alternatives

Educational Futures Projects
P.O. Box 2977
Sacramento, CA 95812
(916) 393-8701

Coordinated by Don Glines, creator of the well-known Wilson and Lincoln public alternative schools, this clearinghouse has information on the original philosophy of alternatives for everyone, the history of the movement, and publications on how to create alternative programs.

Education Now and Education Heretics Press
113 Arundel Drive
Bramcote Hills
Nottingham, England UK NG93FQ
www.gn.apc.org/edheretics
www.gn.apc/educationnow

Education Now is a quarterly newsletter on alternative schools, homeschooling, visionary learning systems, and person-centered education. The Education Heretics Press catalog features original books and monographs on diverse paths of learning. Though published in England, the philosophy and most of the issues are relevant to American concerns.

Endicott College and The Institute for
Educational Studies (TIES)
(877) 276-5200
http://www.tmn.com/ties

Graduate program in Integrative Learning. Colloquium-based, low residency and innovative online learning community. By addressing human and ecological issues through a systemic approach, these studies emphasize the need for congruency between what we know and how we act. Students develop practical strategies for designing learning environments that meet the needs of a culture in rapid transition.

EnCompass
11011 Tyler Foote Rd.
Nevada City, CA 95960
(530) 292-1000

A nonprofit, holistic learning center dedicated to the psychological and emotional health of children and families. EnCompass teaches and models the NLR (Natural Learning Rhythms) approach developed by Ba and Josette Luvmour through an integrated program of workshops, classes, internships, retreats, Family Camps, Outdoor Education, special programs, conferences and publications.

Genius Tribe
P.O. Box 1014
Eugene, OR 97440-1014
(541) 686-2315

A mail order library for unschoolers, homeschoolers, and other people committed to education in the fullest, freest, most joyful sense of the word. Book and resource reviews by Grace Llewellyn, author of *The Teenage Liberation Handbook*.

Goddard College
Plainfield, VT 05667
(802) 454-8311
http://www.goddard.edu

Graduate program in teacher education emphasizes alternative, progressive, and holistic approaches. All graduate as well as undergraduate programs regard each student as a unique individual in charge of his or her own learning.

Great Ideas in Education/Holistic Education Press
P.O. Box 328
Brandon, VT 05733-0328
(800) 639-4122
http://www.great-ideas.org

Publisher and distributor of books in the areas of holistic and progressive education and the journal *Encounter*: *Education for Meaning and Social Justice*. A partner with the Foundation for Educational Renewal (publisher of *Paths of Learning*).

Growing Without Schooling
Holt Associates
2380 Massachusetts Ave., Suite 104
Cambridge, MA 02140
(617) 864-3100
http://www.holtgws.com

GWS is a bimonthly newsletter linking homeschooling families, filled with resources, information, and personal stories. Holt Associates offers consultations; sponsors an annual conference; and publishes the catalog John Holt's Bookstore, containing tools and ideas for independent learning.

Haven
http://www.haven.net

Haven is a web-based global learning center with personal inquiry, dialogue, collaboration and service as guiding processes. Focus is on 21st century "edge-ucation," right livelihood and sustainable business, deep ecology, and the interconnections between people in their daily lives. Offers online salons, mentoring, and apprenticeships for teens and adults.

Heinemann
361 Hanover St.
Portsmouth, NH 03801-3912
(800) 793-2154
http://www.heinemann.com

Publisher of numerous titles on whole language approaches to literacy and other student-centered methods of teaching, including several excellent books on alternative education. Titles include *Making it Up as We Go Along*: *The Story of the Albany Free School* by Chris Mercogliano, *One Size Fits Few*: *The Folly of Educational Standards* by Susan Ohanian, and *Round Peg, Square Hole* by John Gust.

Home Education Magazine
P.O. Box 1083
Tonasket, WA 98855
(800) 236-3278
http://www.home-ed-magazine.com

Published since 1983 by a second-generation homeschooling family, this is an in-depth and well balanced general interest homeschool magazine. Ten columnists and over a dozen feature articles in every 68-page issue. *H.E.M.* website offers an extensive online library of articles; a database; discussion forums; and more, including the American Homeschool Association, a nonprofit networking and service organization with a newsletter, writers' clearinghouse, and information on home education laws in all 50 states. See http://www.home-ed-magazine.com/AHA/aha.html.

John Dewey Project
on Progressive Education
535 Waterman Building
University of Vermont
Burlington, VT 05405
(802) 656-1355

A policy research institute promoting ideas such as justice, equity, human development, creativity, care, ethics and community in public discussion of educational issues. Publishes studies and position papers, sponsors conferences and forums.

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2933 N. 2nd St.
Minneapolis, MN 55411
(612) 529-5001

Publishes the periodical *Public School Montessorian* and an annual *Montessori Community Directory*, a comprehensive listing of hundreds of schools across the U.S., as well as organizations, teacher education centers, publications, materials suppliers, and other resources for Montessori education.

Alfie Kohn
http://www.AlfieKohn.org

A useful website featuring articles, books, videos, and lectures on teaching and parenting by Alfie Kohn, one of today's most astute observers of schooling. (His best-selling titles include *No Contest* and *Punished by Rewards*.) Also lists national and state-by-state resources and contact people to build a campaign against the educational standards movement.

National Association for Core Curriculum
1640 Franklin Ave., Suite 104
Kent, OH 44240
(330) 677-5008

Promotes integrative, interdisciplinary studies, team teaching, block scheduling, and other learning-centered approaches. A network of innovative educators influenced by the principles of progressive education. Newsletter lists conferences, resources, and research support for these methods.

National Association for Year-Round Education
P.O. Box 711386
San Diego, CA 92171
(619) 276-5296
http://www.NAYRE.org

Year-round education represents an alternative way of thinking about the school's relationship to the community as a whole, encouraging experimental programs and lifelong learning. NAYRE publishes books, articles and monographs, and sponsors an annual conference.

National Coalition of Alternative
Community Schools
1266 Rosewood, #l
Ann Arbor, MI 48104
(734) 668-9171
http://www.geocities.com/Athens/8187/ncacs.htm

NCACS is a nonprofit network of schools, groups and individuals committed to participant control, whereby students, parents, and staff create and implement their own learning programs. NCACS sponsors a directory and other publications, conferences, exchanges, accreditation, and alternative teacher education.

National Coalition of Education Activists
P.O. Box 679
Rhinebeck, NY 12572
ncea@aol.com

NCEA is a multi-racial network of parents, school staff, and others involved in public school issues. Its purpose is to promote a progressive and equitable vision of public education and to help local activists acquire the information, skills, and support they need to make this vision a reality.

National Community Education Association
3929 Old Lee Highway, #91A
Fairfax, VA 22042
(703) 359-8973
http://www.ncea.com

Supports schools (primarily public schools) and community leaders working to provide expanded learning opportunities in response to individual and community needs. After school and extended day programs, social services, alternative schools, and lifelong learning approaches are among the models promoted. Based on principles of local control and self-determination. Publishes books and other materials.

New Horizons for Learning
P.O. Box 15329
Seattle, WA 98115
(206) 547-7936
http://www.newhorizons.org

An online resource for educators concerned with the fullest development of human capabilities. Explores ideas not yet in mainstream educational practice. Online journal, books and other materials, networking for people and organizations.

Directory of Resources for Educational Alternatives

Northeast Foundation for Children
71 Montague City Rd.
Greenfield, MA 01301
(800) 360-6332
http://responsiveclassroom.org

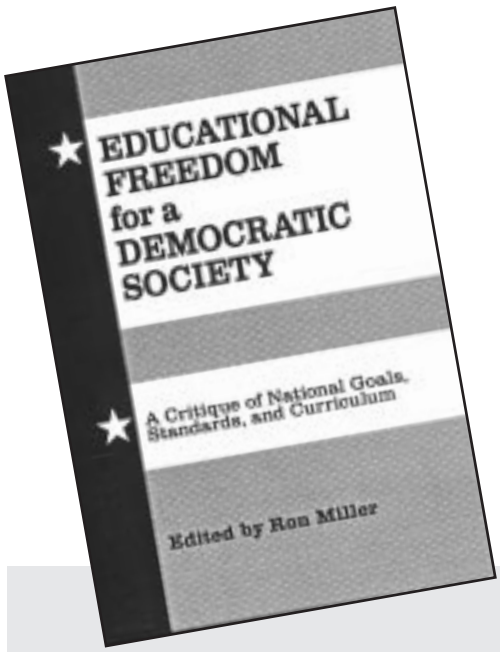
A nonprofit organization providing workshops, consulting, publications, and other resources dedicated to the improvement of K-8 teaching. Strong emphasis on the social context of learning and understanding of children's development. "Responsive Classroom" approach has been used successfully in hundreds of schools.

Rethinking Schools
1001 E. Keefe Ave.
Milwaukee, WI 53212
(800) 669-4192
http://www.rethinkingschools.org

An activist publication for teachers, parents, and students concerned with urban education. Views classrooms as "places of hope" and empowerment. Also publishes books and resources on particular topics.

Zephyr Press
P.O. Box 66006
Tucson, AZ 85728-6006
(800) 232-2187
http://www.zephyrpress.com

Publishes books exploring "new ways of teaching for all ways of learning," including multiple intelligences, brain based learning and integrated curriculum. Sponsors workshops and an annual conference.



Educational Freedom for a Democratic Society

A Critique of National Goals, Standards, and Curriculum

Edited by Ron Miller

Contents

Goals 2000 and other standards-setting initiatives represent a massive shift of educational authority from families and local communities to federal and state bureaucracies, from teachers and learners to commissions of "experts" and policymakers. They replace intellectual freedom and cultural diversity with a narrow, economy-driven vision of standardization and uniformity.

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Paths of Learning

Options for Families & Communities

- Erika Schickel, a parent active with the Play Mountain Place, writes a profile article on this humanistic, Summerhillian, alternative school located in Los Angeles, California.

- An interview with Dr. Thomas Armstrong, the highly influential educational theorist and the author of *In Their Own Way, Awakening Your Child's Natural Genius, The Myth of the A.D.D. Child,* and numerous other books and articles.

- Peg Lopata, a freelance writer, writes on the use of rhythm in Waldorf education.

- Robin Ann Martin, coordinator of the Paths of Learning Resource Center, offers a practical view on how parents, teachers, and students can benefit from educational research.