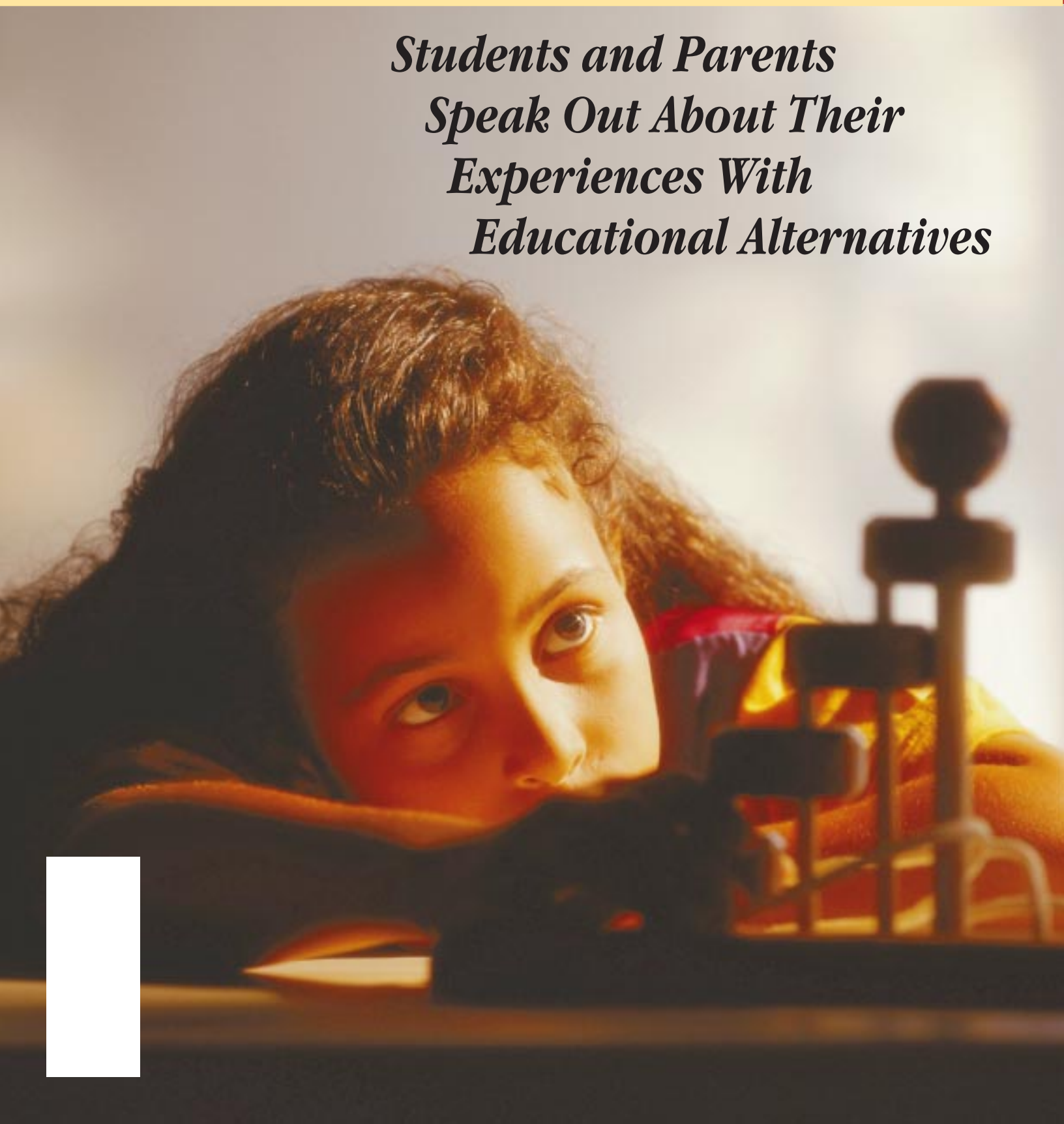
AUTUMN 2001

# Paths of Learning

Options for Families & Communities

## *Students and Parents Speak Out About Their Experiences With Educational Alternatives*

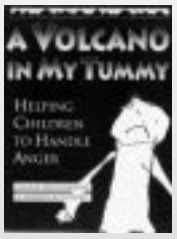


# BOOKS TO BUILD FREE MINDS

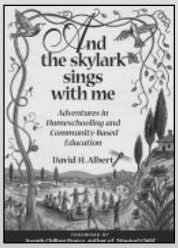
## Buy 3 Books and We'll Pay Your Shipping!


**STRANDS IN THE WEB**
*201 Activities for Teaching Environmental Awareness*
***ROGER SMITH***
This teachers' sourcebook includes over 200 activities and 32 black line masters for class handouts to enhance students' understanding of today's environmental issues. Grades 4–9. Index
**• $18.95 • 0-88751-035-3**

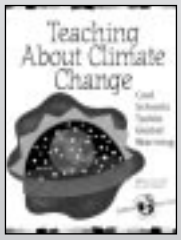

**DESCHOOLING OUR LIVES**
***MATT HERN, ED.***
*Foreword by Ivan Illich*
*"A terrific overview of all the things people are doing instead of sending their children to conventional schools. Most importantly, it is a collection of electrifying essays which challenge our assumptions about education."*
— Patrick Farenga
**• $14.95 • 0-86571-342-1**




**A VOLCANO IN MY TUMMY**
*Helping Children to Handle Anger*
***ÉLIANE WHITEHOUSE & WARWICK PUDNEY***
Engaging activities help children learn the difference between anger the feeling, and violence the behavior. For classroom or home. Grades 1–8.
**•$12.95 • 0-86571-349-9**

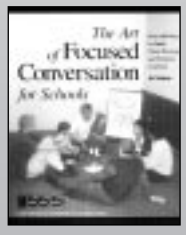



**AND THE SKYLARK SINGS WITH ME**
*Adventures in Homeschooling and Community-Based Education*
***DAVID H. ALBERT***
*"**And the Skylark Sings with Me** should now be considered the definitive book on homeschooling."*
— Joseph Chilton Pearce
**•$16.95 • 0-86571-401-0**

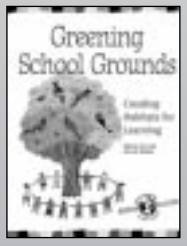



**TEACHING ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE**
*Cool Schools Tackle Global Warming*
***TIM GRANT & GAIL LITTLEJOHN***
Strategies, lesson plans, experiments, and activities to teach about global warming and help students do their part to cool the planet. Grades 1-12. Index, Resources.
**• $12.95 • 0-86571-437-1**

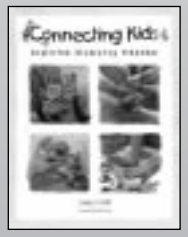

**IN THE GLOBAL CLASSROOM Vol 1 & 2**
*GRAHAM PIKE & DAVID SELBY*
This cross-curriculum approach blends the personal/social development of students with a global perspective. Vol. 1 focuses on the environment; Vol. 2 focuses on social justice. Grades 1–12. Bibliography, Index.
**• $24.95 each**
**• Vol. 1: 0-88751-081-7**
**• Vol. 2: 0-88751-085-X**




**THE ART OF FOCUSED CONVERSATION FOR SCHOOLS**
*More than 100 Ways to Think Clearly in Schools*
***JO NELSON***
Bring the Focused Conversation method to your classroom, staff meetings, and parent-teacher meetings for better communication. Grades K–12. Bibliography, Index.
**• $21.95 • 0-86571-435-5**




**GREENING SCHOOL GROUNDS**
*Creating Habitats of Learning*
***TIM GRANT & GAIL LITTLEJOHN***
Transform barren asphalt wastelands into exciting natural spaces for learning and playing. Includes project plans and curriculum tie-ins. Grades 1-12. Index, Resources.
**•$16.95 • 0-86571-436-3**




**CONNECTING KIDS**
*Exploring Diversity Together*
***LINDA HILL***
Over 200 fun games and activities help children explore and celebrate differences and build an inclusive culture that prevents prejudice and discrimination.
Grades K–6. Index.
**•$19.95 • 0-86571-431-2**

Name _____

Street _____

City/State/Zip _____

Daytime Phone _____ email _____

**Payment by:**

❑ Check or Money Order ❑ Mastercard ❑ Visa

Credit Card # _____ Expiration _____

Signature _____

***For Credit Card Orders Call: 1-800-567-6772***
***or visit www.newsociety.com to see our full online catalog.***

| Title | Qty | Price | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | Shipping/Handling | |
| | | Subtotal | |
| | | TOTAL DUE | |

*(FREE shipping when you order 3 or more books)*

Shipping & handling charges
$4.50 for the first book plus
$1.00 for each additional book.

## NEW SOCIETY PUBLISHERS

800•567•6772 www.newsociety.com

# Paths of Learning

Options for Families & Communities

ISSN 1526-0186

Issue Number 10 Autumn 2001

## Editorial



## Feature Section: Tales Out of School



## Focus on the Learner

## Families and Community



## New Possibilities in Public Education



## Education, Social Change, and a Sustainable World



## Resources



**Paths of Learning**
**Options for Families and Communities**

ISSN 1526-0186

**www.great-ideas.org**

**Editor**
Richard J. Prystowsky
326 I Street, Ste 148
Eureka, CA 95501
707-840-0567
paths_editor@great-ideas.org

**Managing Editor**
Beryl Robare
mg_edit@great-ideas.org

**Subscriptions**
Marietta Sheehan
P.O. Box 328
Brandon, Vermont 05733-0328
1-800-639-4122
marietta@great-ideas.org

**Advertising and Business Manager**
Charles S. Jakiela
P.O. Box 328
Brandon, Vermont 05733-0328
802-247-8312
csj@great-ideas.org

**Design**
Anything Graphic
Pittsford, Vermont
bearsaway@aol.com

**Printer**
Sharp Offset Printing
P.O. Box 757
Rutland, Vermont 05702-0757
www.SharpOffsetPrinting.com

Paths of Learning is a publication of the independent Foundation for Educational Renewal, which promotes diverse learner-centered perspectives on teaching, learning, and human development. Subscription cost is $19.95 in the U.S. and $28.95 elsewhere. *Paths* is printed with soy ink on recycled paper. Ron Miller, President of the Foundation, can be reached at <milleron@together.net>.

## EDITORIAL

# *Education in the Backyard*

"I've stayed in the front yard all my life.
I want a peek at the back
Where it's rough and untended and hungry weed grows.
A girl gets sick of a rose."
—Gwendolyn Brooks, "a song in the front yard"

In a previous issue of *Paths*, we requested that persons send us stories highlighting their experiences with especially meaningful teaching approaches or learning environments: In particular, we wanted to hear about approaches and environments that, as we said in our announcement, "truly allow young people to thrive." In this issue, we present in the form of a writing collage a special feature article that showcases a range of views and experiences with unconventional teaching and learning. As we hope you'll agree, this writing collage offers insight into the potential and promise associated with the world of freedom in educational choice.

As I read the other pieces to be published in this issue, I began realizing that, in their own ways, all could be seen as representing a response to our special request for submissions, even though none was sent to us for this purpose. In other words, everyone whose work appears in this issue writes about teaching approaches and learning environments that truly allow young people to thrive. In fact, one might even argue that *Paths* has always been publishing special issues, insofar as all of our issues amount to a sort of collage of articles illustrating deeply meaningful paths of teaching, learning, and living. In this sense, this issue's special feature article serves epigrammatically to highlight the hard work and soul struggles of so many persons connected with educational alternatives — those who have written for us; those who have written to us; those who belong to our community of readers; and, more generally, those whose hearts lead them to walk paths of committed, soulful living.

Although many persons familiar with alternatives in education know that there is an abundance of good, though unconventional, educational work being done on behalf of young people, much, if not most, of this work is not widely known among the general public. Indeed, despite the increased national exposure of educational alternatives — *Newsweek*'s cover story on homeschooling; *60 Minutes*' coverage of the Sudbury Valley School — many people in the population at large remain unaware of the multitude and variety of teaching and learning projects in which young persons and adults involved in alternative education are engaged. Why is that? One reason, I think, is that most of these projects take place, to borrow Gwendolyn Brooks' words, in the back yard, where "it's rough and untended and [where] hungry weed grows." This frontier territory is not ordinarily populated by so-called "charity children," about whom Brooks writes admiringly in her poem, but, rather, by revolutionary thinkers and practitioners who are not afraid to take chances, to be uncertain, to experiment, to risk social acceptance in exchange for the chance to grow and be free, to reach, as the poet Robert Browning might say, so that their reach exceeds their grasp.

Yet, albeit ironically, the concept of "charity children" is not altogether unfamiliar to persons involved in alternative education, given how often they find themselves subtly or boldly under attack by, as Hamlet's friend Horatio might say, the yet unknowing world. Those who are familiar only with public school paradigms of teaching and learning (and private school versions of these paradigms) sometimes wonder if, in fact, kids who travel alternative education paths are being neglected. Indeed, when homeschooling parents, for example, talk with persons unfamiliar with homeschool-

ing, often they find themselves answering neglect-oriented questions such as "But what about socialization?" or "But is Johnny reading at grade level?" or "But how will Shirley get into college?" When, during 60 *Minutes*' special on the Sudbury Valley School, Morley Safer asked an ostensible education expert what she felt about the SVS approach, she accused the staff and parents, in so many words, of child neglect.

It has been my experience that most mainstream folks who challenge or criticize the work of alternative education teachers, parents, and students — and we must remember that their challenges and criticisms *per se* are not necessarily bad, nor are their concerns necessarily illegitimate — do so in large part because they don't understand. They have spent so much time in the front yard of conventional approaches to teaching and learning that they aren't even aware that a fecund and fertile educational backyard exists (to be fair, and to recognize the efforts of those public school teachers who have tried to effect meaningful and significant student-oriented change within public education, let us acknowledge that such a backyard can exist even in public school settings, though perhaps more subtly and in smaller ways). When they do discover the existence of this backyard, many are, understandably, afraid. They don't know what to make of the seemingly strange teaching and learning approaches that they find there, such as unschooling and student-led learning. Most seem to have no paradigmatic understanding of these theories and practices, and thus no contextual basis for knowing how to hear the answers to their own questions. From what I have seen, many such persons appear to be threatened by our work. Some are defensive; some seem to feel guilty for having made less desirable choices for their children and themselves. Some even seem to feel indicted. Unfortunately for them, many don't understand that, sometimes, a rose by another name is not in fact a rose; therefore, unlike Brooks' narrator, they have trouble understanding why sometimes "a girl gets sick of a rose."

Fortunately, many persons in alternative education have committed themselves to helping a larger group of people understand the value of many non-traditional approaches to teaching and learning. Among these persons are the authors whose work we present in the present issue of *Paths*, who help us to understand that we can honor our creative intelligence, our imagination, our insights, our intuitions to honor children and ourselves. These authors help us to see that, as Richard Lewis, the author of this issue's profile article, might say, we can learn to tell other stories — ones that are more authentically and genuinely our own. "Within everyone, child or adult," Lewis writes, "an elegant narrative of a story exists between ourselves and the life around.… Though a story may challenge what we already believe about our world," he continues, "ultimately, it is through stories that spirit is nurtured" (1998, 71).

Let us all listen attentively, then, to the diverse voices represented in our special feature article, voices telling us stories of spirit and imagination, of struggle and soul. Let us listen to the voices of the students and staff at the Puget Sound Community School, who were interviewed by Robin Martin, as these committed individuals relate their stories of success and struggle to build a community of honoring and respectful teachers and students. Let us listen to the voices of Tina and Mike Dawson, as they relate stories of the rewards and benefits of outdoor education. Indeed, let us hear all of the voices and all of the stories in this issue, voices and stories honoring those pioneers who, either quietly or boldly, continue to take risks in the service of engaging themselves in alternative, healthy, holistic ways of living and learning.

In her contribution to our special feature collage, Gretchen Rae says about her alma mater — Camden, Maine's The Community School — that this alternative high school "is more than a school; it is a place that saves lost spirits." But maybe these spirits, or at least some of them, might not have been lost in the first place had we known how to pay attention to and honor them all along. Telling us about her family's journey through alternative educational paths, Rena Fielding, another contributor to the special feature collage, echoes Gretchen's thanksgiving to those who provide nurturing, sustenance, and support to persons struggling to find a healthy educational and life path. She expresses her gratitude to two important mentors for her, whose support, she writes, enabled her to "build [her] own way to be with [herself] and [her] children." She adds: "I wouldn't have missed this for the world."

Indeed. May we find in the articles presented in this issue yet further sustenance, yet further support, yet stronger community, so that all of us can build our own ways to be with our families and communities. Let us have the strength and courage to be examples, to be different, to show others by our examples and through our stories that on a larger and, perhaps, more public scale we can effect meaningful change in our children's, families', and communities' lives. Sometimes, we just need to remind ourselves that it's okay for us to explore new options, to look in different places for our own truths, to look deeply within ourselves to see how we might honor our children's and our own being. Sometimes, we just need to take a peek at the backyard.

*— Richard J. Prystowsky*

Reference

Lewis, Richard. 1998. *Living by wonder: The imaginative life of childhood.* New York: Parabola Books/Touchstone Center.

# Tales Out of School

*In a previous issue of this magazine, we asked readers to submit stories about the experiences students who have benefited in meaningful ways from their educational experiences. Specifically, we wanted authors to tell us about those qualities of teaching approaches or learning environments that truly allow young people to thrive, and we hoped that these authors would distinguish those qualities from conventional practices that all too often frustrate and alienate students. Ultimately, we wanted to hear about students' attempts to walk a path of deep living and learning.*

*Happily, our expectations were met. Below, we present to you a collage of stories that we received, told from the perspectives of one teacher, a number of students, and several parents. We hope that you find these stories enlightening and challenging, and we invite you to send us your reflections on what you read here. In the meantime, let us enjoy the writing that follows and, in the process, celebrate the diversity of ways in which we can encourage truly valuable teaching, learning, and living.*

*As many of us know, although there is much that is disastrously wrong with public education, there are also many gifted, caring teachers who are trying their best to make their classes meaningful to their students. Our first piece is written by one such teacher, who strives to have the teaching and practice of politeness and encouragement be a central component of her pedagogy.*

TALES OUT OF SCHOOL

## How I Am Teaching Compassion to My Students

by Gina Vanides

Gina Vanides

This is my fourth year of teaching 4th-6th grade band and violin classes in the Buena Park, California School District.

I am a good "encourager" and I have a kind heart, so for the past three years I have made it a point to encourage my students and bring out the best in them.

This year, though, I changed to a more direct approach of positively directing students' lives. This was a result of recent observations I've had in seeing adult musicians and adults in general behave rudely and impolitely.

So four weeks ago, I introduced the concept of "polite encouragers" to my classes. I connected it to the idea that sometimes musicians can have big egos, and I wanted my students to grow up to be kind and polite musicians. Then I tied this goal into life in general, explaining how being polite and encouraging has a direct, positive influence on the people around us.

At the end of class when my students write down their practice assignment on their homework sheet, they also get to give themselves a "p" if they were polite during class, and an "e" if they encouraged anybody or planned to encourage anybody during the day. (At that point, I mention examples of how many people I have encouraged that day to show that I am quite serious about being kind to others.)

Now that we are four weeks into this "project," students are actively encouraging those around them, and pointing out when others use encouraging words. They have also had the opportunity to note the joyful effect that their encouragement has on those around them, and this has inspired them to keep being kind. In turn, I myself am encouraged to discover that my "polite encouragers" project helps my students learn compassion.

*[Editor's Note: For more of Gina's heartfelt views on teaching and learning, see page 40.]*

*Many parents struggle to find the right learning environment for their child, knowing that their child has special and perhaps even unique needs. The following article details the journey of one such parent, who was determined to find a high school for her child that would honor the integrity of her child's own learning paths.*

TALES OUT OF SCHOOL

# Choosing a High School

by Karen Davis-Brown

I cherish many friends and family members who have struggled long and hard to make their local public school systems work for their children. I am filled with awe and admiration at their creativity, patience, and persistence. However, I did not have the creativity, patience, or persistence to follow their example. Perhaps this is partially because I live in California where, until the recent charter school movement, parents had little input in their children's elementary school education. Perhaps this is because our family learned, when our son Mark was in the early grades, that he had neurological challenges which meant that, though he was very intelligent, he would not be able to manage the pace, stimulation, or visual and aural demands of a traditional classroom. Mainstream special education is not geared to gifted children who cannot read.

Therefore, throughout my son's grade school years he participated in a series of Waldorf-based independent study and alternative school venues, concluding with grades five through eight at a Waldorf school for children in need of special care called Somerset, located in Colfax, California. His four years at Somerset were extremely successful. His neurological issues were largely remediated through the therapeutic support he received there. World-class teachers took the time to learn his heart, mind, and soul, and to help him explore what was there. His long-term relationships with the animals on the school's farm, and with the younger and more seriously challenged students at the school, laid a foundation of compassion and responsibility that has already borne significant fruit in other aspects of his life.

Mark Brown

However, we all felt it was time for Mark to go out "into the world." Though he loved Somerset, Mark was feeling the need for a larger circle in which to polish his newly developed social skills. The teachers, though in some ways loath to let him go, understood that he needed to move on to a place that presented him with new and different intellectual and personal challenges. I felt he needed to transition into a situation that would maximize his post-high school vocational and educational options.

But, where? The traditional high school down the street was never seriously considered. The tremendous stress and sensory overload of the classroom and between-class rush was evident, and Mark still maintained a love for learning and (yes) for homework that we did not want dampened in any way by the cynicism and disrespect of even the brightest high school students.

We looked seriously at some very good private high schools—two Waldorf high schools, and a Quaker high school in a nearby community. The latter was particularly appealing, due to its small size, rural location, and the strong ethos of mutual support that was part of student life there. However, two things became clear for these types of settings. The first was that Mark would not have enough time to do the required homework, because of the long, uninterrupted school days. The second was that he would not have sufficient time to devote to his music, which was becoming an increasingly important part of his life.

We are very fortunate in our public high school district to have two "independent study" high schools. We looked at both of these schools, and discovered that both would allow Mark the flexibility to do his homework during the day, and to practice voice, piano, organ, and composition, while getting a high school education. However, as we explored one of the schools further it became clear that it was the curriculum, and not the student, that was the basis for the school's structure and measurement of progress. For instance, when I presented a staffperson with the idea that Mark could study Ireland for a while in preparation for a summer trip there, the response was that he would have to do that on his own because the curriculum for that semester was American History. The response to the possibility that he could learn math through his music study was also rejected as outside the parameters of the math curriculum. It seemed that he could do anything he wanted, but it would have to be outside school time because the school had goals they wanted to accomplish with the textbooks

they wanted to use; these goals and textbooks had little to do with what Mark wanted to learn.

The school we finally chose for Mark to enter next fall is called American River Canyon School (ARCS).[1] A small (100 students), relatively new independent study middle school/high school, ARCS is modeled after the Jefferson County Open High School in Denver, Colorado. It is a school with about 200 students that bases student evaluation on self-evaluation and peer and teacher feedback in a structure based on life outcomes and personal growth rather than grades. In some ways, ARCS is structured along traditional independent study school lines. Classes meet at the school on Tuesday and Thursday for the students who have chosen to take them, and students meet individually on a weekly basis with an advisor on Monday, Wednesday, or Friday, to check progress, assess work, and plan next steps. Students at ARCS can also co-enroll at other high schools or the local community college, depending on where their interests and skills lie. Classes are often concentrated into a few weeks instead of quarters or semesters—such as the ecology classes offered at the county nature center—and frequently center around field trips to other states or countries. For these trips, the students are expected to plan, carry through on their plans, and sometimes raise the necessary funds.

The difference, for me, at ARCS, was the responsiveness of the staff. Every idea we brought up for consideration as a possible learning experience was met with an appreciation and enthusiasm equal to our own, from attending Irish Fest in Milwaukee to a trip to Germany, where Mark could study organ building. Even our family reunion in the Midwest was perceived as the marvelous opportunity for learning that it can be. This spring we are visiting a fine woodworking program at a community college on the Mendocino Coast, and next spring we will travel to Oregon and Washington, where we will observe organ builders to find out what they do and what they look for in a student or employee. What we learn on these adventures will be accepted and incorporated into Mark's learning plan at ARCS. The woodworking apprenticeship we have worked out with a local builder, and the organ lessons he can finally begin this fall—all will be considered an integral part of Mark's high school experience. And, he will meet young people who share many of the values and attitudes toward education and learning that he does, so that this larger peer group will support him personally, socially, and academically. Most important of all, Mark's love of learning can continue to grow and deepen throughout his high school years, and he will be allowed to assume as much responsibility for his own choices, knowledge, and future as he is capable of assuming.

*I am now looking forward to my son's attending high school.*

Note

1. ARCS has recently moved from the local high school district to become part of the Bitney Springs Charter Home Study Program of the Twin Ridges Elementary School District.

*A number of children who are given the freedom to pursue their own learning agendas blossom as creative individuals whose passion for life engages them fully with their worlds. The following entry, co-written by a mother and daughter, documents a journey that led to this kind of blossoming.*

TALES OUT OF SCHOOL

# Freeing the Spirit of Learning: A Mother/Daughter Journey into Unschooling

by Linda and Katie Garrett

*Probably one of the most difficult transitions in my life is coming up. My daughter, who has been one of the most inspirational teachers in my life, is leaving home. I'm sure we will continue to learn from each other, maybe in even richer ways than we do now. I have mixed feelings about her leaving—excitement, nervousness, anticipation, and not just a little sadness. What follows is a dual perspective of our journey these past 18 years. We have traveled through a number of different schooling and unschooling adventures. And now it is time for Katie to take her learning to new levels. I will do the same as I release her, knowing that she will spread her wings...hoping that the roots we share will continue to hold her as she flies through life.* —Linda

## Early Years: Exploring the Options

*We sampled a lot of options in the elementary years: a fairly structured K/1 private school program ... a cooperative free-school ... public school ... and finally combined public school/home school. Whew!*

**Linda**: When I remember how obsessed I was about finding the "right" learning environment for my kids, I have to laugh! I'm still pretty interested in learning environments; in fact, they have become a key part of my life's work, but what I laugh about is how one of the very first schools that we *left* was almost exactly the type of environment we ended up with (unschooling). In hindsight, I see that much of the exploration we did was just that—experiencing different options so that we would know what we were choosing. Sometimes it's important to taste different things before you can decide on your favorites. This is definitely true for me. I like to sample the edges of life before finding my own balance, my own preference. I've always admired those people who just knew what they wanted, but I am coming to enjoy my own process of tasting ... and *changing my tastes* as I move through life.

**Katie**: I think that my early experiences in school gave me a great foundation for what my learning process has developed into. We tried a lot of different things, and I know I learned something from everything we tried, even if it wasn't always a fun experience at the time. I think what helped me the most was how much my mom supported my education. She was always involved in my schools, and always eager to help me find a way of learning that was right for me. I have some great memories from one of my first schools, Whole Child, and I was a little sad to leave, but I also had some great teachers in public elementary school. I even still go back to visit some of them, since I'm now tutoring at that school.

**Linda**: The Whole Child school is the one I referred to before. It was a cooperative, "unschool" that was led by an extremely creative teacher. We left because I felt *un*-comfortable with the degree of "un-structure." I was working for a big corporation at the time, and while I was creative enough to have been one of the key catalysts for this school, I wasn't seasoned enough to let go of certain things. This was the beginning of my own "unschooling" journey.

When we transitioned to public school, Katie was in third grade. Some things worked and some didn't. Fortunately the teachers and principal were very open-minded and willing to make adjustments. They were really there for the kids. We created our own experience by partially home schooling, by asking a lot of questions, and by initiating some creative projects. (These eventually turned into the start of a new school ... Boise's first public charter school!)

**Katie**: Looking back on it, I don't think I realized at the time how lucky I was to have this "half and half" option. Half of the day was spent at regular school, while half of it was spent at home, working on various projects. I can see now how important it was for me to have this creative time to myself, but sometimes the kids at school didn't understand. They would ask me why I left early, and, when I stayed with my fourth grade teacher instead of moving on to fifth grade, they asked if I had been "held back." Unsure of how to respond, I would come home frustrated and confused. Eventually I decided that it would be easier to follow a more "traditional" education,

so when junior high rolled around, I decided to try it.

**Linda**: I think one of the most important things I learned from the early years (looking back) is that we should let our children play more and not worry so much about what they are learning. Another is that we really can initiate change in our learning cultures by letting our children lead the way. Katie was really a catalyst for me to initiate change in the public school system. And both my children have caused me to change the way I think about learning and life.

## Middle Years: Choosing the Alternative Path

*The middle years were a time of confusion and emotion, even after we found a good school! I still don't think there are enough good learning alternatives for teens. We'll have to create some....*

**Katie**: The words "junior high" still scare me. I didn't have many friends; everyone I knew was younger than me and still in grade school. Instead of attempting to socialize, I spent most of my lunch periods in my math class, reading. My math teacher let me eat lunch in the room with no questions asked, for which I am eternally grateful. I was miserable. Finally I couldn't take it anymore, and I left seventh grade, not even staying to finish the semester.

After my experience at junior high we decided to try homeschooling again, which, in my eyes, was a mistake. I was completely unmotivated. I didn't want anything to do with school or learning. One day, while attending a Boise Philharmonic concert (which I didn't want to go to) we ran into a girl I had known from my junior high math class. She had also left junior high, and was going to a small private school downtown. I agreed to visit. For a confused, angry seventh grader this was one of the best decisions of my life. A month later I was enrolled in the Foothills School of Arts and Sciences. This school was one of the best learning experiences I've ever had, hands down. Not only did I learn a lot, but it gave me a mix of the freedom I wanted and the discipline I needed. It was also a very small school (my ninth grade class had four people!), so all the students got a lot of attention from the teachers, but there wasn't a lot of social activity. Ninth grade was the highest level offered, so after that I had a big decision: should I try public school again, or give homeschooling another chance?

**Linda**: By this time I was well on my own path of unschooling. I was working as a creativity consultant helping other people break their patterns and habits, so I was also inspired to break my own! While my work was a factor in why we decided to put Katie in the Foothills School, I also really believe she needed that environment at the time. It gave her a number of activities to enhance her creativity while also adding some discipline to her writing and researching. I think it also gave her a vision of who she could become. It also gave me the experience of another passionate, creative approach to learning. I am really grateful for that schooling experience.

When Katie graduated from Foothills in 9th grade, she decided to go the public high school route. She really wanted the social experience of a larger school. Well, she managed to get what she needed in one semester, and then decided that her creativity and freedom were being compromised too much. That's when we found a copy of Grace Llewellyn's *The Teenage Liberation Handbook*. It literally changed our lives. [*Editor's Note: To read more about Grace's powerfully influential ideas that have indeed helped to shape and change the lives of so many families, see our interview with Grace in* Paths *2, October 1999.*]

**Katie**: After going to a small school for so long, and after my previous experience with junior high, I was scared to be going to a big high school, but I was also determined. I had gained new self-confidence at Foothills, and I wanted to resolve the fear and anger I had towards public school by conquering it in some way. Sadly, my newfound resolve, while nice in my head, was hard to put into practice. On the first day of school I was sitting in my Theater Arts class with my hands under my desk because they wouldn't stop shaking. But I was optimistic—at least I had some friends to hang out with. However, I soon became annoyed by our little "clique" and started hanging out with Jen, the same girl who had introduced Foothills to me. We became as close as sisters. Sadly, Jen wasn't in any of my classes, and she was moving to Los Angeles at the end of the semester. I knew I would need to find some other support.

I don't remember how I first picked up *The Teenage Liberation Handbook*, but when I read it I understood. It really connected with me in a way that made sense, and I found myself thinking "of course"! I finally began to understand that public school was the wrong choice for me in a way that made sense. For years I had been pushing it away on an emotional level (because it *felt* wrong) without the support of a mental level (because I knew it was the wrong way for me to learn). One day I came home and said "That's it. I can't go back." I finished the semester and walked away into a new life!

**Linda**: While I had followed my intuition and tried to give Katie what she needed, I was also feeling a bit uncomfortable with the random path we had followed. I often wondered whether the many changes we had made would cause Katie to lack staying power and commitment. I looked at friends' children who seemed to do fine in the public school and wondered if perhaps we just weren't tolerant enough. When Katie was in public school, I found myself nagging her about grades and homework while simultaneously wondering whether either of these was doing anything positive for her. (I still find myself doing this with my son....) Grace's book finally gave me the courage and support to believe in our choices.

## Unschooling: The Uncharted Path

*Letting learning be a process rather than a destination is a constant challenge in this goal-oriented world. Our unschooling*

*times have been filled with questions and challenges, mixed emotions and an erratic flow of activity. Both of us are convinced we made the right choice!*

**Linda**: This hasn't been a simple path for us by any means, although it has been much easier for Katie than it has been for her dad or me. For Katie, this is a natural approach to life. She will always be interested in a wide range of things, and following her interests to take her deeper into life is something she does with passion. I, on the other hand, have not totally unschooled myself yet. I still sometimes worry about what others will think, especially when they start questioning what Katie is "achieving" in life and whether she's getting a thorough enough education. I still wonder about how a free spirit will fare in the "real world." I still nag too much when I feel that Katie isn't sharing her creativity enough with others. But as I continue to free my own spirit, I notice that the uncharted path becomes a little less confusing and I find other people who are charting some of the same territory. And this makes learning such a great adventure!

**Katie**: After a long path of educational decisions that didn't always work, I finally feel happy with learning. I feel peaceful, good about myself, and full of confidence. I have the time and energy to learn about a wide variety of things, and I'm interested in all of them! I also have a great relationship with my mom, and I have time to focus on my writing and art, as well as having the great opportunity to volunteer in the community. If I were attending public school I would be far too busy doing homework and worrying about grades to write poems or paint pictures or read books.

I've also learned a lot about myself. My poetry is an expression of that, and I know I wouldn't have this kind of inspiration if I were still in a traditional setting because I'd be too stressed out with the social setting and the academic measurements. I've noticed that I'm more cheerful and optimistic, and I feel more balanced and open to ideas. It feels good to have published a book, started my own business, and worked in the AmeriCorps program this year. Now I'm going to college at a campus that feels right for me and that will allow me to pursue a lot of different interests.

**Linda**: I have learned ... am still learning ... to let go of the outcome and enjoy the process. I've learned to have faith in the process. Faith gives us so much more freedom to do what we are really here to do—to create our lives and to create ourselves in the process. I believe both Katie and I are doing well at this.

## Graduation: A Passage

*For many students, graduation becomes a time of escape and freedom. For unschoolers, it simply becomes another transition. (An important one that deserves a special "Rites of Passage" ceremony!) Katie has decided to attend a community college that actually has an "exploratory" major for those who "have many interests and aren't ready to follow a specific one."*

**Katie**: While I am excited at the new opportunities college presents, I'm also pretty scared to be leaving home. My mom has been a big reservoir of support for me, and I don't know what I'm going to do without her. It's a big change, but no matter how nervous I am about the coming year I know it's time to leave the nest. It's time to move on to new experiences and new adventures, and I know my family will always be here to support me, no matter what.

**Linda**: We were having a heart-to-heart talk the other day and I was noticing how our relationship is changing. I told Katie that I'll always be her mom, and that I'm honored to also be her friend. Maybe this is normal, but I don't think so. I know several teens who are ready to split, as in divorce, their families as soon as they can. I don't remember thinking of my own mom as a friend until after I'd had my own children. Maybe unschooling helped us grow a stronger friendship because we could start playing together again. I'm just glad that my daughter has also become a best friend.

In many ways, we are graduating together.

*The following poem is from Katie Garrett's book,* Holding the Sky, *which Katie published while she was in high school. The book is hand-bound in a limited edition of 200 and includes several of Katie's watercolors.*

### *Hands*

Hands as warm as
my mother's
still in the Garden;
the brown Earth
calls to us
with sweet songs
of green things.

We are not makers,
but nourishers.
We are not masters
of the world, only
helpers of the green happiness
that grows
in the sweet brown earth.

We were all planters once;
the land was more than property,
it was our home.

Things we can't remember
teach us more than what we
know;
now the sun beats down
on the Garden,
and I still have
my mother's hands.

*In* Paths *8 (Spring 2001), we profiled the educational journey of Jenifer Goldman by excerpting passages from her book,* My Life As A Traveling Home-Schooler, *in which she documents many of her unique and exciting learning experiences. Below, Jen offers us a kind of editorial postscript to her earlier narrative. Here, she helps us to understand some of her struggles to find educational settings in which she could thrive as a learner.*

TALES OUT OF SCHOOL

# Life After Traveling Home-School

by Jenifer Goldman

Looking back on yourself just how you were as a child is a very insightful thing to be able to do. I don't really mean remembering how it was or being nostalgic, not that those don't have their places as well, but it is more interesting to look at an actual work of art or writing, which shows how you thought of yourself at the time. In my case I have the chance to look at a very in-depth story where I tell exactly who I thought I was and what made me that person. This comes in the form of *My Life As A Traveling Home-Schooler*, the book from which excerpts were published in the spring 2001 issue of this magazine. I wrote this book when I was about ten years old to document my experiences home schooling with my uncle Jerry. Looking back, the thing I recognize above all as the most valuable lesson that I gained during my home schooling is the ability to act on my passion for knowledge. During this short period of my life I really learned how to learn. Being an independent learner is the single driving force that got me through my return to public education, my continuation to college education, and is still one of my most important assets as a working adult.

During home schooling, much more than with public school, you have the chance to learn from real life experiences. Unfortunately not many home-schoolers have the opportunity that I did to travel the country, but there are countless real life educational opportunities close to home as well. For me, the idea of having to learn math in a classroom was a dreadful bore and I couldn't see the necessity of it. However, if you go on a regular food shopping trip and you have a budget to work with, or go to a restaurant and it comes time to figure out the tip, the need for routine math becomes instantly apparent. As a child I had a great passion for science, and I loved animals, yet somehow looking at a biology textbook while listening to a teacher rattle on about the life cycle or the classifications of living things just doesn't hold my interest as much as going to a zoo or taking a nature walk. When you are immersed in something in daily life, the excitement and necessity of education becomes overwhelmingly clear. I was incredibly fortunate in that I had my uncle Jerry Mintz who was willing to take me with him all over the country to meet people and explore different surroundings. [Editor's Note: Jerry Mintz, Paths' Editorial Advisor, is a leading advocate for and a long-time practitioner of alternative education.]

I had some difficulty back then relating to other people, no one would ever say that this is one of my faults today. I attribute that in large part to different kinds of people I had the occasion to associate with during my travels. I know that oftentimes people are concerned with the "lack of socialization" that is considered by many to be an unavoidable fault of the home schooling option, I can assure you that this is not necessarily the case. I learned more about healthy socialization with members of my community from home schooling than would have been possible in a public school environment.

My surroundings did not teach me that it is important to be like everyone else; they did not show me that fashion is more important than intellect and commonsense; and most importantly, I was taught that being yourself is the best thing you can be. These insights came to me in less than one year of home schooling, and they will benefit me for the rest of my life.

In the beginning of sixth grade I faced one of my hardest challenges: I had to go back into the public school system. For the past year I had tasted freedom. I knew what was out there to be discovered and explored, and I did not want to be restricted to a non-flexible curriculum. I made some good friends, but I couldn't bring myself to work with the system. I struggled through sixth and seventh grades without very much enthusiasm, and with an unhealthy dose of boredom, then decided to move to Massachusetts to live with my father. I thought that a different home environment and a new group of classmates and teachers might be the key. My father has always been an important figure in my quest for knowledge and back then I believe that I thought he knew everything. We went to museums, aquariums, and all sorts of other fun and educational places.

Unfortunately I found the school system there to be substantially worse than it had been back on Long Island. I couldn't relate to the kinds of people I was surrounded by, and my teachers had an extreme lack of

insight into the minds of their students. We talked with some people there about an alternative high school program that sounded promising. We visited it and expressed interest in my attending school there. It was a very small program that was part of the public high school. The size was its main appeal, but it was also a problem because they did not have any openings at the time. So I went back to New York to live with my mother and stepfather again rather than continuing to attend the public high school in Cambridge.

I attended public high school in New York for ninth grade, or maybe I should say I chose not to attend it, ever. I discovered that if I just didn't show up for class, no one would notice. I spent almost every day at the public library learning about things that interested me in a more efficient manner than I felt I could learn it in the classroom. Regrettably, no one else saw this as a positive behavior and eventually they noticed my absence, almost three-quarters of the way through the school year. The administration decided that it would be best for me to be on a PINS petition, which was basically probation to force you to go to school.

My mother and I went to court to figure out what we were going to do about my situation. The judge wanted to send me to an all-girls boarding school in upstate New York for girls in my situation; I think he referred to us as "delinquent." We ended up visiting it, but I believe it was mostly to scare me. When we returned to court I suggested an alternative school that a friend of mine was attending and thankfully the judge agreed. So at this point we went for my entrance interview at PACE. As it turned out, they would not have an opening until my second quarter of tenth grade, so I would have to continue at public school until then. The absurdity of it was that I had to attend every class, not ever miss any school, and not a single one of my credits or grades from that quarter would transfer to PACE. Essentially it was public babysitting, not school. Finally the time came for me to start at PACE, where there were about 45 students in the whole school, which included grades nine through twelve. This was an ideal situation for me since it meant that the classes were somewhat more flexible about the curriculum. My first year there I made up all of my missed time in ninth grade and finished tenth grade classes as well. Most of my teachers were really open-minded about our course of study and would be willing to go into more detail about things we were interested in and try alternate methods of teaching the things we were not interested in.

Beginning the following year I had the chance to go to a vocational program called BOCES for half of the day. I chose to go to a program for small animal care, because I wanted to work with animals for a career. What I really wanted was to work in a zoo, but everything comes one step at a time. Every day I went to BOCES in the morning from 8:00 until 10:30. We studied all the basics of animal care. We learned about grooming, anatomy, basic diagnosis of disease processes, and assisted with surgeries. I was finally learning something in school that really interested me.

I graduated from PACE and BOCES in 1997 with high honors. About halfway through my senior year I decided that I wanted to move to Colorado after graduation. I had been there with Jerry during my travels, and I fell in love with the clean air and mountains. My father had moved to Colorado Springs about three years earlier, and I had spent the summer there a couple years back. By the time I was graduating my father had moved to Denver and had seen advertisements for a college called Bel-Rea Institute of Animal Technology. He sent me paperwork and brochures about them and it looked interesting. I went out there on a vacation from school to look at Bel-Rea and meet the administration. It was a small school, just under 500 students at the time and the facility was small but nice. I decided to give it a try. I received a scholarship and paid for the rest with savings bonds I had received from my great aunt as a kid and some help from the rest of my family. It turned out to be a very intense program but it was something that I was passionate about. I took my time going through; I finished the two-year program in three years instead, but it paid off because I graduated with honors and a 3.6 GPA. After receiving my associates' degree in applied sciences from Bel-Rea, I took my national boards and became a certified veterinary technician.

I am currently working for IDEXX Veterinary Laboratories as a chemistry technician, where I run diagnostic lab work on all types of domestic and zoo animals. Recently I have been promoted to Lead Technician on the night shift. I live in Colorado with my fiancé Jonathan, my father Harley, my dog Wednesday, and my cat Morticia. Aside from my work at IDEXX we also own and operate a videogame store, Looking Glass Games, in Parker, Colorado, where Jonathan dedicates all his time and energy, and my father and I pitch in as much as possible. I still use all my skills and ability to learn every day, and I will always be dedicated to learning and growing as a person. Without the unique educational experiences I had growing up, I doubt I would be as strong and dedicated as I am today.

*In* Paths *8 (Spring 2001) we profiled the Community School, an alternative public high school located in Camden, Maine. With the help of Emanuel Pariser, a member of our Editorial Advisory Board and the Co-Director of the Community School (or "C-School," as it is commonly referred to), we received the following two stories from C-School graduates. Each of these pieces, in its own way, attests to the noble workings of this school, which brings inspiration and help to its students, many of whom are or seem to be in quite desperate straits.*

**TALES OUT OF SCHOOL**

# The Road Home

by Emma Hall


Emma Hall

This past week I went to the Community School in Camden, Maine, to tutor a seventeen-year-old in social studies. Ten years ago it was I who was the tutored.

Upon arriving I drove right by the place. I didn't even recognize it. It has had some major renovations and looks nothing at all like the beat up white house on the hill I remember. The Community School program is completely unique. I believe the most admirable part of its uniqueness is its recognition of *each student's* uniqueness. They consider personality, learning style, and even the student's mood on that day as they design each night's curriculum. It may be the only residential alternative school in the country. They operate in five-and-a-half-month semesters. One is coined summer term (April-September), and the other is winter (October-March). I am a winter term veteran. Eight students attend at a time and are expected to complete several objectives in order to graduate. Students must hold a job and pay a weekly rent, keep their rooms clean while keeping out of others,' complete a set amount of hours of community service, do various chores, and complete a full load of academics. In order for a student to successfully finish the program and receive a diploma, they must fulfill all of the aforementioned requirements and find their own way to create a clear path when faced with unforeseen challenges. Throughout all this, the students also have to live together, which at times can be the roughest task. There is a great deal of attention paid to the awareness of one's own and of others' personal space. For success, this demands great respect for fellow students as well as stern assertiveness regarding one's own limits. In order to facilitate the resolution of healthy disagreements, The Community School also requires each student to engage in three-way mediation to resolve conflict. Each student must at one time be the mediator and at another time be one of the mediated.

Fortunately there is a lot of support. Each student is assigned what is called a "one-to-one." This staff member works very closely with the student all term and serves as a sounding board or as a punching bag depending on what the student may need at the time. I could remember one thing very clearly. It was the longest, hardest, and greatest five-and-a-half months of my life.

I tried to recall what it felt like to be there as a student as I listened to the general chatter of the current term before Tuesday evening classes began. Seeing as I have been through just as many renovations as the building itself, it was hard to grasp the feelings I had experienced during my stay. I know I would not be who I am now had it not been for The C-School, but trying to remember just who I was before and especially during my stay at the school was daunting at best. As I sat down to start the tutoring session, I realized that from the moment I pulled into the school's parking lot, I had been experiencing many of the same core emotions that I had felt when I first arrived ten years earlier.

On this return trip, I found that the school was new and yet strangely familiar to me. I was instantly surrounded by people I did not know. I had feelings of trepidation and anxiety. Sitting down to help a student with a paper brought on a sense of pride speckled with moments of feeling incompetent and ill prepared. So there I was, right back in the same emotional place I had been in as a new student.

I arrived at The Community School in the fall of 1991. I was probably scared out of my mind, but so good at hiding it that I can barely recall the actual feelings with any clarity now. I arrived at the school with a diminished trust in my peers, and virtually none in adults. After all, in my mind, it had been the people, not the system who had let me down. In public school I had spent years as an A student. In the second half of my junior year I began to experiment with drugs and lost interest in school fast. I went from straight As to all Fs. What was the most disturbing to me was the fact that the public school, teachers and administrators alike, seemed not to notice my drastic downfall, and aside from multiple detentions and repeated suspensions they didn't try to do anything to find out what was going on outside of school. Eventually teachers stopped asking for my homework or expecting anything from me at all. I think what hurt the most is some of them even stopped looking at me. I was to be ignored;

they had given up before they had even begun trying to reach me.

I also arrived at The C-School with a pretty distorted image of myself. While teachers had written me off as anyone with academic worth, a whole new subculture had taken me in as their Baby Jane. I was always the life of the party, but I never felt very alive at all. I was searching for some kind of freedom, but my reckless behavior was counter-productive to my mission. I don't know whether I felt I had something to prove or if it was all just something to do, but, regardless, it was never what I really wanted. I still don't know what it was I actually wanted. All I really came away with was the talent to be incredibly vain even though I was filled with self-doubt. The Community School was to be my new scale; I was the one who had to find the balance.

I also had the false impression that The C-School was going to be a cake walk. I was dead wrong, and I didn't like being wrong. In the following five-and-a-half months I was to be wrong on several occasions, but with the help of the staff making mistakes became a little easier.

I was to learn many things beyond my academic training that I don't believe I was cognizant of at the time. These much-needed skills have become invaluable to me over the past ten years. I learned to trust again, but also to set boundaries. Before I came to the school I had no boundaries. I was ready for anything no matter how much it hurt. The objective was that I maintain my freewheeling reputation no matter what the cost. As I began to gain a clearer image of myself I realized I didn't always have to be the best or the most fun. I could even be the worst. I learned to laugh at myself. I learned to constructively challenge authority. I learned how to be an active participant in my own learning, in my community, and in my growth. I couldn't just sit back anymore and let life happen. I made it happen. I had to find a job, I had to get to work, I had to do my chores, and I had to do my school work. I was responsible, for the first time in a long time, for all of my achievements, and for all of my lapses in judgment. I cannot, of course, credit the school with all my growth as a young woman (they probably would not want all of the credit), but I can credit them with a lot of the good stuff, and with a lot of the strength that has helped me through the bad stuff.

The good stuff is easy: I have a better relationship with my parents now, I choose my friends and lovers wisely and on my own terms, I keep my space clean (yes, Bob, my room is spotless!), and I like to keep my mind fresh. I am a sponge for new knowledge, and I welcome new challenges. I enjoy the privilege of being a part of my community. I love to debate, I love to vote, and I love to be counted. I have lost the adolescent idea that I am the center of the universe, but I have gained the power to be the center of mine.

The bad stuff is a little harder to recount, and so I choose to do so vaguely. It has to be my life, and is therefore my choice to do so. I took a nose dive for the first three years post-graduation. I did lots of drugs. I drank like a fish. I lost friends and lovers to drugs, and I attempted to lose myself somewhere in the mix. The bright-eyed graduate my parents were so proud of managed to accumulate two DUIs, an abusive boyfriend, and a keen taste for self-destructive behavior. But with the school's help, I began to turn things around.

After leaving my abusive boyfriend, I called Bob (my one-to-one) to ask him if he would meet with me on a regular basis for a while, which he did without question. That is not something someone can generally expect from a public school education. Another unique attribute of The Community School is its "after-care" program. The school is always there when I need them. The relationship does not end with a diploma. The staff is always receptive to former students in need. They have helped me through college applications, job references, and most importantly personal issues. Bob came and ate lunch with me at least once a month, allowing me a safe venue to discuss my feelings with raw honesty. I think hearing myself explain my situation out loud to someone who really listened but did not judge helped me to see my situation for what it was rather than returning to my modus operandi as the martyr. I had always been very comfortable as the victim, and knew I had the role down. With Bob's help it was time to try something new: success.

Having seen the bottom, I can now recognize its features and avoid it. Bob posed two insights to me that I have realized as my real challenges. The first is that my greatest weakness and also my greatest strength is the ability to appear fine no matter what is going on inside of me. I must admit, this talent came in handy when my boyfriend was beating me, but it has also helped me to overcome many a fearful challenge through a facade of fearlessness. I have learned to use it more for the latter, and to fight the urge to use it in situations when I need help rather than hiding behind my cheery disposition.

Bob's second words of wisdom come from the last phrase of my graduation award: "Now that Emma has begun to face some of the flying heads in her life, it will be her challenge to let others face theirs." This is a tough one. I often spread myself very thin in trying to "fix" everyone else's heartache. That's when those magic words float through my mind and I regain control. I still stumble at times and find myself resenting my friends, perhaps after letting them copy my homework or as I grow tired of listening to their problems when I have things of my own to deal with. I have come to realize these are my issues and I cannot rightfully blame my friends. I am becoming more and more aware of these feelings and do what I can to rectify these situations. I support people but do not make their problems mine. I allow them to navigate their own way through their struggles with the knowledge that, although I am there for comfort, I am not to be taken advantage of. I have

much work to do before I am truly comfortable in voicing my complaints without worrying about the repercussions, but I'm getting there.

The power of knowing at least some of who you are and a bit of what you want to contribute to this world is a priceless tool. The Community School gave me this tool. It is I who must learn to use it. I do this the best I can for right now. It may take my whole life to hone the skills needed to use the tools I have earned and to understand their full capabilities.

I breathe more easily now, for I have finally accepted that only I have the right to decide what guidelines to live by. I have given up on achieving anyone else's agenda. I respect my parents and want to make them proud, but I do so by doing what I want rather than by doing what they may want of me.

I am now a junior at Lesley University and am engaged to the most wonderful person I have ever met. I am majoring in global studies with a minor in film.

I am happy, and I am full.

When I graduate, I am going to work on opening my own version of The Community School and share with other scared teenagers the gifts that this school has given so many of us. For now, I am going to continue the work I have started on myself as well as help the current students with their endeavors. I am not sure there is a way to credit The Community School to the extent I believe they deserve, but through bettering myself I also serve them. The seventeen-year-old finished his social studies paper, and I believe the slight twinkle I saw in his eye as I left was the result of pride in a job well done, and for that we can all share in the credit.

# Lifeline

by Gretchen Rae

Gretchen Rae

Life was hitting me up-side the head in 1987. I was just about to turn sixteen and all hell was breaking loose. I understood that being a teenager wasn't supposed to be all a bowl of cherries but daily thoughts of suicide just didn't seem normal.

The man who had been my father since I was two years old committed suicide in my garage as a revenge tactic towards my mother when I was just fifteen. He had reached the breaking point with my mother. She had just remarried for the third time, which lasted only a few weeks, when her new husband got ill and died unexpectedly. After that loss, she continued making unhealthy decisions. My very alcoholic father and her were literally at war. When you sit in the dark with a rifle in your hand waiting for your father, pretending that you know how to use it, you don't think that his actual death would throw you for a loop. At least, I didn't. It wasn't his death that threw me but more how his death was the peak of a mountain, a mountain of life lessons that a teenager shouldn't have to experience.

Getting straight As was not a hope but an expectation. I never let my parents down from fifth grade on. It was my only source of approval from them. Goodie, Goodie Gretchen. Never swore, smoked, lied, cheated, or had sex. What a good girl.

Well, things changed in 1987. I broke down. My defensive tackle went on strike and the winning spirit had lost its spirit. It's amazing to me now how bad brings good, though. Back then I thought my whole world was bad, but now I know it was just the beginning of the good.

I entered a psychiatric hospital for four months and learned the power of caring again. I didn't want to be there, but I loved being there. The thought of leaving was terrifying, but the Camden Community School came into view as a life buffer. Having been a college preparatory boarding school goodie, I knew I wasn't the traditional Community School student. I was traditional, though, in my need for a different environment from the kind that other educational systems were providing. I was in life saving mode. The Community School was up for the challenge. They had seen worse, I am sure.

My "one-to-one," like my personal guidance counselor, was Emanuel Pariser, co-director of the school, who has continued to be my life one-to-one even now at thirty years old. He was my father figure, my hope for better things. I, as a sixteen-year-old, challenged him and the whole staff during my six-month term. There are still things about my school time that I have not shared with them. Not that they can take my diploma away now, but some things "parents" just do not need to know.

With the school being a live-in situation, they required weekly "rent" contributions to be made towards our own tuition. Our required employment within the community was our source of income. The job requirement was a way for the school to help guide us into the adult world but for me it was a path that led me towards independence. I was making my way in the world and I found it a great way to challenge authority. Some of those early challenges were not productive for me, but to this day I challenge conventional wisdom. The Community School can thank themselves for that. They taught me about "thinking out of the box" before society even knew about thinking beyond defined lines. They taught me that knowledge of self and culture was greater than material possessions by means of required hours volunteering in the community. The school taught me that I was smarter than what all the As in a grade book could possibly show. I learned that I was creative and thoughtful through art classes and that I loved the outdoors on our many camping excursions. The teachers expressed their deep love for the outdoors with every student. Each of them came from diverse backgrounds, but were brought together in this small Maine coastal town for a similar purpose. And that was to share their lives with young adults to try to make a difference.

There have been changes within the school since I graduated fifteen years ago, but Emanuel is the same incredible teacher. The school is his heart, which he shares with every student. He travels within me on my trips to Africa, accompanies me on my exotic jobs, is there with me during my daily interactions with others, and is my little voice that keeps me going when life shows me another mountain to climb.

The Community School is more than a school; it is a place that saves lost spirits.

*The following two pieces were sent to us by Sandy Hurst, a member of our Editorial Advisory Board who is also the founder of the Upattinas School and Resource Center, a democratic, open, holistic community of learners located in Glenmoore, Pennsylvania. According to Sandy, Upattinas "serves people who share in un-graded learning. The school has full and part time day programs for kindergarten through high school, as well as home education support programs. It was developed in 1971 as a family cooperative alternative school and is located on seven rolling acres in southeastern Pennsylvania."*

*In the January 2002 issue of* Paths, *we will present a profile article on this most impressive school, whose "philosophy of openness and experiential learning promotes learning in unique ways." For now, we would like to whet your appetite and, at the same time, end this featured collage of stories by presenting to you two engaging pieces concerning Upattinas School, one written by a former student of the school, and the other written by her mom. In our view, the spirit, honesty, and integrity manifested in these two pieces underlie the sometimes difficult but often rewarding struggles and journeys of those individuals committed to securing the well-being of families and communities.*

TALES OUT OF SCHOOL

# Like Mother, Like Daughter: Stories from a Upattinas Family

by Cleodhna Nightshade and Rena Fielding

Cleodhna Nightshade

## Cleodhna

This has been my last semester at Upattinas....

I have come through the system entirely, from eight to eighteen. I attended no school before Upattinas, and for only two weeks attended another, a public school in Texas. Even in that short space of time I felt the pressure of the public school system. Kids are pressured, not only by the system, but by each other. There is no such pressure at Upattinas—at least I felt none. I am free to learn here, and within that freedom I do learn. I am a person who has never attended a formal class for any length of time. I have never written an essay on what I did this summer, nobody taught my ABCs by rote. In fact, I learned to read upside-down before rightways, because that was the way I sat when my parents read books to me. And I am in my senior year of high school, about to graduate, as capable as any other high school senior. This system does work.

When I first began coming to school here, it was rather a novelty. I would come home and my father would ask, "What did you learn in school today?" and I would usually tell him, "I learned a new song that Sandy sang in morning meeting." After a while, he started to say things like "Didn't you learn any school stuff? When are you going to learn things like math and English?" and I would have to say I didn't know.

I didn't really realize it, but I was learning those things all the time. Playing with the geo blocks, reading the books, talking with the high schoolers who seemed to think nothing of my being eight years younger then they were, going on woods hikes with Birdy and listening to him talk about the ecosystem and the wildlife. I didn't realize that all this was math, English, social studies, science. To me it was having fun with friends. But I entered high school with math skills at algebra level, my reading and English skills at twelfth grade level, and I had hardly ever attended a class.

High school was more structured and organized, but still it was informal and without great pressure. There were classes, with teachers teaching and students learning, taking notes, and doing problems. But it was done in a personal, friendly way that I did not see in the public school—though I was there only two weeks, there was an obvious and distinct adversarial relationship most of the adults and most of the kids, with which I was completely unfamiliar. I am used to being friends with my teachers. It is difficult to learn from a person whom you do not like.

Upattinas education has taught me things that are not academic as well as things that are. An important thing it has taught me is how to overcome prejudice. Prejudice is a seemingly inborn quality of people, but it is not undefeatable. It can be dealt with. I believe I am a fairly unprejudiced person. A person's race, sex, age, whether or not they have a Mohawk, have little or nothing to do with what I think of them. Upattinas has shown me that people come in all types, and to be open minded regarding them. Sandy has said that people worldwide have a basic tendency to be good, for the most part, and I

believe that she is right in that. I accept people for who they are, and in turn, I expect the same. I do not feel that I need to pretend anything in order to be acceptable. I have gotten confirmation of this from people who have accepted me just that way.

I have also been taught the importance of being open minded with regard to books, art, music—almost anything. I hope that I am and can continue to be fairly open minded. I may not always like it, but I will try just about anything. Just because I have experienced a certain type of something before and didn't like it does not mean that I will never try it again. I often find myself enjoying something, a book, a piece of music, that I was sure I wouldn't, and I'm not afraid to admit it.

Perhaps more than any other thing, perhaps the most important thing I have learned at Upattinas is how to learn, how much fun it is. People will learn whatever they need to, and then whatever they want to, if placed into an environment in which they can. It does not need to be forced. Forcing learning seems to have a tendency to turn off the desire to learn. The non-coercive environment of our school does not, and I find that it encourages.

Some people may take longer than others in a non-coercive situation. Maybe they fall below average for their grade, or they're in the wrong grade for their age. This is the kind of thing people get uptight about. The numbers don't match up. But people are not numbers, you cannot treat them as such. Maybe a seventeen-year-old student has an eighth grade reading level. But spend time with that person, and I'll bet that you find they excel in some area. They can write wonderfully, they are artistic, they are masterful in the playing of the bassoon, something. Very few people are genuinely stupid.

I have learned a great deal in Upattinas School. I have learned how to be a member of a community, how to work for the good of the whole. I have learned the importance of caring for the environment, how to be responsible for myself and for others. I have learned things about myself that I might not have if I were not so free. I have learned to play the piano. It has given me so very much.

I am thankful that I was given this education. I am grateful to my mother, who worked here so that I could come. To Paula, my lower school teacher; to Ed Hess and Birdman, who taught me how much fun science is; to Tom and Tom and Tom, Warren and Fritter, Marie and Meg and Andrew; to Jim, who has been a great friend and an excellent teacher to me; and especially to Sandy and Nancy who have taught me and been my other moms for ten years. I also have to say something about Dave Funk, who told me how to make a cursive J when I forgot. That was one of my earliest experiences at Upattinas, and I have never forgotten it. The inter-age relationships at this school are a very important and good aspect of it.

I may be graduating from this school, but there is no way it is ever getting rid of me. I may be gone for a while, but I'll come back, I'll haunt it. I'll return to it as I would return to my family. It has been an enormous part of my life, and I hope that someday I will be able to return some of what I have been given.


Rena Fielding

## Rena

In our family we are alternative to the core. We have four daughters who have had the benefit of trying everything: homeschool, alternative school, no school, summer school, private school, university, and graduate school. Back in the mid-seventies when the older girls were of compulsory education age in Pennsylvania (where Amish fathers had been arrested for taking their children out of public school after 8th grade), we met Sandy Hurst by the most extraordinary chain of events.

At that time I was desperate to find a way to keep me and the girls together, and all I had been able to find out was that we were already in trouble because the eldest had not gone to kindergarten. We visited Sandy's school as it was being packed up and moved from Valley Forge Mountain to Glenmoore, and I knew it was the right place for my wonderful girls when I saw the big jar labeled "Five-Year-Old Mold" and the goat wandering in and out of the hallway. It was a private school and we were poor, but we thought we could figure out some way to put Cleo in and thus comply with the law. After two weeks of doing without her at home, Crystal and I turned ourselves in at Sandy's desk and declared we would do anything if we could stay because we couldn't live without Cleo.

Looking back at this event, I am grateful for the compulsory education laws in Pennsylvania for introducing us to other like-minded families. Up until that year, we had just been living; the girls were born at home (in spite of that being politically dangerous) and we hardly left home except on our walks, our trips to the library and to Texas to visit Grandma. Both Cleo and Crystal had been reading since age 2 or 3. No one really noticed when they started because it was so natural a progression from the interactive "read to me" sessions that went on all the time. They could draw and calculate and play a little music and take care of cats and had picked up a little Hebrew because they liked the look of the alphabet. The thought of public school was enough to send us to Canada as if to escape the draft, and meeting Sandy and Upattinas School was the beginning of a wonderful adventure that is still going on today.

There are now four girls, the youngest born when Cleo was 18 and a student at Marlboro College. I feel really happy and lucky to have a 12-year-old at my age (53). Our most strenuous testing of the concept of alternative education has come since she was born. My third

daughter, Jessie, went to public school during Anna's very young years; this was a condition of my going back to school myself so I could support my single-parent family. When Jessie graduated from 5th grade and the next step was being bused to a huge prison-like middle school an hour away, that was the end of public school for her.

We decided to try homeschooling. When Anna was five, my sister and she thought going to kindergarten would be fun, so we were back in the public school system again. Within five months, we had missed 58 days of school because we continued to take trips to the Science Museum and Texas and Washington, DC, and stay home to watch the creek rise, etc. Dropping out seemed the only right thing to do; kindergarten was not fun for Anna or me. We do a lot of enriching things: We live in a rural area with lots of animals and we travel when we can and we buy lots of books and we do not watch TV. We do not do school. We quit calling what we do "homeschooling" when Jessie (my counterculture ball of fire) just plain couldn't work it into here social life. I do not need to defend that in Jessie either; her social life is a real agenda and she has learned a lot about living in a social world the past four years. She and I are not entirely kidding when we work to have rednecks (and that means a lot of our friends around here) included as people of color and seen as desirable members of the NCACS in its striving for diversity. We realize that no one can make Jessie change her life to fit expectations that are not hers. I am proud of the way my daughters set their priorities.

*Perhaps more than any other thing, perhaps the most important thing I have learned at Upattinas is how to learn, how much fun it is.*

Our twelve-year-old started to read for pleasure last year, skipping picture books and going directly to Harry Potter. She wrote on the computer pretty willingly when we got one. She had been writing since she was 3 or so, letters from our alphabet and alphabets foreign and imagined, just because she liked the look of the letters. She wrote as easily frontward or backward, mirror-image or upside-down, covering pictures of birds and dragons with streams of conversation and narrative pouring from everywhere. Her writing has become neat, legible, and fairly standard in the past year. In my mind, this has been a fine time for her to start reading and writing in a standard way.

During her years since becoming a kindergarten dropout, she has learned animal husbandry, home economics, and lots of things about the world in general (we call this "Ranger Rick stuff"). Since we don't go to school she isn't "behind" or "below grade level." She is able, happy, and functions wonderfully in all situations. She can look at her sisters and see a range of activities open to grown-up, self-educated women and know that she can do whatever she wants to do if she works for it. One of my children is a Ph.D. candidate in the UK (the ephemeral, beautiful Cleodhna Nightshade, who just turned 30). One is an inspired musician and biology lover who did not just survive cancer but bloomed out of cancer (Crystal Clearlight), living and working in Vermont. Jessie is 18, doesn't want a piece of paper with "graduated" stamped on it, is as wild as a thunderstorm, is for the second year the student secretary of the NCACS [The National Coalition for Alternative Community Schools], and will have to find out for herself what she can and can't do by pushing the limits. This may seem like a confusing act for Anna to follow, but Anna is not confused. She is upstairs planning the itinerary for a trip to Texas that her friend Roxanne, who has never been out of Virginia, is coming on. School and its importance in a child's life is an illusion, a political concept. We have a child or children in our lives as a reality. It would be a shame to serve the concept of school thinking we were serving our children.

I thank my mentors, Sandy Hurst at Upattinas School, and Mary Leue at the Free School, for holding me together long enough for me to fall apart within their love and support, so I could build my own way to be with myself and my children. I wouldn't have missed this for the world.

# *Freeing Their Spirits*

## The Experiences of an ESL Teacher

by Shelley Buchanan

At the end of a second year of teaching, I had reached a point where a revelation was going to occur or apathy was going to set in. Being a person instinctively drawn to difficult circumstances, I had made a choice at the beginning of my career to specialize in teaching English as a Second Language in the public schools. Here was an area where I could help those students often perceived as "the most difficult." Moreover, it was a subject that provoked very little concern or support — the perfect situation for a masochist and a martyr. I'll not claim that my tenacious personality allowed me to work miracles in the classroom. Teaching ESL took its toll on me within the first few months of my first year.

Despite the fact that non-English speaking students are one of the fastest growing populations in our public schools, there is still an appalling lack of concern for their needs. Astounding as it may seem, a significant number of public school personnel remain unaware of even the most basic ESL pedagogy and the legal mandate that ESL services be provided. According to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, limited English proficient students must be identified, their progress must be monitored, and they must be provided an appropriate educational program that gives them the greatest chance of academic success. However, although ESL is federally mandated, it continues to be one of the most underdeveloped and ignored curricular areas. Far too often, ESL programs are underfunded, understaffed, and swept into the corner of our public schools. Traditional and inappropriate teaching methods and curriculum prevail year after year in a futile effort to make students speak English as soon as possible. ESL students often become disillusioned and apathetic, many dropping out of school by tenth grade.

During my first year of teaching, I was assigned over three hundred ESL students and taught in four different schools — two elementary schools, a middle school, and a high school. My second year of teaching was better — I taught at only one school and was responsible for just sixty students. Throughout my experiences teaching ESL, I have taught in hallways, broom closets, and cafeterias. My students were far too often either pulled out of their classes for English instruction, or were rarely sent to me and instead sat for hours with only a vague understanding of what their teachers were saying. Because the traditional mainstream classroom is not designed for ESL learning, I would have to "pull out"[1] many students who could have benefited from inclusion. Sometimes, students who would have otherwise been lost in a sixth-grade classroom came to me embarrassed and resentful for being singled out. Almost always, these children were Hispanic, while the mainstream classroom was filled with white faces. It was easy to see how these children may have felt increasingly aware of their racial differences in these situations.

At other times, students would plead to stay with me beyond their typical two hours a week. They would courageously admit that they were completely lost in their classes, that they were sometimes chided for not speaking enough English or humiliated when they could not keep up with their peers. I did all that I could to improve their situation, but, given my circumstances, my impact was diluted and sometimes imperceptible. I vowed that even though I could not change what was

going on in the mainstream classroom, I could change what was occurring within my own room.

By my third year, I had been placed in a quarter of a room (which was partitioned by a rolling blackboard and a bookcase). Day after day, as many as fifteen fourth, fifth and sixth graders at a time were crowded into this confining space that smelled of ancient carpeting and the dust of discarded textbooks. We would slog through insipid workbooks that taught the names of pieces of clothing or different types of vegetables — none of which was inherently interesting to my students or me. Inspired by tales of munificent teachers who proudly bragged about their students' tales produced from such techniques as the Language Experience Approach[2], I begged for, pleaded for, and finally stole from the supply closet, an old overhead projector. With this, I would write out, word for word, the stories prompted from my students.

For several months, my students and I struggled through the complex game that is so common in classrooms: The teacher at first enthused with the new technique attempts to "sell" the product to the students. How could they not want to write stories about their lives? Won't this be wonderful? We can post their essays in the hallway. Some students responded positively out of a sense of duty or a need to please. Some didn't respond at all. In the end, the results were the same — half-hearted, stilted, empty stories. "This is my dog. I like her. One day she runs away. The end." Of course, I could have done what teachers very often do in their attempts to have "creative" work emerge out of a forced teaching and learning situation — I could have "improved" the children's writing by "suggesting" certain additions. I must admit that I did fall into this trap for a short period, persuaded easily by students who had become so used to the requirement to please the teacher that very often they accepted my suggestions and readily assimilated them word for word into their stories.

After a short period of this charade, I became uncomfortable — like you do when you're wearing a cheap wool sweater that is itching your shoulders every time you lean back in your chair or reach for the telephone. Something was missing. There was an indefinable but clearly evident void in my classroom. Deep down inside, I knew that the children had no spirit in that room. There was no passion, no joy in what they did. There was, though, an effusive sense of tension, of anxiety and fear, that hung not only in my class, but also throughout the school. The children were constantly being judged, and I was one of those ordained to do the judging. I was the authority that meted out the rewards and the punishments along with the decisions about what and how the students were to learn. Because of this situation, they were not in control of their own learning. On the other hand, they were responsible for following directions. But I had seen these same drained and sometimes defiant children express true joy at times, as when Juan explained to me how he fixed a bike that he had found by the dumpster and when Susanna drew a picture of her five sisters — each head a little below the one preceding it so that they were arranged in a stair-step fashion. Yet, when I suggested that they write their assignments on these topics, they would either refuse or produce emaciated bodies of writing that resembled nothing of the satiated richness in their minds. Their spirits were missing.

***Despite the fact that non-English speaking students are one of the fastest growing populations in our public schools, there is still an appalling lack of concern for their needs.***

One January afternoon, after a particularly frustrating day at school, I took a short trip to the used bookstore. There I came upon a book that changed my perception of education forever. After reading John Holt's *How Children Learn*, I zealously read everything I could about unschooling and meaningful learning — Gardner, Montessori, Dewey, and Freire. Here were books that I was never required to read in college, but were the very books that dealt with the most pertinent issues facing education today. Learning came from within. Though force may produce compliance, it will not produce learning. Each child has unique talents and abilities that are often unaccounted for in a "one-size-fits-all" approach to teaching. These books contained more than mere tips and tricks that are really no more than variations upon the traditional pedagogical practices that pervade our schools. My thinking was set free, and I saw myself as truly a life-long learner — not just a container of knowledge that dispenses wisdom to my students. I freed myself and could therefore free my students.

By combining solid language acquisition research with holistic learning theory, I was able to radically transform (if just for a couple of hours a week for my students) what learning English, and indeed what learning *period*, was about. English became a vehicle for meaningful and real communication. My students, and not I, now determined the purposes of communication and of their schoolwork. I used no achievement timetable in which I required my students to memorize certain grammatical forms or skills by a specific date. My students progressed

Shelly Buchanan lives in Reno, Nevada and has taught in the public school system for four years. During this time she has been a teacher in elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and adult literacy courses. She has received an M.A. in Teaching English as a Second or Other Language and is currently on leave from teaching.

at their own pace and were valued for what they could do right then. Reading and writing became integrated into the process of communicating meaningfully. I did not keep my students from using certain materials because these materials may be "too difficult" or "too easy." I did not write out lesson plans but instead observed my students closely, using these revelations to facilitate individual projects.

Thinking back, I can recall vividly a moment when everything I was attempting to accomplish came together. My fifth-grade group had decided to celebrate Chinese New Year with a class luncheon. Each individual, including the teacher, was to bring a necessary item. We sat around a large rectangular table as we discussed the particulars.

Carlos, an exceptionally energetic and distractible boy, assumed his usual classroom position — half in and half out of his chair — and declared that we needed tea and sodas. Susanna, who had not uttered a sound during the first three months of school, quickly volunteered to bring the sodas. Eric blurted out that he wanted to bring napkins, and Gema, with large grandiose gestures, emphatically stated that we must serve chips and rice. At that moment, Jorge caught my attention, "Hey, Ms. Buchanan.… Ms. Buchanan.… Hey. We need to make a list, huh? Somebody should write this down." My heart almost leapt outside of my chest as this small boy in cinched-up black jeans three sizes too large took it upon himself to retrieve a piece of paper and a pencil. As he wrote in slow deliberate letters, "Ships … Gema", he then paused, wrinkled his brow and asked me, "Ms. Buchanan, is this right? Is this how you spell 'chips'?" It was hard for me to imagine that this was the same boy who, starting the school year with a special education diagnosis of "mildly mentally retarded", had succeeded in making every teacher intensely dislike him because of his extreme apathy and his fondness for anti-social behavior.

Even though my students could not boast of impressive test scores and spelling-bee awards, I was extremely proud of them. Their sense of accomplishment was epitomized by Jorge's transformation. He had discovered, at this small moment in time, a profound purpose of writing — that writing was something that served his own purposes. Writing was something that could belong to him.

Out of this transformative process came a dramatic shift in the way my students behaved during their time with me. Gradually, they became more tolerant of themselves and each other. Students who had once lashed out at their peers with abusive words and actions now became more giving and calm. Before, they would become rebellious and resentful when forced to do meaningless exercises that they were ordered to complete, taking their anger out on each other when they could not take it out on me (for fear of repercussions). After I had changed my way of being with them, their rebellion and accompanying resentment dissipated as they gradually came to realize that I — and their classmates — valued and respected their choices and thoughts. Additionally, and not surprisingly, my students' use of expressive language and their desire to read and write surged.

Day by day I started to see the emergence of my students' spirits. The shine in their eyes that was only evident when they occupied themselves in "non-school" topics now appeared cautiously as they engaged themselves in the realm of academia. My students began to experience the joy of learning and seeking new knowledge. At the end of the school year, I began to realize my own spirit as well, for I was able to be myself, stripped of the role of enforcer. Becoming a partner with them in our mutual educational endeavor, I was now able to fully share with my students my love of learning. Together, appreciating each other for who we truly were, teacher and student could finally work together to produce what education should be all about.

## Epilogue

Unfortunately, this positive experience did not last long. My school decided to adopt a packaged reading program that was designed to raise standardized test scores. My ESL teaching time was cut in half, and all of my students were placed, due to school-wide tracking, in remedial level groups. Now having to teach in such a regimented fashion, I saw the effects of homogenized instruction on my students. Positive respectful behavior plummeted, and the joy of language and reading dove along with it, leaving students only to be cajoled and manipulated with award ceremonies, prizes, and treats.

## Notes

1. A common term used by ESL professionals to define one of many scheduling approaches within the elementary school. When students are "pulled out", they are taken out of their regular classrooms and placed in ESL classrooms for a pre-determined portion of the day or week.
2. The Language Experience Approach is an instructional method in which ESL teachers have their students recount stories from their personal lives, which are then written on the board and used to lead lessons on reading. Although this technique sounds and can be quite effective for children, in the majority of the circumstances in which I have seen it used, the stories that emerge more often bespeak a sense of pride and accomplishment for the teacher alone — the end result being a piece of writing showcasing the story-telling talents of the teacher, not the student.

# Growing and Learning Using Two Languages

by David Carlson

The author Jonathan Swift once quipped that "Nature, which gave us two eyes to see, and two ears to hear, has given us but one tongue to speak." For Swift and many people in Britain and North America who grew up speaking a powerful language like English, having but one tongue or language to speak would certainly seem to be the norm. However, in many other parts of the world, speaking two (and often more) languages is actually more common. In fact, it often surprises English speakers to learn that the majority of the world's population is bilingual.

I am a language teacher and linguist by training. My wife, Keiko, who is Japanese, is also a language teacher and linguist, as well as an interpreter. We both speak two languages, Japanese and English, and we use those two languages in our daily lives here in Japan. So when our daughter was born, it seemed only natural for us to raise her bilingually. There was no question about that.

What my wife and I did have a question about was the best way to raise our daughter bilingually and biculturally, especially since there are many approaches to bilingual child raising. In the pages that follow, I would like to share some of the decisions that we have made regarding our daughter Emily's upbringing and education, especially those decisions that have helped her grow and learn using two languages. I would also like to share some of our concerns and hopes for Emily's future.

## Language Decisions

The first and certainly one of the most important language-related decisions my wife and I made was to follow the so-called "one-parent/one-language approach" with our daughter. What that means is that I use only English with Emily; my wife only Japanese with her. I do not speak to Emily in Japanese, nor does Keiko speak to Emily in English. (Between the two of us, how-

David Carlson lives in Matsumoto, Japan, with his wife and daughter. He is an Associate Professor at Matsumoto Dental University. His interests include languages and music. He currently teaches courses in medical English and film appreciation. In addition, he is active as a concert pianist, and he particularly enjoys performing chamber works with strings, as well as piano duets with his daughter.

ever, my wife and I use both languages.) Using the one-parent/one-language approach with Emily right from the time of her birth has given her two "first languages." She has grown up as a native speaker of Japanese and English, always with roughly the same ability and fluency in each language.

There were several reasons we decided to follow the one-parent/one-language approach. As I mentioned, it seemed most natural for my wife and me to each speak our own native language to our daughter. Also, back when the two of us were linguistics students, we had studied language acquisition and learned that the one-parent/one-language approach is widely-recommended for promoting childhood bilingualism. But we also chose this approach because of what we had observed among the bilingual children we knew. Even before Emily was born, Keiko and I had noticed that our friends' bilingual children all seemed to become quite weak in one language shortly after they started school. This seemed to be mainly due to a sudden decrease in the use of the non-school language, but I suspect that peer pressure, as well as a desire to fit in and be like the other kids, also played a role. Some of the children eventually quit using their non-school language altogether and switched to using their school language at home with both parents. One girl even told her Japanese mother to stop speaking Japanese to her because it embarrassed her in front of her American school peers.

The second important decision my wife and I made was to work at providing an environment with a balanced exposure to both languages for our daughter. Emily was born in the US, but before she was even two years old we moved to Japan. Throughout Emily's early years in both countries, my wife and I both talked with and tried to read to Emily each day. When she was almost four, we moved back to the US, and from that time Keiko and I knew that we needed to try to use Japanese as much as English with Emily each day if she were to continue to progress simultaneously in both languages. Fortunately we were then living in a part of the US with a sizable Japanese community, so there were various opportunities for Emily to use Japanese, as well as English, with many people each day. As a result of our continuing to use the one-parent/one-language approach, and providing an environment with a more or less balanced exposure to both Japanese and English, at age five Emily was a "balanced bilingual" — someone equally fluent in two languages.

## Homeschooling

The next big decision we made was to homeschool. When Emily turned "school-age", we were living in Michigan, a state with no legal requirement for home educators to follow a state-mandated curriculum or to report to the State. So our homeschooling revolved around what we all wanted to do, and naturally we continued to use both languages each day. In order to continue our balanced-bilingual approach, my wife and I arranged our work schedules so we could both be equally involved in our daughter's life. I found a university that let me teach night classes and that gave me a lot of free time during the day. Keiko found a job teaching one day a week at the Japanese Saturday School in Detroit, and that also gave her considerable free time.

Right from the start, our homeschooling was a hybrid. When I was involved, our approach tended toward "unschooling," which for Emily meant growing and learning without workbooks, drills, or a rigid schedule. In other words, her learning environment was unlike that of most schools. Emily simply followed her interests and did a wide variety of activities — many with me — including gardening, swimming, cooking, reading, playing the piano, hiking, building model airplanes and rockets, and much more. One of the highlights of our week was volunteering at the local Interfaith Council, where we worked with people from many different religious traditions on a variety of peace and justice issues ranging from human rights to housing and food for the homeless. The council staff also gave Emily considerable responsibilities around the office — allowing her to handle everything from data entry, mailings and petty cash to recycling. As I watched Emily, I often thought to myself that she could never have experienced many of the things she did if she had been confined to a typical school classroom each day. My wife, on the other hand, tended more toward a structured "school at home" involvement, making study assignments and organizing groups for Emily and other Japanese children who came to our house in the afternoon after school to play and to study in Japanese with Emily. As an elementary school teacher at the Japanese School, Keiko knew the Japanese government's prescribed curriculum for each grade, and she had Japanese textbooks and other materials. Keiko also arranged for Emily to attend a Kumon Math Center that was run by a Japanese-American university professor who spoke Japanese. Furthermore, Keiko arranged for Emily to attend the Japanese School in Detroit, where Emily studied on Saturdays. In addition to all the structured activities, my wife also talked a lot with Emily, which gave Emily an opportunity to use Japanese to discuss the many English language activities she did each day.

In short, while we were in the U.S., Emily lived and learned in what I think was a wonderful environment for growing up bilingual. She was fluent in both Japanese and English in a wide variety of situations.

## Going to School in Japan

Things suddenly changed for us in 1998. In the spring of that year, I received an invitation by my former employer in Japan to return as a tenured faculty member at Matsumoto Dental University in Nagano Prefecture. While I was initially delighted by the offer, both my wife and I knew that if we moved back to Japan, there would be major changes in our family life. We also knew there would be drastic changes for Emily's learning since the

balanced-bilingual homeschooling that we had been doing in the US would be difficult to accomplish if I were working full-time. As far as I was concerned, there was only one condition for my accepting the offer: my prospective employer would have to help make arrangements for Emily's education. Sending her off to an international school 200 km away in Tokyo was unacceptable; and the local Japanese schools, notorious for *"ijime"* (bullying), were also out of the question.

To my surprise, the university came through. They told us about a small experimental school run by the nearby national university's education department. After the director of my school made some arrangements, Emily was cleared to attend the elementary school. Emily, however, was not very excited about the prospect of going to school in Japan. Mainly that was because she did not want to leave all of her friends and relatives in the US. But after talking things over as a family, we decided to move, and since August 1998 we have been living in Matsumoto, Japan.

Despite our initial favorable impression of the experimental school, Emily's attendance has not been without periods of difficulty, nor without some major adjustments for all three of us. The first big hurdles to overcome were the extremely closed nature of the school and the students' hostility toward newcomers. At the experimental school, each class of students stays together for all six years in the elementary program. Accordingly, the children tend to be very clannish and unwilling to accept new class members. The fact that Emily did not share her classmates' previous experiences, and therefore was often uncertain about what to do, only gave the children an added excuse to pick on her. The students were also quick to label Emily as "The American" and to constantly remind her that any behavior of hers that was different from theirs was due to her coming from America.

Emily certainly felt excluded, and there were days during her first few months when she told us she did not want to go to school. I could sense her pain, and several times I was half-tempted to simply pack up and take the family back to the US. It took Emily nearly a year to make any close friends. The students started to accept her only after another child entered the class. No longer the new kid, Emily was slowly allowed to join the group, while it was the newest student's turn to be ostracized. Emily, who must have felt some solidarity with or compassion toward the new student, befriended him, but that only caused her classmates to resume teasing her.

The next big adjustment for all of us involved the length of Emily's schoolday. On a typical day, she leaves home at 7:10 and gets back after 4:30. In Japan, there is also a half-day of school every other Saturday. Quite frankly, I believe that Japanese children spend far too much of their childhood in the very narrow confines of school, leaving them with relatively little time for outside activities or even for daydreaming, as well as for valuable social interaction with people other than same-age peers or a teacher. As a homeschooler, Emily had a far richer social life, regularly interacting with people of all ages from a wide variety of backgrounds. And she used both of her languages. By the time she now comes home from school, does her homework, eats dinner and takes a bath, she has relatively little time to do anything else during the week.

Naturally, that has meant a change for Emily's bilingual environment. As a homeschooler in the US, she was constantly alternating between her two languages, probably hundreds of times most days. As she interacted with many different people, the number of her alternations between Japanese and English was truly amazing to me. Now, living in Japan, Emily is still in daily contact with both languages, but the pattern of use is quite different, and there is a marked imbalance in favor of Japanese. On school days, she now uses English during just two blocks of time: before school and after school. During these two times, Emily and I talk and read together in English. On weekends, there are sometimes other opportunities for her to use English, such as with American friends who live nearby, or with visitors. This past year, we also spent about 35 days vacationing in the US, where Emily used English much of the time, except when she was with her old Japanese friends and with my wife. Otherwise, most days when we are in Japan Emily uses only Japanese for much of the time.

Because Emily's English was so well-rooted in her first eight-and-a-half years, her English skills, particularly her speaking, listening and reading, are rock-solid, and they have shown no sign of regression since we moved to Japan. In fact, I would say that in some ways her English continues to progress, due in large part to reading. She and I read aloud for at least 30 minutes on weekdays, and even longer on weekends and holidays. We tend to read challenging novels and biographies, and I believe that reading and discussion provide her with a rich variety of language — far richer than the language one encounters in simple daily conversation, or in more passive media such as TV and videos. Of course, we use those media, as well, but not very often. There simply isn't the time.

I also believe that because the other language Emily knows is English, a language widely seen to have prestige here in Japan, she is likely to receive positive messages about English as she grows up in Japan. For instance, Emily's Japanese classmates, many of whom are now forced to attend beginning English lessons after school, have recently begun to tell Emily how lucky she is to already know the language. There have even been times when her teacher, unable to understand something written in English, has asked Emily for assistance in front of the class.

The only English skill that does not get much use these days is her writing. Given the limited time Emily has for any additional activities due to her long schoolday, writing in English has not been a high priority. She does send e-mail to her American grandparents,

exchange notes with overseas friends, and write memos and shopping lists for me. But these days that is about the extent of her writing in English.

Now into our third year in Japan, Emily seems to be doing well overall. In general, she has made the adjustment from balanced-bilingual homeschooling in the US to monolingual schooling in Japan. And I am happy to say that she is still bilingual.

## The Future

Right now, Emily seems to enjoy school. There may be some things that I personally do not like about schooling, and I know that for Emily's bilingualism, homeschooling was superior to her present institutional education. But for a school, the place she now attends is rather good. The curriculum is very relaxed and experiential. And her teacher, who will probably stay with the class through the 6th grade, is a wonderful person.

The only pressing question that my wife and I have about Emily's education is what to do when she reaches junior-high-school age next year. Although Emily's current school also has a junior-high program, my wife and I have serious concerns about the school. The curriculum suddenly shifts from an experimental and experiential elementary program — one that stresses compassion, creativity, and individuality — to an oppressive cramming-oriented program — one that is aimed at getting students into the "best" high schools. The main reason for the sudden shift seems to be that the junior-high teachers believe there is a lack of academic rigor in the elementary program. So they try to make up for lost time by driving the students. Although many parents say that they are dissatisfied with the junior high school program and its emphasis on rote memory, the teachers simply respond by saying, "If you don't like the way we teach, don't send your child here."

So we probably won't. Most likely, Emily will homeschool once again, this time in Japan. Now that I am settled into my present teaching job, I have some time on weekdays to once again be actively involved in her homeschooling for part of each day. This past year I have also made contact with many people involved in various types of alternative education in Japan, and, after listening to them talk about their experiences, I believe that bilingual homeschooling is very do-able for us. But no matter what Emily's educational future holds, I am confident that her bilingualism is now secure, and that she will always have two languages and two cultures to enrich her life.

# Students and Staff Speak Out and Make Changes Within Their School

## An Interview with Students and Staff of the Puget Sound Community School


by Robin Ann Martin

*The Puget Sound Community School (PSCS) currently serves twenty some students in the Seattle area. With four staff members and many active parents and volunteers, it offers a unique form of self-directed and community-based learning for students ages 12 to 18. I first came in contact with PSCS in 1998, through its e-mail course about lived experiences in "kindness," and then proceeded to move to Seattle, where I spent almost a year learning about the school firsthand as a volunteer facilitator. Having since then moved away, I keep in touch with the school by corresponding with Andy Smallman, who is both the founder and director of the school. Earlier this year, I returned to the school for a visit and conducted this interview with a handful of staff and students. Students whose voices appear in this interview are Ani, Dan, Zoë, Asa, Heidi, and Kyrian. Andy, Deb, and Dave are staff members.*

*In the first part of the interview, I explore the perspectives of both staff and students about the purpose of the school and the meaning and value of their day-to-day experiences there. Later in the interview, we talk about some significant changes that the school has been undergoing, initiated by students, in this its seventh year of existence. Previously, the school had been organized on a 10-week quarter system, with a "Reflection Week" half way through each term reserved for special activities in which the entire school would stop to take stock of life and learning. Within this old structure, the school offered pre-scheduled tutorials (classes) two days a week, field trips one day a week, apprenticeships one day a week, and an all-school meeting and community service project one day a week. In this interview, students and staff discuss why this system, as flexible as it may seem, needed to be re-evaluated. The resulting "restructuring" of the school now creates even greater flexibility for both students and staff, as the whole school now meets every morning to create that day's schedule.*

### Why was PSCS founded?

**Robin:** For starters, I want to talk about the basics of your school, and what the school is like for you. I'll start with Andy, since Andy is the founder of the school. Could you tell us a little bit about the history of the school, how the school was founded, and why it was founded?

**Andy:** The idea of PSCS was to fill a void in education in the Seattle area for middle and high school age students. I felt, and a number of parents felt, when we were really creating the school that there were not a lot of options for families who wanted a student-empowered, nurturing, respectful school for twelve-year-olds and up. So, I worked with a group of parents for a year prior to PSCS getting started, basically defining theory to practice and putting those two together. The core idea of PSCS was, and is, if you create a loving, nurturing educational environment, you don't have to force people to participate in activities. Ultimately, they will do it naturally, they will learn the things that are meaningful to them, and meaningful learning will carry them on. So, that was the first thing.

The second piece of PSCS was the idea that if you believe that human beings are by nature curious and want to improve and learn, then the key thing is to get out of their way and let them do it. And not put hurdles up for them. So, that was the first thing we did. I've since tried to summarize the educational philosophy of PSCS as "Try to do no harm." That's the quickest summation of PSCS. So, on the one hand, stay out of people's way. On the other hand, we want to provide opportunities from which students can freely choose. So, that's the next thing that we were trying to design: How would you go

about offering opportunity without its feeling like an imposition? That's part of what has evolved over time, and which relates to the re-structuring and how that happened. PSCS was starting to feel more and more like an imposition on the students, the way it was structured.

Another piece to the foundation of PSCS was that we didn't want students to feel that they had to stay in one place all day long, five days a week, six hours a day. Basically, the way I put it at that time was that schools for a lot of people felt like they were prisons, where students were sequestered for six to seven hours a day. And we wanted students to feel that they were part of a community, and we wanted the community to embrace this idea that young people should be part of the community. So, we formed PSCS as a "school without walls."

**Robin:** A lot of readers of *Paths of Learning* are involved with different schools that are different kinds of communities. When you use the word "community," what do you mean by that?

**Andy:** There, I mean the greater Seattle community, getting out into the community, instead of being in a building. And part of the reason that schools have existed as more or less a daycare, for keeping kids off the streets from a young age, has been so that adults wouldn't have to bump into them during the day while they're working. And we wanted to be just the opposite, putting kids with adult mentors while the adults were working, helping the students realize what adults were doing in the latter's workplaces, how they got to where they were, and so on. So, we intended to move around; each day of the week we would have activities take place in different places. That was also one of the foundational pieces of it. So, with this plan, we started in September of 1994, with eleven students and two staff members.

## Students' Experiences at PSCS

**Robin:** I'd like to talk to the students about what Andy has been saying and see how that meshes with what your experience has been here at the school. So, if I could hear from the students about the opportunities, or what they consider to be meaningful learning — is that something you feel you're getting here?

**Ani** (age 13)**:** Yeah.

**Robin:** Okay, Ani says "yeah." What's that about?

**Ani:** It's a lot different here from the way that it is in other schools. Like, I really like to come to school … the homework, the opportunities.

**Robin:** What kinds of opportunities?

**Ani:** I never knew anything about Taoism until I came here. And math classes that make math fun.

**Robin:** So how is math done here that's fun?

**Ani:** You have a basic math class like geometry taught through origami. Or another time we learned how to design our own house or buildings, which made it a lot more fun. And we had a social studies class that Dan [a student] facilitated, which used *The Simpsons*.

**Robin:** *The Simpsons?* And that was a social studies class? So [to Dan], tell us about *The Simpsons*.

**Dan** (age 17)**:** Yeah, it was a class that I taught last year, but it was more just watching the show than discussing topics I brought up in the show. And this year, it became more of a media literacy class, where we looked at the topics that were parts of different shows, that examined the underlying meanings, such as counterculture messages and stuff where the producers can get important points across within the dialogues of the shows. The Simpsons is not just another cartoon with all these extreme leftist views put into it. So, I thought the best

Andy, Dave and Deb: PSCS staff

way to illustrate such counterculture messages was to share (and talk about) shows from my childhood that brought me to where I am now, like *Ren & Stimpy* and *The Simpsons*, along with some books that show the same thing.

**Robin:** So, you were looking at the messages behind those shows?

**Dan:** Right. Because a lot of the producers were people that started from *National Lampoon* and stuff, and they've done interviews where they say, "This is what were trying to do. We're trying to get this message across.…"

**Robin:** So, for you, without getting into the content of the class more, this whole experience of teaching must be new to you. Had you done much teaching before?

**Dan:** No, no. Usually when I'm in classes (as a student), I'm more quiet, I think, and I process everything, over and over again, get a good grip on it and all, then I say something later on. So, being a facilitator was a challenge, but I really enjoyed it. In preparing as a facilitator, I had to become a more active contributor, taking responsibility to consider issues in advance. I actually put my ideas firmly in writing as I prepared for each class.

## How Does the PSCS Experience Compare with Experiences in Other Schools?

**Robin:** [Note: Students told me about the school's no-grading policy, as something that they especially like about PSCS.] So, you don't get graded here. Have you been in schools where you get graded?

**Zoë** (age 17)**:** I was in a couple different styles of grading schools, too, not just where they gave letter grades. One school I went to, they graded you by points. So, for example, if you go to your class and you're really good, you might get five points. And if you weren't good, you'd get less.

**Robin:** What is "really good"? What does that mean?

**Zoë:** I don't even remember, but on your sheet, you got a grade every day. And you could get bonuses; each class had different things they'd grade you on. And in each section you could get five points. When you added them up, you could see how well you were doing.

**Andy:** That sounds terrible.

**Zoë:** You're telling me! I got myself kicked out of that school so that I didn't have to go there anymore.… At first, I didn't really mind being at that school, but as time went on, I really didn't want to be there, because I didn't like it. And it was actually a special school for kids with learning disabilities. And so it was supposed to be helping me, but it wasn't helping me. I wasn't really progressing. So …I didn't want to be there just to pass the time away.

**Robin:** How does that experience compare to your experiences here at PSCS, and would you even say you still have a learning disability, and how does that play into how you're experiencing PSCS?


**Zoë:** I'd say I still struggle with some things, my learning, and all that stuff. But [pause], I don't know. I think in some ways, I hold myself back. It has nothing to do with PSCS. It is because of all the schooling situations I've been in; I've been in public school and asked for help with my learning, and they tell me that they can't help me. So, I've built up so many walls around myself with that, that it's hard to break those down to actually work on it. So, yeah, sometimes it's a struggle.

**Robin:** Do you find that there's opportunity here for you to develop your reading and writing skills?

**Zoë:** If I ask for such opportunities. I mean, I learn the best one-on-one, so I really like going to my tutor. [Note: Zoë is referring to a tutor outside of PSCS; students and their families sometimes hire tutors for special interests or needs that PSCS in not able to accommodate.] It's easier having a tutor who helps especially with reading. In the past, I've had readings assigned in my classes and not been able to do them. So, I'm not going to put myself back in that type of situation. I would rather die than do that.

**Robin:** So, why do you stay at PSCS?

**Zoë:** I'm not sure. I guess it's because I don't have to do those things here [reading assignments that are too difficult]. I can do other things.

**Robin:** How about some of the rest of you? What brought you to PSCS, and why are you still here?

**Dan:** Eli and I are both products of the public school system. We got shut down the first day of freshman year. We realized that, without trying, we pretty much were "C" students, and my first year, I made a 1.9 GPA. I wasn't learning anything I was interested in. Ever. It was to the point of absorbing something from a ditto sheet and throwing it away, or filling in the answers from a book that's right next to me. We weren't learning anything; it

was just to fill a quota for the school. I needed to get away from that because I didn't want to be just skipping classes and not showing up, and I didn't just want to walk out.

## Concerns about PSCS?

**Robin:** I'd like to hear what some of your concerns have been since you came to PSCS. Have you had difficulty in any ways? I mean, it's still a school, and it's not perfect. So, what are the difficulties that you have sometimes found here?

**Ani:** Adrian just started going to PSCS, and I've known him since preschool. My other friends, when they hear about PSCS, they say, "Oh, yeah, Adrian is playing pool today," and that's what they thought he did at school.

**Robin:** So, how does he learn, if he's playing pool?

**Ani:** We actually had a physics class last year that used pool. But you don't play pool all day. You can, but I don't see people doing it.

**Robin:** I've hung out here, and I know that there are lots of times when people are just hanging out, and they don't seem to be doing anything. How is that learning? How can you claim to be teaching people something if they're just hanging out?

**Kyrian** (age 15)**:** Well, I think it teaches you how to learn in a different way, just coming in and hanging out. Often, when people first come here, they don't do anything. They just play pool or go out to restaurants or play video games, or just sit there. It teaches you that you can do whatever you want and pursue whatever you want, and it makes you more open to other things, wanting to try other things. Eventually you can just play pool all the time until you think, "Hey, I'm going to learn about icicles," or something like that. You think, "Hey, I'm bored at pool; that sounds kind of cool." And then you go learn about it. Or, when you go back into an environment where someone is teaching something, you learn a lot better after you've had the space and time for not doing anything.

**Robin:** I'm going to keep playing the devil's advocate a bit because a lot of people will be uncomfortable accepting what you are saying. When you say that you can do whatever you want, a lot of people will say, "Well, in the real world, you don't get to do whatever you want." So, how does that match up? I mean, there are things in the world you have to do that you don't want to do. So, if you get to do whatever you want here at PSCS, how does that...?

**Kyrian:** Well, I think it teaches you how to enjoy and realize that the stuff you have to do is not necessarily a bad, bad thing. You realize that you have choices. If you're in some job that you don't like, a lot of people think, "Oh, I have to go to college, and then take a nine to five job that's blah, blah, blah." And if I'm going to PSCS, you learn that, hey, I have to do my taxes, but I can realize that I've got this job working at McDonalds and that, if it sucks completely, I could stop working there and go find something I really enjoy. Going to PSCS helps you see that there are other options.

**Dave** (staff member)**:** PSCS students get the chance to minimize the possibility of doing things that don't make sense to them. They really get to learn what truly makes them happy, and then they do it. And that feeling of being weighed upon disappears. I mean, there still are certain things you just have to do, but I think students here aren't unduly burdened by as many of these things as are a lot of other people. So, having to do their taxes — they're not coming home from a job that they hate, so it's easier to do the taxes, and things like that. It makes them happier people, and happier people deal with unpleasant situations better than unhappy people.

## Red Flags Indicating It Was Time to Restructure the School

**Robin:** Dave's points seem to tie in well with the issues surrounding the restructuring of the school. I don't know that much yet about what was going on here, earlier in the fall and winter, when it was decided that you really needed to restructure the school. So, does somebody want to inform me on that? Heidi? You've been here for a while. How long have you been here?

**Heidi** (age 17)**:** Six years. What was going on in the fall and winter was that PSCS had become too scheduled. We weren't able to go get certain opportunities because we were locked into certain things. If I wanted to learn how to bake cookies, for instance, I couldn't because I would have all these classes already scheduled. And we just had stuff scheduled every day, and couldn't really decide other things we wanted to do. We'd have to wait until the next quarter before we could do something that we wanted to do at the time. So, I don't know.… Talk to somebody else, and let me think about this. [Note: Heidi was one of the more active voices for change in the restructuring.]

**Robin:** Okay. Asa? [Her name is pronounced "Ace-A."]

**Asa** (age 13)**:** I think it wasn't working because it was too structured, and it was more like a public school. Or, for me at least, it was far more structured, … and another thing, we had become too dependent on the staff. Also, there were just too many policies building up that were meant to try to stop things. But then when we got the new structure, it kind of played out by itself.

**Deb** (staff member)**:** Adding on to what Asa is saying, in terms of policy-setting, that was probably for me one of the biggest red flags. Looking at the way we seemed to be handling any school concern, it was by adding a policy related to that concern. And it came to the point where we had to ask: "Okay, what are we doing here? Adding policy isn't really looking at where the real problem is. Maybe the problem is a structural problem. Even though we have a school where definitely the students have choice in many of the things that they're doing — they can choose which classes that they take, for example —

are we as staff, or the adult volunteers, giving too much? Or providing too much?" Like Asa is saying, if students have a schedule, do they feel locked into that structure, preventing them from doing something else? For example, they might have been thinking, "I did this schedule for this 10-week quarter, but two weeks into it, I'm now completely interested in something else, but there's no real way for me to work that new thing in, because we have this set schedule."

**Andy:** Part of that too is that the staff became very scheduled. Things had become too rigid. We recognized that over the course of years, we had built in a lot of external structure in a school that was intending to provide students the opportunity to create their own internal structure. The more policies that we had added in response to issues at the school, the more structure we ended up creating. Suddenly, some students said, "Hey, wait a second!"

**Robin:** So, since one of the goals here is that students will develop and maintain a strong sense of integrity, how would minimizing the school's structure help them reach this goal?

**Heidi:** Because if students really want to be involved, then they're going to be on time. They're going to think, "Oh, okay, this is the activity that I asked for, that we're going to do special today." It's a lot easier to be pumped about it when you've set it up yourself.

**Andy:** What's interesting, Robin, from my perspective is that there are a lot less school infractions since the restructuring, which has nothing to do specifically with restructuring. For example, the students are still obligated as students to sign in and sign out, but they're remembering to do it more.

**Robin:** Why do you think that is?

**Andy:** Well, I think they feel freer. I think they feel more empowered. I think they feel more involved. And I think they feel that this is more their school. It's the sense of "I want to be here."

**Kyrian:** I think it's also just kind of in a more practical way; it's more laid back. Before, it was like you got here at 9, then you had a class at 9:15, and so it was easy to forget to sign in. And now, you get here, and it's easier to remember to sign in. [Note: Recall that, now, there is a morning gathering of all the students for planning each day, whereas, in the old system, there was only a weekly meeting of all students.]

**Robin:** Tell me more about the whole process of the restructuring. How were students involved in the restructuring?

**Heidi:** I think the way it mostly happened is that two students [Heidi and Adam] were like, "This is sucky. We don't even want to come here." We were talking to Andy about it, and we said, "All of this schedule, it doesn't even make us want to come here. We're not interested in our classes and there are things maybe we'd want to learn, but…."

Dan

Melinda: PSCS staff

Heidi

**Robin:** So, talking about it, did you start to come up with suggestions of other ways that it could be?

**Heidi:** Well, yeah. That's pretty much how we did it. We thought, "You know, we shouldn't have a schedule. We should have the students figure out their schedule, and not have a set schedule already." And then we called a meeting to do it.

**Kyrian:** Also, the staff and other people kind of realized that there were problems going on at the school. And so for Reflection Week, we had no structure, just five days with space. We thought, "What if school were like this the whole time?" So, we talked about it, and a couple days later, like Heidi said, we had a meeting about actually changing it.

**Robin:** What were some of the things that came up? I mean, usually, there's a lot of resistance to changes being made in schools. So, as you wanted to change PSCS — I mean, it's only a seven-year-old school — what came up for people that they were maybe NOT wanting to just do this right away?

**Kyrian:** I think that some people were concerned that they wouldn't be able to do anything. Even though they wanted power for themselves, some people still wanted others to do things for them. You know what I mean? So, they were like, "Oh, if no one goes here to the classes, then I'm not going to take any classes." Or, like me, when I first heard that idea, I was like, "Well, I don't think so. This change is kind of weird."

## What More Is Being Learned?

**Robin:** Are people happy now with the way that the school has been restructured? More than just happy, as there is more to education than happiness. Do you feel like you're learning? What tells you that you're learning? It's one thing to say that you're learning, but how do you know that you are?

**Ani:** I'm learning more of how to make my own schedule.

**Robin:** So, the school is less organized, and thus you need to be more organized?

**Andy:** That would be what I would describe as she is developing an internal structure, whereas before, others were providing an external structure for her.

**Robin:** How do others of you feel about this kind of shift? For example, has does this shift come into play with an issue as big as responsibility? How has PSCS encouraged you to be more responsible, or maybe in some cases to be less responsible? Help our readers understand what really goes on for you here.

**Dan:** I've had to be responsible for myself, take care of myself, feed myself, support myself since I was 14 or 15, or something like that, just really being on my own, not a whole lot of contact with my parents. And this is a good time to test my responsibility, prove to myself that I can make good choices. At PSCS, all activities are optional. I can take what I want to take and don't feel pressured into doing something. What I do, I do because I've chosen to do it; the responsibility is mine, as are the consequences of my choices. I finally got to the point where I have goals, and I can make things happen now. Before, when I first started at the school, it was just more of getting a feel for how to take care of myself and see what's really important to me. But now, it's like I can actually experiment.

**Robin:** Experiment with what?

**Dan:** Experiment, like this is a freedom, I guess. It's hard to put a word on it. That, now that I've come so far as a person, that now I can actually use what I've learned, like start up a certain class, or something like that.

**Kyrian:** And for me, it kind of teaches a lot of social skills, being responsible and being respectful and being treated with respect. I just recently went back and visited the school I used to go to. And I saw how the students were being completely disrespectful to all the teachers, and how the teachers were completely disrespectful to them, and the students there hated the school. I saw how that environment kind of made me not want to learn.

**Dave:** I wanted to say something about the perspective of a staff member. I know at the beginning of this year, we were very heavily scheduled, and I felt like I didn't know the students very much at all. I just saw those who were signed up for my classes. It felt like a chore. You'd go to classes, you'd see those students that are in your classes, and then you'd go to the next one. And I could justify myself, "Well, I'm doing my job. I'm teaching these classes. I'm there on time. I'm prepared."

And now, with less structure, I feel like I've gotten to know students better, all of the students better, without that structure in place. I feel like there's more of a responsibility on me to say, "Hey, I haven't talked to Eli in a while. I'm going to sit with Eli today, and see if he wants to do something." And I do that with all the students, to make sure that I see them. And I feel like I'm so much more available as a person, and as someone with something to offer, without this very rigid schedule. It took away the external justifications. You know like Kyrian was saying, "Hey, I have five classes today." He may not

have learned a damned thing in those five classes, but he could tell his parents, or tell himself, "I went to five classes today." Now, it's really on him, he's going to know — there's nothing to hide behind. He could have played pool all day, and that could be just fine with him — if that's really what he wanted to do today. Or, he could go home with a true sense of "I really accomplished something today." And I feel that as a staff member. I know when I go home whether I accomplished something that day. It really means something.

**Andy:** The restructuring seems to have encouraged the greater involvement of more members of the PSCS community. We've seen parents come in and just sit down and hang out, just being present, which has been wonderful. You experienced this morning the Horserace Handicapping class, where my father came in to co-facilitate the class. We had one parent who came in purposefully for that activity and brought her young daughter, who is on spring break. We had a sibling come and participate. We had a student who just started school today, who came with his guardian, who wasn't planning to stick around; but when he heard what the activity was, he was encouraged to stay. Then, suddenly, the community has extended and feels welcoming to people who previously, I think, had felt a bit of a wall, or a bit of an obstacle, to overcome. They felt welcome to come into a class like that, because the activities were ongoing and inviting. There's a welcoming feel to the school now, which I think extends beyond the way the staff and students per se are feeling.


Adrian


Kyrian

**Robin:** But, now you're still going to have regular classes, won't you? Classes in which you're learning one thing for an extended period of time?

**Andy:** Let me give you an example of that. I'm going to talk about the Vonnegut class before the break. I believe it was Kyrian who came to me and said, "Now that we've restructured the school, could we get a Vonnegut class started?" And I think after that we went and said, "Hey, Ani, are you interested? I know you were into this last spring." I think Dan and Eli almost simultaneously with Kyrian had come in. So, we stood together in the middle of a room and said, "Vonnegut class. Okay, what book do we want?" So, we decided on a book. We were all ready to go get the book that fast. Within 15 minutes of all of that hapening, we were off to find the book we had decided to get. The only thing that stymied us at that point was a little thing like the earthquake. Still, the next week, we were together every class, and we picked the time that we could all agree to that would be a regularly scheduled meeting time: Wednesdays, 1:30 to 2:30, we were going to have the Vonnegut class.

We started out with a small committed group saying that they were part of that class, but the next week, we said, "Hey, we're meeting; anyone want to come sit in?" And several people did, including Dave and a couple of other students. Dave was so taken in by the class, he went home with the book and read it so that he could participate the next week. That's how free our new environment is. My point simply is that once something is established, it can go as long or as short as the group that has established it wants it to go.

**Robin:** Let me switch topics here. What about conflict in the school? How do you think about conflicts?

**Dan:** I think that conflict leads to growth. Here, you're open to say, "No, you're wrong; I disagree with you," or, "Knock it off. The way you're treating me isn't right," or whatever. Even a compliment could be like a confrontation, I think. So, to be really passive and never communicate with each other wouldn't work; we have to communicate with each other. There are twenty some odd students here. If we didn't communicate, and if we let everything be okay all the time, we'd never get anywhere.

**Kyrian:** I also think there's personality conflict. There's an art to getting along. Even if I don't like someone, it's okay that I don't like them. I can be nice about it; no one is being mean about it. In a public school, though, if I don't like someone, I'm going to make fun of them.

## What about Getting into Colleges?

**Robin:** As we continue to talk, lots of things are going through my head. But, the one big thing is that a lot of schools are structured with requirements that are meant

to help students get into college. I mean, there are a lot of schools that have now gotten away from grades. But, how are you tracking? Do you have a portfolio, or semester hours, to show colleges what you're doing? Does anyone here want to go to college?

**Kyrian:** With me, I know if I choose to go to college, then when I make the decision, I'll do what's required. If I need to take a math class, I'll do it because I want to get into a particular college.

**Heidi:** Well, my sister went to PSCS, and Andy encourages us to make portfolios. But my sister didn't make a portfolio or anything; she just went and got her GED, and she's in college right now. She went to a community college for a year or two to get some math, because that's one thing that she hadn't been motivated to get until then. And she's in college back East now. It didn't seem very hard for her at all. She wanted to go to college, so she did the things she needed to do to get in.

**Dave:** There's something in every student here. There is something dynamic in their personality; some part of them is dynamic and really excited, and if that's what they're following, that's going to come across to whomever they meet. And that opens doors. That makes these students compelling people, and I think that's one of the keys to being successful — being genuine and dynamic. And we all have it, everybody.…

*Because of publication length limitations, we need to end the transcription here. Hopefully, this dialogue has helped you to understand some of the theories and practices of this "school without walls." Alternative schools are never finished products, and as we learn more about how students are being and what they are learning and what their needs are within any given structure, we can begin to see how re-assessing and restructuring schools and programs is an essential part of a school's survival. Ultimately, "success" to me is not about the structure of the school, but about how we are relating with students and with each other, and from that position discovering creative ways to meet the needs of students while also honoring our own needs as parents and educators.*

*In the remainder of this interview, we talked about homework, self-motivation, what it means to get out of the way of students' learning, what students think gets in the way of their learning, an example of flexibility in the new school schedule, more about modeling and about students as facilitators, the problems students face in trying to describe their school to others, the problem of challenges at the school and how to recognize them as challenges, redefining the nature of success/failure, and understanding "conflict" within the school. If anyone would like to read more from this particular interview, please let me know, and I'll send you a print copy. For anyone interested in reading the full transcript (29 pages, single-spaced), please e-mail robin@PathsOfLearning.net. You can also learn more about PSCS by visiting its website, www.PSCS.org.*

# The Touchstone Center

# A Way of Imagining

by Richard Lewis

*Editor's Introduction: For this issue of* Paths, *we are pleased to present the following profile article on The Touchstone Center, a non-profit educational organization, located in New York City, which was founded in 1969 by Richard Lewis, the Center's current Director. In previous issues, we featured profiles of various sorts of learning centers and environments. The Touchstone Center is rather unique among our profiled paths of learning, in that it is more a traveling set of assisting programs and projects than a stationary center of activity. As its brochure rightly proclaims, it "has been a leader in creating interdisciplinary arts programs in public schools, as well as producing a variety of exhibitions, publications, theatre events, and workshops and seminars committed to sustaining the imaginative process as a means of deepening individual and collective understanding." We invite you, our readers, to enjoy learning about this unique and wonderfully exciting venture in child-centered, child-honoring learning and thus, even if only vicariously, to join the many children, parents, and teachers who have been fortunate enough to use the Center's services.*

She sat near the back of the room. And when I asked all the children in this third grade class to bring their chairs closer to me, she decided to sit on the small carpet in the middle of our circle. I took a very small envelope (the kind you put small change in) from my bag and slowly opened it. Inside was a torn piece of paper. I held it up and said this was the seed of my imagination. I explained how, if I plant this seed of my imagination in my thoughts, it will grow into a garden. Not the flowering garden the Center had planted outside the school the year before, but a garden of our imagining that each child was about to construct in their own cardboard box. Most of the twenty or so children in the class looked at me — and the seed I held in my hand — approvingly. But she, quietly and firmly, said, "I don't believe you."

This, of course, was not the first time a child had doubted my playfulness. Nor was it the first time, given the dynamics of childhood believing, that someone in a large group of young children had insisted on playing according to the standard rules of logical thinking. And as I had done many times before, I politely demurred and said: "Be patient. What may not be true for you now may be true later." Having said even that, I'm not sure I had quite convinced her, because I could see on her face that questioning half smile of "well, show me — prove it, please."

She (for the sake of her privacy, I will call her Alissa) was one of the reasons I founded The Touchstone Center for Children in 1969. It had been a long-brewing idea of mine to establish an umbrella under which I could explore the purpose and value of imaginative thought, particularly as it existed or didn't exist in schools. Ever since I had begun working with children in a community arts center, I was interested in seeing how imaginative thought might become the central axis upon which all of children's learn-

ing could pivot. I was determined, as I continued to see the ways children responded through their imaginative thinking, to reposition the imagination, not simply as a part of human intelligence, but as the very stuff of intelligence — and perhaps as the life-blood of our perceptions.

The Touchstone Center for Children, Inc. was officially given its non-profit status as an educational organization in August 1969, the same year and month we humans landed on the moon. I was on vacation with my family in Maine and I remember well our excitement watching, on a neighbor's blinking television set, those first extraordinary black and white images of our human footsteps on the moon's bleak surface. My daughter, two years old then, was still trying out her newfound ability to walk, especially that summer, when she practiced the art of maneuvering down the winding stairs of our rented two-story house.

With my daughter's fragile steps on the earth — and those of the astronauts on the moon — I became aware of a quality of thought I had hoped the newly born Touchstone Center could encourage. As my family looked up at the moon that August night, the conflict between the scientific imagination and the poetic and mythic imagination seemed apparent. Would it be possible to reconcile these different forms of imaginative thought? Could we look at any object or observe any natural phenomenon through the common ground of our instinctive amazement and awe?

It seemed that if Touchstone were to find its distinctive reason for existence, it would have to center its mission on locating the ability of our imagination to balance and counterbalance these many competing directions. It had to become a process, a touchstone, out of which we could understand our imagining selves — and experience first hand, by being involved in the imaginative act, how our view of the world is brought into focus through the different lens of our imagining. It had to be a way of knowing arrived at by the uniqueness of our individual perceptions shaped and given meaning through our imaginative thought.

That said, I made a conscious decision in the early days of Touchstone that the Center not be confined to a permanent space, but be the movable spaces of my own and others' imagination. I envisioned an organization that would evolve and create, in different environments, a variety of performances, workshops, exhibitions and publications, in collaboration with children and adults interested in working together.

One of the very first collaborations took place at Public School 9, an elementary public school in the upper West Side of Manhattan. With funds from the Edward J. Noble Foundation, Touchstone was initially brought to the school for a three-year period beginning in 1971. Working with three other artist-teachers representing the visual arts, dance, and story telling, I intended to experiment with different ways to enlarge and support the imaginative experience of both children and teachers at the school. One of our first concerns was how to create a separate environment for teachers to develop their own imaginative projects, which they could take back to and use in their classrooms.

Because of large budget cuts in the city school system, an empty classroom became available to us during our second year at the school. We decided to make this room into a "studio" where all the teachers in the school were welcome to come during the day in order to explore various artistic materials, as well as to devise and develop imaginative projects. Touchstone's role was to support and encourage these projects, so that each teacher could maintain the project in their classroom.

At first, what was exciting was the degree to which many teachers who had never had the opportunity of expressing themselves began to use the studio to paint, write a poem, tell a story, work with clay or create a sculpture. Particularly at lunchtime, the studio was a beehive of creative activity, where teachers, sometimes in absorbed silence, sometimes in impassioned conversation, were able to rediscover their own imaginative resources and redirect these resources into the art of teaching children.

One of the teachers spoke of her experience in the "studio" in this way:

The program takes you up from the bootstraps and pulls you out of the depths, stirring your creativity and

imagination. You feel that you can do, that you can be, and that you are." Another teacher said: " An extremely rich experience — it released the self — gave spark, new directions (not just learning skill perspectives). It was a loosening up of the mind" (Goldberg 1984, 122–123).

Early in the fall of our third year at the school, a teacher with whom we had worked the year before walked into The Studio and said she wanted to create an Eastern Woodlands forest as part of a Native American curriculum she was going to use with her third graders. The forest, she thought, could be constructed in the wooden flower box she had brought with her. As we all talked about such a forest, it became clear that a flower box was just not going to be big enough. As serendipity would have it, a classroom next to the Center's studio was being emptied out (unfortunately due to further budget cuts). With a bold leap of faith and the euphoria of playing, we suggested that the forest be built inside of this vacated room. And so, with the blessings of the school's generous principal, a forest — an *imagined forest* — began to be built the following week in the empty classroom.

But why an imagined forest? As we soon learned, many of the children in the school had never seen a forest, and many, despite living only a block away, had never been to Central Park. By allowing the forest to be imagined, we were asking its makers (and this eventually included almost all of the children, teachers, and parents in the school) to create from their collective memory and their personal sense of what they thought a forest might look like. Little did we realize that such an invitation would encourage the creation of not only a forest as it might seem, but also a forest that represented our interior view of our most elemental feelings of fear, longing, delight, and wonder. Within six months (it took almost another two years to finish the forest), this once empty room began to be filled with children's finely constructed caves, nests, prehistoric creatures, glowing moons, suns, flying birds, waterfalls, staring frogs, ancient seas, and secretive hunters moving in the shadows of old trees. Teachers and student teachers often added richly colored leaves and flowers, and parents (curious to know what their children were talking about at dinner time) sometimes came to the forest to add their own creations, frequently inspired by their children's work.

Every kind of material was used to make the forest: colored tissue paper, string, cardboard, clay, wire, upside down chairs and tables, discarded boxes, and scraps of wood. Tucked away beneath a three-dimensional tree or a palm-sized cave were poems and stories written by the children. On the walls were paintings and drawings of volcanoes, dinosaurs, and luminous skies. And, hanging from the ceiling, each time a window was opened, were mysteriously moving mobiles of rainbow colored fish, beckoning stars, and far-away planets.

Speaking and writing the very word itself — *forest* — had become, we realized, a way to unlock images and memories that were, for many of the adults and children in the school, a part of the biological underpinnings of their imaginations. For those of us ushering in these images, the forest proved to be an exciting insight into how rich the imaginative life of children (and adults) was and could be. The numerous teachers, parents, and just plain curious persons who came expecting to see a real forest — in progress — found instead a room not unlike the unraveling of our imaginative thought, perhaps a confusing world, but for others, a blessed revelation.

After nearly two years of sustained creation, The Forest was officially declared opened in a daylong celebration in the spring of 1976. The third floor hallway was crowded with teachers, families, and many of the children who had constructed the forest and were now acting as its informed guides. Here is an excerpt from a community newspaper, *The Westsider*, reporting the event:

> The forest was asleep. Or so Alita Lyons said: "At night," the wide-eyed nine-year old explained, as she led visitors through a wonderland of flora and fauna on the third floor of PS 9, "the animals come alive. The birds fly; the rhino walks and the deer runs." She took a tiny guest by the hand and led her to a table covered with small clay figures. "Here are the bumble bees," she said. "They won't sting you now, but you have to be careful at night." For the young Ms. Lyons, the forest was clearly a magic world.

Richard Lewis founded the Touchstone Center for Children in 1969 in New York City. The Center presents workshops in schools and environmental centers for children and teachers emphasizing the role of the imagination as central to all learning. He is also the editor and author of a number of books, among them being *Miracles: Poems by Children of the English-speaking World; When Thought is Young: Reflections on Teaching and the Poetry of the Child;* and *Living by Wonder: Essays On The Imaginative Life of Childhood.*

And so, with the forest as a designated space in the school, as important as the gym, lunch room, the library, and a single classroom, it became obvious to us that here, right in the midst of the school, lay numerous themes and images that could be explored with children as the beginnings and sources of their imaginative selves. A question continually arose amongst us: Was the forest merely a forest, or was it, metaphorically, the ever-evolving space of our imagination? As we kept that question in mind, for the next five years we saw the forest flourish with the extending of themes and images that already existed inside its bustling life.

Using the large sun and the moon hanging on either side of the forest, made specifically for The Forest by kindergarten children, we began the next year of Touchstone's work in the school with a year-long thematic exploration based on children's perceptions (both scientific and mythic/poetic) of the origins of the sun and the moon. With a winter celebration of the *Birthday of the Sun* and a *Spring Celebration for the Moon* — in which children from the school assembled at dusk on the lawn outside of the planetarium of the Museum of Natural History to look through telescopes and read their mythical stories of the moon's creation — we had begun to use The Forest as a sheltered home out of which children could reflect upon, both scientifically and poetically, what emerging life in all its manifestations meant to us.

In subsequent years, The Forest inspired us to investigate amphibians and reptiles in a thematic overview entitled *Creatures of the World,* followed by one entitled *Humankind: the First Artisans*, in which we envisioned, through many different art forms, the ways early human life first created images. These yearlong, in-depth explorations became the basis of Touchstone's work over the next two decades. Expanding upon its school-based activities, the Center, during this time, engaged in several creative ventures. We began a theatre company, which performed original theatre pieces in museums and environmental centers (*Cave* and *Creature Tales*). We completed various publishing projects (poster-booklets, *Air Sings, Earth Dances* and *Sing We of Creeping and Crawling Things*). We created touring exhibitions *(Haiku* and *Prints and Poems by Japanese Children*). And we held workshops for teachers and parents (*Learning and the Imagination* and *The Magic Word: Children and Their Poetic Vision*).

In 1980, Touchstone ended its residency at Public School 9, and The Forest was dismantled, tree by tree, creature by creature, to make room for a regular classroom. The Center continued its work in various elementary schools in the South Bronx, East Harlem, and the Lower East Side; in a middle school, Intermediate School 227; and, most recently, in the Townsend Harris High School, both located in Queens. In these schools, the Center variously explored a six-year theme, *Realms of the Sea, Sky, and Earth*, followed by a group of themes, which we then presented in various publications of ours, related to the specific qualities of imaginative thought — *In The Spirit of Play*; *The Many Ways of Thought, The Many Ways of Feeling*; *The Bird of Imagining*; and *The Making of Worlds*.

At present, the Center is finishing a three-year project entitled *Speakings: The Many Voices of Language*. The intent of this project is to locate not only the language capacities in us, but also the ways in which language functions as a faculty of expression and communication throughout the natural world. Working in three schools (PS 20 in Manhattan, IS 277, and the Townsend Harris High School), the Center has altered this project to fit the needs of each school. In the high school, students created a tile mural, hung in the main lobby of the school, based on their original art and writing inspired by their study of the origins of human language. In both the middle and elementary schools,

From the chapter "The Story the Child Keeps" in *Living By Wonder: The Imaginative Life of Childhood*.

A story is simply about what happens. If so, stories are everywhere, both inside and outside of ourselves.

When [one student] said, "It's amazing how the wind moves the trees. It moves my mind also," he was speaking to all of us about the story that each of us keeps. Within everyone, child or adult, an elegant narrative of a story exists between ourselves and the life around.

That story is a place of possibility in which we take part in a world that enhances, enlivens and offers us something with which we can identity. Through that identification, we grow. We become more than we are. We learn how to get from here to there. Though a story may challenge what we already believe about our world, ultimately, it is through stories that spirit is nurtured.

In a time when children can easily lose the birthright of imagination, we must find new ways to help children to the sources of the stories they urgently wish to tell. Each time they speak their stories, they establish once again the fertility and importance of their imagining selves.…

Touchstone, in conjunction with school staff, has created outdoor school gardens surrounded by tiles and murals decorated with students' original art and writing, inspired by the *Speakings* theme.

***

And how is Alissa doing in her third grade class? Has she changed her disbelief of my planting a seed of the imagination in my thoughts? Has she, with the other children in her class, begun making her imagining garden in the small cardboard box we had given to each child? Did she understand the parallel we drew between the growth that takes place in the garden outside her school and the growth of thoughts in her own imagination?

Now, in the third session of our workshop with her class, I watch her work quietly, intently balancing a small piece of paper between her two fingers — and with her other hand, spreading glue on the paper's edge. The classroom is filled with all the outside noise of urban life, but she, like most of her classmates, doesn't seem to be bothered. She bends over her box and, with the care of a much older artisan, attaches her yellow paper in and around the carefully arranged twigs and stones she has already put into the garden of her box. Standing near me, she asks: "Richard, do you like my yellow flower?" And for a brief moment I hold my breath as I realize that what had been her fear of the imaginative process had now become her innate ability to believe that even a yellow piece of paper, cropped and folded, could become a flower.

In the weeks that followed she wrote down a few of her thoughts about her growing garden:

"My garden looks up and thinks how it is to be in the sky. My garden always thinks about the sky."

"My sky sees my garden like little ants. The sky looks down and says 'Oh, it's amazing down there.' The sky wishes it could touch my garden."

What had happened to Alissa that made her feel at ease with her imagination so that her making a garden in a cardboard box and her writing about the relationship between the garden and the sky came to her without any sense of falsity and disbelief? Was it just a matter of our showing her a different way of thinking and feeling, a way that we merely and quite naturally introduced into her day-to-day classroom activities? Or was her change due to something else, something which reaches into the larger and deeper textures of childhood thought?

While I won't diminish the importance of bringing into classrooms another form of thinking, I also believe that by emphasizing the imagination as a reality to be considered and expressed we have touched upon something too often absent from the classroom experience. At the beginning of our work with this class, we purposely decided to offer each child a small envelope with a piece of torn paper inside in order to say to all the children: "We know you can imagine. We are also confident that your imaginative thought will be able to transform a piece of paper into a seed that you can plant in your thoughts."

From our earlier work on The Forest, we learned that there is another form of childhood thinking and feeling that is profoundly important as a basis of learning. When the natural world is used as both a starting point and a larger context for imaginative thought, there is the possibility that the imagination can be seen as a part of the natural world itself. It has been our experience that children, whether they live in urban, suburban or rural environments, need to be continually brought back to their probing questions "Where am I? What other aliveness is growing with me? How can I connect to trees, the sky, oceans, the patterns of insect wings, the flight of birds?" Children's initial empathy for the natural world is not simply a passing phase; it is a deeply rooted concern for the establishment of their place within the phenomenon of their being alive. If this instinctive empathy is ignored, and the use of the imaginative as an expressive link to this empathy is disregarded, significant personal learning, which springs spontaneously from the child, can be permanently damaged.

Whether it is Alissa or any other child we have worked with, one thing has become clear: When a child uses their innate capacity for wonder and their natural ability to imagine, a new interest in learning often follows. Not necessarily only academic learning, but the learning that no amount of tests and assessments can measure. A learning, in its intimacy, that we strive for when all the facts and figures have been put aside and we are alone, within the solitude of our thoughts and imagining. Such learning, in the end, never disappoints us. And such learning, when encouraged, is what adults, as well as children, need in order to sustain them in the course of a lifetime.

If we succeed in our work at the Center, we do so because we help both children and adults realize that there are many dimensions to learning. Even more important, we help them understand at the deepest levels of their core being that the learning that takes place when our imagination is acknowledged and utilized is a learning that represents the depth and extent of our personhood — open and responsive to our ever evolving and innate creative capacities.

As we were leaving Alissa's classroom, after our final workshop with her class, I turned around and noticed a group of children in the front of the room. They were playing with their clay figures — about an inch in height — that they had made as inhabitants for their gardens. I tried to say goodbye, but they didn't hear me. No matter, though. For, one of them had written earlier, as they watched their imagining gardens grow, "My imagination is the cover. It is like a rainbow guard that is protecting my garden." I felt assured that they were doing what their imagining was asking of them: To be fully engaged in and attentive to the ebb and flow of their imaginative thought. A seed had been planted.

**Reference**

Goldberg, Lillian. 1984. *The Touchstone study: Bringing the arts to the Schools*. New York: Touchstone Center Publications.

Gina Vanides teaches 4th - 6th grade instrumental music (band and violin) and classroom general music for the Buena Park School Disctrict in Southern California. Miss Vanides holds a single subject teaching credential for music education and a Master's Degree in Education: Curriculum and Instruction.

# Making Public Schools Places of Meaningful Learning!

## *An Essay Review*

by Gina Vanides

Often at the mention of public school, a negative image comes to mind of students sitting passively at desks while a teacher lectures in front of the classroom on reading, writing, and math. Pleasant memories of warmth and enjoyment are scarce, while feelings of inadequacy and frustration regarding grades and squelched creativity may surface. Maybe the catch phrases of "higher test scores" and "teacher accountability," constantly used as campaign promises by politicians from recent television commercials, also have a place in this modern representation of school.

However, the public school system can in fact be a place of meaningful learning and interaction between students and teachers, as I have experienced first hand in my own teaching of 4th-6th grade band and violin classes and general music lessons. Through reading Richard Bromfield's *Handle With Care: Understanding Children and Teachers*, Mark Kennedy's *Lessons from the Hawk,* and Sebastian de Assis' *Teachers of the World, Unite!,* I was inspired by and have given some careful consideration to the ideas that the authors present in order to replace the traditional stagnant paradigm with a spirited and exuberant public schooling experience. The books' themes interconnect to form a beautiful tapestry of what public education has the potential to be — a mutually empowering interaction between teachers and students that is woven together with the threads of love for learning, care and compassion, respect towards both children and teachers, engaging curriculum, and an awe of humanity.

Bromfield's *Handle with Care* lays the foundation for what I personally consider the mortar of the schooling experience: The recognition that both students and teachers are human beings with hearts and minds capable of coexisting in loving and learning. Bromfield's ideas reach beyond the de-personalized, current standardized test score hype that overlooks genuine student achievement and teacher effectiveness, to reveal the humanity and "precious goods" worth of both the adults and the children in the school environment. The common denominator is that children and teachers are people with a wealth of talents to share with the world. They all have their own thoughts, distinct personalities, and life experiences. Both parties are at their best during meaningful interaction, and both parties have feelings of joy and struggle. Acknowledging that students and teachers are, first and foremost, people with hearts and feelings, clashes with the traditional view of pushing children to master the subject matter and develop intellectually. This collision of values can be an important change agent to rethink the current schooling practice, which ignores children's social needs of learning how to get along with others, as well as their emotional needs of validation, patient guid-

**Handle With Care:**
**Understanding Children and Teachers**
by Richard Bromfield

**Lessons from the Hawk**
by Mark Kennedy

**Teachers of the World, Unite!**
by Sebastian de Assis

ance, and encouragement. As Bromfield cautions, these needs cannot be disregarded, "for when we push away what a child thinks and feels, we push away a child."

Although altering from the course of the current paradigm may bring criticism from educators and community members who are stuck in archaic thinking, it can be achieved through the teacher's strength of heart and willingness to pursue holistic education that is in the best interest of children. My band and violin classes are actually in alignment with Bromfield's humanistic conviction. The foundation of my classes is built on a climate of love, kindness, encouragement, respect, and politeness — with the students believing that their ultimate goal is to be good people and make the world a better place by both their compassionate actions and mental knowledge. I then incorporate these humanitarian qualities into my instruction, so much that at times the caring atmosphere and growth in knowledge fit together seamlessly and both myself and my students are empowered through a joyful experience of mutually participating in the learning experience.

A disparity to the delightful public schooling experience presented above is the mistaken notion that discipline means sitting silently and conforming to orders as robots. Bromfield honestly states that the things that children "treasure often violate the codes of the classroom." Children are naturally ebullient with energy, which is stifled while they sit at desks for hours, not being allowed to run or jump, and being told to keep quiet. Bromfield quotes a boy as saying that "not moving hurts him." This unnatural confinement currently causes children to clash with their teachers, which in turn results in discipline problems and, worst of all, the child's eventual apathy towards learning.

Teachers must strive to understand how restricted and lifeless the children must feel, and in turn be creative with their curriculum to accommodate the children's needs and tap into their natural energy while still within the framework of teaching self-discipline through rules and structures. My own realistic incorporation of these ideas into my teaching practices is when I teach general music lessons about fractions, rhythm, and counting. The music lesson transforms students into active participants with the subject matter by having them physically clap and verbally count out loud to the musical patterns. It is a joy to see the students formerly labeled as troublemakers or low achievers excel with confidence in the music lessons. In being given a framework to move their bodies and tap into their natural energy, these students wholeheartedly interact with the new knowledge while being allowed to do the one thing that usually gets them in trouble: Moving around and talking while sitting at their desks.

So it is possible to have an orderly foundation at school and still teach in a way where everything about students is valued and in which they are guided in how to respect themselves and others and how to grow as contributing members of society. The experiences of my students exemplify Bromfield's prominent point that "children cherish what they say, do, think, and feel in the world and in the classroom mostly because they create it and it is theirs." If I, as the teacher, had only explained and clapped the rhythms while standing at the front of the classroom and being far removed from the students, the children would not have experienced the ownership of the material that they did when encouraged to actively participate with the learning process.

To give teachers their due praise and genuine admiration, we must realize that, while a parent struggles to meet the varying needs of only her or his own children — and even this is sometimes a frustration — teachers must care about every child in their classroom. Teachers must put their hearts into trying their best to help their students develop critical thinking skills and make sense of the world around them. Teachers must take a classroom full of children, each at individual points of development, and "process all the needs" by guiding the children to make meaning of the instruction.

To educate means to listen non-judgmentally, to teach children how to learn so they can be self-learners for a lifetime, to recognize tiny steps of progress when bigger leaps are needed, to broaden the view concerning what constitutes "success" and to see success at points C or D when perhaps the teacher might have wished to see it at points A or B, and to encourage a self-doubting student towards confidence. I believe that it is the small successes that public school teachers must learn how to celebrate, especially in a paradigm that often disregards that teaching is about growth and not instant perfection. Bromfield reminds teachers that it is not immediate perfection that is of utmost importance, but their tremendous responsibility to "help children grow into adults who succeed and matter tomorrow."

Bromfield presents the following thoughtful hypothetical social experiment meant to help us understand the diversity and interests of all of the human beings in a school setting, and how valuing each students' educational achievements and growths far supersedes the erroneous paradigm of conformity. If one hundred tourists were dropped off in Boston for a day, they would all visit different places. The artists would revel in the beauty inside the museums, the scientists would make discoveries in the Museum of Science, the readers would browse the book shops, and the sports fans would see a ball game. The music lovers, historians, financial advisors, architects, marine biologists, and retired sailors would disperse in different directions. Even if two or three out of the one hundred did go to the same destination, they would not follow in each other's exact footsteps.

Children are just as varied with their learning and interests as are the Boston tourists. Effective teachers must incorporate curriculum into their lessons that appeals to their students' differences. One of my classroom general music lessons is an example of how students' distinct qualities can all be celebrated and utilized at the same time. The students listen to a piece of music

about a bird, and then are asked to creatively illustrate the music on their papers. The students may choose one or more of the following options: The artists can draw the bird and surrounding scenery, the writers can compose a story about the bird, and other students can chart the bird's flight patterns with color coding and line form. At the end of the lesson, no child's project is the same, yet every child's project exemplifies an expression of the students' musical knowledge.

To transform the world of education with the type of significant, flexible curriculum needed to teach a group of students as diverse as the "Boston Tourists" mentioned above, teachers with hearts for making public schools more effective should perform a careful reading of Mark Kennedy's *Lessons from the Hawk,* a must read for every teacher who strives to bring out the best in ALL of his or her students. The book is based on an analogy of a hawk flying over a field, able to see both the whole field and the smallest detail because of its elevated perspective — a perspective that humans cannot attain through their grounded vision. Teachers must be as versatile and perceptive as the hawk, able to see the whole field of learning needs, and in addition focus on individual student needs.

Kennedy means this to be a resource book for what teachers can do NOW by building on what they are already doing in their classrooms. He also means it to be a quick read for busy professionals and an immediate idea generator (via charts) for measuring one's curriculum against the book's ideas. I found the book to be an inspirational reminder to teachers that guiding and molding holistic children is a greater and more meaningful task than following the trend of pushing children to excel with higher math and reading scores, and ignoring that there is more to children than these respective achievements.

Building on Garmston and Wellman's 1992 work [*How to make presentations that teach and transform*] Kennedy presents the idea that there are four types of student perspectives: The "Professors" who ask "What is it?", the "Scientists/Troubleshooters" who ask "Why does it work?", the "Inventors" who ask "What if we change it?", and the "Friends/Guides" who ask "What does it do for me?" This range of perspectives supports the validity of the current public school practice of learning subject matter facts and mastering skills to prepare students for the future job market. The beauty of using these perspectives in bettering public schools is that they extend into the holistic relevance by also validating learning as a means of bettering society, and the importance of learning for personal relevance.

The perspectives must be interconnected and equally honored if teachers are to help students become "hawks" who extend beyond their own one or two natural perspectives and grow into holistic beings who fly out of their schooling experience with the capability to view learning from all four perspectives. The premise is that every student has strengths, which are "roots," and natural weaknesses that can be strengthened, which are "wings."

The current top-down, analytical school system does not enable students to strengthen their wings and fly. Children's excitement for learning becomes crushed when their perspectives are ignored and disrespected. However, if educators seriously implement the ideas in this book and honor "non-traditional" student learners [kinesthetic and auditory learners, as well as caring, helpful, and compassionate children] they will see fewer discipline problems, less burnout, and even higher test scores as students begin to assume ownership of their own education.

From my own experiences as a public school teacher, I have felt frustration and so-called burnout during the times that I have purposely stopped honoring all student perspectives and focused on only trying to teach facts in compliance with a specific outcome. It has been at the times where my music students don't sound as good as I would like them to, when I get discouraged in not seeing success at points A or B and fail to recognize the success at points C or D — and where I worry what others will think of my effectiveness as a teacher — that neither myself nor my students are able to be productive. It is when I remind myself that all perspectives matter, and that teaching is about growth and spreading wings instead of immediate perfection, that my students and I once again become empowered and able to celebrate the tiny steps of progress that always have led to a notable end product despite my initial worries. It is when I remind myself that there are many steps along the path of learning — just as the hawk sees the perspective of the entire field — that I see that it is impossible to have quality learning without honoring every students' participation in the class and their tiny steps along their journey of growth, no matter the size of the steps.

Both traditional and holistic elements of the curriculum must be linked together, and not kept at opposite ends of the spectrum. Kennedy uses the following example of a college professor to thoughtfully illustrate his point: A professor, who is dedicated to focused learning, may be thoroughly educated in facts, yet unable to relate to people and society with friendliness, caring, compassion, and helpfulness. This professor has the "roots" of knowledge, but he needs to develop "wings" that will enable him to acknowledge that heart and spirit coexist in the world along with facts. Likewise, students who have the "roots" of loving relationships and concern for the good of humanity would need to develop "wings" to comfortably interact with fact-based book knowledge.

Contrasting to the traditional paradigm that only a tedious task qualifies as real work, public schooling can be a joy for students, helping them find their wings. My students grow wings through interacting with both the factual knowledge of music, as well as relishing the joyfulness of treating each other with heartfelt kindness. In addition, public schooling can make it possible for students to be deeply engaged in their work and view learn-

ing as "interesting or even fun." Many times when I teach classroom music lessons, I play games with the students where they are so involved in the material that they transcend learning the subject matter just because they are supposed to learn and extend into complete interaction with the material because it is exciting for them. During these enjoyable times they are having at school, the students no longer see the learning process as a task, but vivaciously express that the music lessons were "fun!" These students become truly open to learning when they forget about the pressure to learn and segue into naturally interacting with the material so that it becomes a part of them.

**"The public school system can in fact be a place of meaningful learning and interaction between students and teachers."**

Public school teachers can experience similar joy in growing and learning. The teacher certification requirement of professional development encompasses activities that are supposed to make teachers better teachers, such as attending conferences about their subject matter and reading professional journals about education. While these resources provide teachers with new ideas to use in their classrooms, it is in the simple, day-to-day occurrences that I have been able to develop the holistic component of my teaching style, and become a much more effective teacher in turn. Observing a staff member graciously holding open the school office door so that a teacher whose hands were full with materials could enter with ease reminded me of the importance of teaching respect and kindness as a means of bettering the quality of life and humanity. Having a colleague pat me on the shoulder in a friendly hello reminds me of the importance to in turn genuinely acknowledge my students when they come to my class. Watching people be hurtful and rude in the grocery store or while driving on the highway reminds me that it is imperative to model love and kindness in how I relate to both my students and the other adults on campus. It is when I incorporate these holistic elements into the fabric of my existence as a person, that I am able to create a classroom climate that honors student perspectives.

Teachers must do more observing of little day-to-day occurrences, and honor both holistic and fact based learners, in order to ultimately influence civilization. With a commentary on society, Kennedy wisely states that "the dominant social values that prevail in schools today will be the dominant social values of society tomorrow." As traditional schooling now stands, students who learn factually and analytically have the upper hand, while students who learn holistically are fighting a seemingly losing battle to conquer their next analytical assignment. The successful students in math and reading are extolled for their intelligence, while the seemingly less successful students are not celebrated for who they are nor seen as contributing members of the school system, let alone of society. We must "rescue democracy from becoming merely an abstraction — which by definition can only be understood by those who learn abstractly — and instead make it an experience equally accessible to the least analytical, most holistic learners." In a true democracy, every member would be valued and respected for her or his abilities and contributions.

A natural segue to attaining such a democracy leads us to the action-packed propositions of Sebastian de Assis' book *Teachers of the World, Unite!* With his powerful, activist-toned writing style, the author condemns the economic functionalism that has been in place in schools since the Industrial Revolution, an economic paradigm that emphasizes financial gain, competition, and intellectual and technical development at the expense of disregarding holistic learning. Nothing is wrong with helping students prepare themselves to earn a reasonable living wage. However, there is a danger in our continuing to maintain a chasm between intellect and humanism, as we saw in Kennedy's example of the smart professor who lacked heart. This gap between intellect and humanism underlies the economic functionalism that de Assis rightly criticizes with respect to schooling.

The message that de Assis boldly proclaims to the public arena is that standardized tests, representing the intellect, don't measure humanism as expressed by compassion, sympathy, empathy, cooperation, nor a sense of community and respect for humanity. These human treasures are sadly viewed as essentially irrelevant in the educational system. This is a horrendous mistake, and de Assis having the courage to address it will help empower teachers who agree with his ideas to provide holistic learning experiences for their students. After all, the problems of the world such as poverty, depleted resources, and sickness will be the childrens' responsibility in the future. The future adults will not be equipped to deal with these problems unless they are educated with a sense of compassion for and an awareness of the needs of humanity. If children themselves are not treated with compassion, the world they create as adults will take on the same characteristics of functionalism as the schools possess, and humanism will fade away. We cannot allow this to happen, and so must teach the children to incorporate all needs of human development into their daily lives.

These general needs of human development are Mind (intellect), Heart (emotions), and Spirit (soul). The educational system mistakenly views only intellect as the

key to unlocking human potential, in turn ignoring the heart and soul, which are just as much a part of every person as is his/her mind. Teachers should possess each of these three qualities, and in turn help children develop them (as I have done with my own students) in order to truly unlock the wonders of human potential.

To guide children to become holistic human beings, teachers must believe that they make a difference in order to facilitate the social transformation necessary for a strong, healthy democratic society. They must not only be intellectuals, but caring, nurturing role models throughout the schooling years of children. They must treat children with encouragement and respect as proclaimed in the 1959 United Nations document, the *Declaration of the Rights of the Child*, and by extension allow children to excel in their natural talents as opposed to insisting that they develop skills that make them fit into the educational mold. Caring for others and cooperation go against the current doctrine of getting ahead in society, so it is especially important for teachers to emphasize and model these qualities of the heart.

A Renaissance of the Humanities of the heart, mind, and spirit is needed. Contrary to the views of those politicians and bureaucrats who want schools to focus narrowly on math, science, and technology and who see music, art, dance, and drama as luxuries that can be omitted with impunity; music, art, dance, and drama are crucial elements in a child's education, since they bring social awareness to children. With exposure to only the so-called "basic" subjects, students lose touch with themselves, and their human spirit withers. The trend is to praise students' efforts to read, write, and calculate math problems, but not to recognize students with sensitive or artistic talents. With exposure to and immersion in the Humanities, the leaders of tomorrow will have the foundation needed in order to be insightful and caring citizens of the world. The Humanities teach love and emotional awareness. Love is the most genuine act of freedom, because it cannot be inculcated into anyone.

We have a love of knowledge in society. Now we need a knowledge of love. For love and knowledge to coexist in the world, they must coexist in the individual. If they don't, then intellect will not be guided by heart and soul, and heart and soul are what are needed to improve the quality of life caused by poverty, depleted resources, and sickness. De Assis resolutely presents the reality that "only educated, developed, and rehumanized individuals will be able to transform chaos into harmony, hatred into love, and violence into peace." These qualities will ultimately be a blessing to the development of the human spirit and civilization.

The human need must supersede economic functionalism and technology. The "full development of the human personality" through education is proclaimed in the 1948 United Nations document, the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, as well as in the previously mentioned 1959 document, the *Declaration of the Rights of the Child*, the latter of which proclaims that the child should be brought up "in full consciousness that his energy and talents should be devoted to the service of his fellow men." What is written in idealistic words must be incorporated into sincere actions.

Teachers who really care about exposing their students to such engaging curriculum put forth a great abundance of heart and energy. They should be truly admired for doing so. To "raise children in freedom of thought, emotions and expressions is infinitely more exhausting than educating for conformity. The former takes energy, effort, and dedication, while the latter only requires the educator to follow the narrow rules."

I personally appreciate de Assis' efforts to raise public awareness regarding the efforts of holistic public school educators. Teachers who are stuck in the traditional paradigm can be viciously critical of holistic teachers, and view those who instruct from the heart as not really teaching. De Assis' declaration empowers humanistic teachers and extols them by pointing out that society cannot afford to live without them.

Passively waiting for and lamenting over the lack of well-deserved recognition won't change anything. Teachers must unite and be empowered at the grassroots level to make decisions that are best for their schools and their students. Quoting educational philosopher John Dewey, de Assis emphasizes the democratic call to action with Dewey's words that teachers "represent the protection of the children and the youth in the schools against all of the outside interests, economic, and political and others, that would exploit the schools for their own ends." He continues: "What human development needs is a reformed educational system in which all the elements of human intelligence are taken into account."

Reformers of education need to continue to keep alive or strive to rekindle the ember that still exists in students' hearts to embrace learning as a meaningful lifelong endeavor. Even if they work from inside an oppressive system, they must fight against those aspects of the system that lead students to view their education as a daily drudgery they have to put up with for 12 years. Public education must be reformed holistically in order to rehumanize the individual. Taking into account the ideas presented in these books, teachers can empower themselves to recognize and validate each student's innate abilities, as well as retain an awe for how humanity is interconnected. As de Assis insightfully tells us, to make a difference one student at a time, teachers must embrace their tremendous power as individuals and not "disregard the power of one and the ability to make a difference on your own."

The lessons learned from all three of these books are precisely the encouragement and idealistic rejuvenation that we public school teachers need in order to be as effective as we can and should be in our classrooms. Armed with the lessons of these books, we can more easily and strongly carry on with our calling of being compassionate crusaders for the positive development of humanity.

# Connecting with Nature, with Others, and with Ourselves

**by Tina and Mike Dawson**

"Now I see the secret of the making of the best persons.
It is to grow in the open air, to eat and sleep with the earth."
— Walt Whitman

*The time I have spent in the out-of-doors has given me some of the best experiences of my life. I have traveled throughout the country and spent time in many different backcountry areas. These travels have shown me that the answer to reconnecting students and giving them the energy and determination they need to succeed lies in the lessons that can be learned in the field. Be it a daytrip to a local hiking trail or a four-week trip to a distant wilderness, the experiences available to students in these places are truly remarkable. An immense sense of connection to the surrounding world is developed by canoeing a river, observing a moose in its natural habitat, or seeing an alpine meadow in bloom. Taking students into the outdoors can be a very rejuvenating experience. Successfully climbing a mountain peak or completing a hiking trail that appeared to be too difficult at the outset, can give students the self-confidence that they need to resist peer pressure and the images sent by modern society. Observing seasonal changes, the cyclic nature of the Earth can provide stability necessary to get youth through the times of uncertainty encountered growing up in a society centered on image and material possessions. Nature can provide the stability that all too often cannot be found in a child's family.*

*However, I cannot say that my experience traveling throughout the country and spending time in many different areas has made me any less angry than a student who has not yet had these experiences. My anger and resentment I now harbor, though, are directed at the elements of our society that are destroying the outdoors, and with it the opportunity for today's and tomorrow's youth to be reconnected and sustained by it. Perhaps if enough of today's educators choose to provide outdoor experiences for their students, the next generation will understand the urgent necessity of preserving the vast, wild classroom that is the natural outdoors.*

Bob Bursey, who wrote this at age 15, traveled the country with Expedition Field Studies (see below) for several years.

## Beliefs

Education should be experiential, process oriented, practical, creative, and empowering. Students need to be able to make sense of what they are learning and to connect experiences in ways that lead to conceptual understanding. The different contexts within which we live cannot be ignored. This discussion focuses on the alternative community schools model that embraces the natural and the community environments. Details used for illustrative purposes are from programs in southwestern Virginia where we lived and worked: Mountain Community School, which existed in Giles County from 1980 to 1986; Community School in Roanoke, which was founded in 1971 and thrives today (we were there 1987-1996); and The Learning Circle, which operated various activities in the New River Valley until 2001.

Very recently, "experiential education" and "service learning" have become popular ideas in public education; they have been priorities in alternative community education for decades. The programs in southwestern Virginia all had partnerships with the public schools in

the area. Community School, especially, was visited by public school personnel and local media personnel looking for models to adopt. Changes are happening that encourage the integration of schools and communities to better address several issues important to the lives of children and to all of us.

All of the programs have been located near attractive and accessible natural areas. Participants first learn much about their local outdoor areas and the related opportunities, challenges, and issues; then they explore outdoor areas and other communities that are not "their backyards." Outdoor education and travel programs are as much for personal growth, development of interpersonal skills, and a widening of perspectives as for learning about particular geographic regions, ecosystems, and indigenous cultures.

Education should be experiential, process oriented, practical, creative, and empowering.

Schools are arenas for cultural politics that reflect and that can potentially transform the society within which they exist (Goodman, 1992). If the members of the school community create a distinct ethos within the school, this may transfer to the community outside the school building. The honest, democratic, and respectful environments attempted will influence the wellbeing of society. Students can learn to use knowledge and resources collaboratively with other people to enhance the quality of life in their families and in their communities. The emphasis is on helping students to take responsibility for themselves and their actions, to become constructive community participants, and to become caring citizens of the earth.

For us, it is important to integrate all of these components and experiences into a *whole*. The outdoor and travel experiences illuminate and support what happens in the classrooms, and they raise questions that are taken back to the classrooms for further exploration and research.

## Components

In the programs in which we have worked, students, their families, and community others are actively involved in planning and implementing courses of study that include developing strong communication skills, research skills, critical thinking skills, skills in the creative arts, wellness and fitness skills, environmental responsibility, and an orientation toward community service. The depth and breadth of that involvement varied across the programs. Mountain Community School, which served children 3–12 years of age, had its roots in a parent cooperative. Family members worked in the classroom, served on all working committees, and had contracts to help with the day-to-day maintenance and management of the school. Community School has larger and more established populations who choose the school for a wide variety of reasons. Family participation is encouraged, and some parents are extremely involved in countless aspects of the school. The local community includes rich resources, including the college that is the landlord for the school. Many of the college faculty members, whether or not their children are connected to the school, offer programs and opportunities for Community School students. The middle school and extended studies students are able to take courses, do independent studies, and otherwise take advantage of having a college next door and a community college nearby. The students have worked with and for various civic groups, newspapers, radio stations, and other individuals and organizations in the area.

At The Learning Circle's Mountain Community High School, the courses of study were as individualized as possible, allowing for each student's interests and learning styles. Students, family members, teachers, and internship supervisors met to create the opportunities for the semester and for the year. Students benefited from on-campus course work, group meetings, seminars, and apprenticeships and internships. The internships included working with members of the student's home community (an organic gardener, a carpenter), with someone in the local community (artists in the studios on the second floor of the high school building, a forest service worker in the district, theater professionals in town, math faculty at the local college), and with resource people across the continent (a boat builder in New England, a glass blower in Mexico).

## The Natural Environment

The quality of life in the future depends directly on our understanding of and our emotional connection with our environment. For too many people, for too many other living things, and for the planet, the world as it exists now is not working. New voices must be heard, and part of being an educator is encouraging these voices. Outdoor education is a process for clarifying the ideas and the values necessary to understand our interrelatedness with nature and with one another. Lessons of life are everywhere in the outdoor classroom. Students interact with the world and with each other under very distinct circumstances. When a sustained experience in a natural setting is provided, students can move beyond their fears and uncertainties to strengthen their natural curiosity, creativity, and sense of wonder. Being together in the outdoors helps participants know each other in different ways and helps strengthen their sense of community. Youths and adults know each other as people and not just as "teacher," "student," "parent," "board member," etc.

It is also good for adults to get out into a world not dominated by the works of man and to experience a more in-depth connection with nature. Many are so busy just going from day-to-day that they forget to connect with the Earth. It is crucial for those of us who deal with children and youth to recapture and maintain our sense of wonder and appreciation for the world around us.

For the past fourteen years the two of us, and others with whom we worked, have participated in overnight and longer outdoor trips with children ages five and older. These began as field trips during the school week, expanded to weeklong camping, backpacking, or canoeing trips, then included summer camps and month-long cross-country trips. These experiences led to the development of Expedition Field Studies, a program which is still evolving. Most recently we offered this program to students 13-18 years of age. The students helped create the trips, and they designed related experiences. They learned how to care for gear, how to plan and to prepare meals in various backcountry settings, and how to deal with the logistics of travel. They chose topics to explore (examples include tidal pool ecology, desert plants, communication through dance or masks, pending legislation related to resource issues) and became the experts on the trip. As we entered the regions related to their topics, they taught all of us about what they had learned.

From 1996 to 2000 we traveled through 40 states and spent time in areas from central Maine to southern Florida; from the extensive lakes region on the Minnesota/Ontario border to the desert canyons of Utah, Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico; from the barrier spit of Canaveral National Seashore to the unspoiled northern coast of Washington state. We climbed the snow-topped peaks of Rocky Mountain National Park and visited Vancouver Island in British Columbia. During that time we experienced Native American cultures from the Penobscot to the Seminole, from the Makah and Suquamish to the Navajo and the Hopi. We visited ecosystems from tidal pools to coral reefs, from northern boreal forests to mangrove swamps, from temperate rain forests to desert canyons, from alpine tundra to the Canadian shield. We saw moose and elk, wolves, coyotes, foxes, eagles and endangered Everglades' kites, roseate spoonbills and canyon wrens, sea lions and barracuda, alligators and desert lizards, and too many other species to list. (One of our hopes is that by seeing all of these things, we increase the likelihood that those with whom we travel will want to protect the environment that supports all of these species.) We found out how to live, to work, and to learn together as a small community. Not everything went smoothly (changes in the weather, forgotten equipment, strained relationships from spending too much time together in the van), and we learned to adapt. There are many shared stories and memories to bond us to the places we visited and to one another.

## The Community Environment

We believe that people want to feel safe, to be open and honest, and to feel trusted. In our programs we try to create an atmosphere of encouragement and support for one another in which making mistakes is okay. Our goal is to create a place where each person is valued and trusted, and that requires learning to balance one's self-interest with the interests of others. We spend a lot of time on communication issues, on the rights of others to express their opinions, on taking the time to understand other perspectives, and on how to listen respectfully. There are many ways educators can foster caring relationships and champion social justice (Koegel, 1996). Students need to be proactive, to take stands, to make a case for what they believe. They also need to learn how to effectively present their messages. Participants learn to interact with one another and hopefully to transfer this to the larger community. They contribute to the life of our community and then to the community in which they live.

Our most recent high school was in Newport, Virginia in the old Newport School. This facility is owned and managed by the Newport Community Action Committee, a nonprofit coalition of service groups who purchased the building from the county to maintain a hub for community activities. There are frequent community events, community college courses, and resident artists who have studios on the second floor. The ten-acre property includes a creek and a wooded area. This location allowed students to take full advantage of the natural and historical settings in the Newport area, the resources of the metropolitan center of Roanoke, the Jefferson National Forest, and the educational opportunities of Virginia Tech and Radford University. Why was this setting important? We had rich resources to share and a great location of which to avail ourselves.

Since we strongly believe that effective learning occurs in many different settings, students in our programs complete internships and apprenticeships. Many programs talk about community participation, and they consider primarily what the community can do for the school and for the students. We have had community members call and offer their time and talents in a variety of areas, many on a volunteer basis. The students have

For more than 20 years, Tina Dawson taught in and directed various PK-12 programs, mostly independent alternative community schools. She has been involved in numerous collaborations between the public and private sectors. Tina is an advisory board member for the National Coalition of Alternative Community Schools. Her interests include lifelong learning, community, experiential education, change, and curriculum integration. She believes that all education is environmental education. Tina is now a Core Faculty member in the Center for Programs in Education at Antioch University Seattle.

As a professional and as an individual, Mike Dawson has more than twenty years of involvement in the protection of special places and their natural and cultural resources. Through his work with the Appalachian Trail Conference and as a volunteer and a board member for various school programs, he has found elements exist within communities and geographic regions that are critical to the functioning of ecosystems, the protection of collective cultural heritage, and the quality of life for any region's populace. He works to create collaborations and to tap motivations that enhance those elements. He believes that experience in and emotional connection with nature is critical to all of us. Mike is now the Director of Trail Management and Protection for the Pacific Northwest Trail Association. The PNT runs from the Pacific Coast of the Olympic Peninsula to Glacier National Park in Montana.

learned from newspaper reporters and publishers, pediatricians, veterinarians, natural resource managers, and many others. On our trips we use resource people in the various locations we visit.

We focus also on what the school and the students can do for the community. As a society we cannot expect students to develop a positive disposition toward community service if they do not have opportunities to serve. Whether we are talking about service to the immediate classroom or to the school community, the local community, or a more extended human community, it is essential that students have responsibility, support, guidance, and the expectation that they will be of service. The goal is to foster and to reinforce an understanding that service is part of active participation in a democratic society.

Students need to be able to make sense of what they are learning and to connect experiences in ways that lead to conceptual understanding.

The students' experiences vary greatly. Sometimes students begin their service simply by taking care of the trash pick up in the neighborhood or on a particular stretch of highway. Often, though, the service is more expansive. Middle school and high school students, for example, have built hiking trails and worked on shelters. They helped create a playground for a Habitat for Humanity project. Students worked in soup kitchens, homeless shelters, childcare centers, homes for adults, and radio and TV stations. In one of our most amazing experiences, we worked with 20 middle school students from Community School to organize a five-day NCACS (National Coalition for Alternative Community Schools) conference for more than 300 adults and children. The students coordinated the registration and the scheduling of workshops and trips and were the staff for the conference. They learned to use databases and to manage crises. They worked with the local forest service district on a service project that occurred as part of the conference experience.

As part of the school programs, the students share their experiences in conversations, in writing, and in oral presentations with each other, with their families, with their mentors, and with the mentors of other students. These opportunities let the students explore career options, too, and the students become more aware of the myriad types of people and work that exist outside their personal realm. They realize what resources are available, and they become more aware of themselves as resources for others.

## *Interweaving the Contexts*

To create a learning community we include students and their families, staff members and their families, and community others, both as individuals and as representatives of groups, businesses, and agencies. Actively involving these parties in identifying issues and developing solutions is critical for the students' growth and for a sense of education as a common good. We are emphasizing that life and education are not separate and that all life on the planet is connected in profound and subtle ways.

The kinds of experiences described in this article take place outside the classroom and are supported by what takes place in the classroom; the themes underlying the students' work are integrated into their reading, writing, and other subject area experiences. Problems and successes are processed, and further avenues are explored. Holistic education recognizes that humans seek meaning, not just facts and skills (Gang, Lynn, & Maver, 1992). Students apply their knowledge throughout their lives as engaged citizens of their community, their state, the nation, and the planet. They learn how to address these questions: "What do you want to see happen? What are you willing to do to make it happen?" May we all be so empowered.

"Awareness is becoming acquainted with environment, no matter where one happens to be.
[We do] not suddenly become aware or infused with wonder; it is something we are born with. "
—Sigurd Olson

**References**


Gang, P. S., Lynn, N.M., & Maver, D.J. (1992). *Conscious education: The bridge to freedom.* Atlanta: Dagaz Press.

Goodman, J. (1992). *Elementary schooling for critical democracy.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Koegel, R. (1996). Oppression and Education: The need for edgework. *Holistic Education Review 9* (4), 5-12.

Olson, S. (1976). *Reflections from the north country*. New York: Knopf.

Whitman, W. (1992). *Leaves of grass.* New York: Collectors Reprints.



*Authors' Note:* All of the programs mentioned in this article were/are members of The National Coalition for Alternative Community Schools (NCACS), a network that arose from an Education for Change Conference held in 1976. As part of its commitment to strengthening and supporting alternative educational approaches, NCACS functions primarily as a network for alternative schools/programs and as an advocate for such schools and their families. Members of the Coalition are independent and public schools, homeschoolers, and similar groups. We want to acknowledge all of the support we have received over the years from NCACS. Indeed, many of our early regional and cross-country trips with students were connected to NCACS events.

# Learning More About Approaches to Bilingual and Multicultural Education

## A Resource List Compiled by Robin Martin

To learn more about various bilingual, multi-lingual, and multicultural approaches to education and parenting, below is an assortment of resources that we have compiled. Except for the books, most of the resources listed are accessible on the Internet. If you do not have easy access to the Internet from home, we encourage you to try your local library.

**Recommended Books and a Newsletter**

Carlson, in his article on pages 23-26 of this issue, especially recommends these three books about bilingualism in education and provides a few comments on each:

*Encyclopedia of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education* by Colin Baker and Sylvia Prys Jones. Very good and wide-ranging, but also very expensive. (Multilingual Matters, Clevedon, UK, 1998)

*The Bilingual Family: A Handbook for Parents* by Edith Harding and Philip Riley. Slightly academic, but it covers the main points on bilingualism rather well. (Cambridge University Press, 1986)

*Bilingual Education: History, Politics, Theory and Practice* (4th ed) by James Crawford. Good, but quite academic. (Bilingual Educational Services, Inc, Los Angeles, 1999)

In addition, Carlson also recommends *Bilingual Family Newsletter*. This quarterly publication edited by Marjukka Grover is designed to help all those families like David Carlson's, who, for various reasons, are in a situation where they can give their children (and themselves) the advantages of being bi- or multi-lingual. The newsletter publishes short informative articles on current thoughts on language learning, bilingualism, biculturalism, mother tongue, schools, etc. It also publishes descriptions of how particular families have managed in their particular situations, problems encountered, and how these were overcome. Readership includes mixed marriage families; expatriate families in embassies, contract work, schools, etc; immigrant families; students of language learning; researchers in field of bilingualism. To subscribe or request a free sample issue, see the "Journals Info" section of Multilingual Matters web site, www.multilingual-matters.com/. Postal address: Multilingual Matters, Frankfurt Lodge, Clevedon Hall, Victoria Road, Clevedon, England. BS21 7HH. Tel: + 44-(0)1275-876519; Fax:+44-(0)1275-871673, E-mail: marjukka@multilingual-matters.com.

On a related topic, a recommended book that provides a holistic perspective to multicultural education is *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education*, by Sonia Nieto (1992, Addison Wesley Longman). *Affirming Diversity* is a comprehensive presentation of the multicultural paradigm. Sonia Nieto holds that social and political realities, school curricula and practices, and the multiple cultures of students and their communities "must be understood in tandem." In her view, multicultural education entails a thorough pedagogical and structural reformation of schooling, including a serious rethinking of tracking and testing, textbooks and narrow curricula, and lack of student participation in their own learning. For a full review of this book, you can do a search for it in the Paths of Learning Resource Center, www.PathsOfLearning.net.

In addition, the 1991 book *New Directions in Education: Selections from Holistic Education Review* contains an essay entitled "Bilingual Learners: How Our Assumptions Limit Their World," by Yvonne S. Freeman and David Freeman. The book is available from the Holistic Education Press, http://www.great-ideas.org/newdirs.htm (This essay is also available in the *Holistic Education Review*, Volume 2, Number 4, Winter 1989.)

**Related Web Sites and Organizations**

**Center for Multilingual Multicultural Research** - provides a research base about multilingual education, English-as-a second language, foreign language instruction, multicultural education, and related areas; and the opportunity to come together for research and program collaboration. http://www.usc.edu/dept/education/CMMR

**JALT Bilingualism Special Interest Group (B-SIG)** - useful for general information about bilingualism in Japan. http://www.kagawa-jc.ac.jp/~steve_mc/jaltbsig/

**Languages and Linguistics: ERIC Clearinghouse** - provides summaries of academic research in thisfield.http://www.cal.org/ericcll/

**Multicultural Matters and Channel View Publication** - offers many resources and journals in this field. For parents new to bilingual education, click on "Subject Browse" for topical options including books especially for parents. Site includes subscription options for journals as well. http://www.multilingual-matters.com/

**National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education** - (sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education) - Among other things, this Clearinghouse provides a lengthy list of schools in the United States and Canada with web sites that share information, ideas, and resources related to the education of culturally and linguistically diverse students. See: "Schools on the Web: Sites of Interest," http://www.ncbe.gwu.edu/classroom/bilschool.htm.

**TESOL Online (Teacher of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc.)** - according to Peter Gray, Coordinator of the JALT Bilingualism SIG, the TESOL Bilingual Interest Section is "the best place to find information about the issues confronting bilingual education in the U.S.A." http://www.tesol.org/
Mailing address: 700 South Washington Street, Suite 200, Alexandria, Virginia 22314, USA, Tel. 703-836-0774.

For more action ideas to supplement these resource suggestions, we invite you to visit our Online Action Guides, at http://www.great-ideas.org/guides.htm, where you can more easily link to the referenced books and web sites as well.
Or, for a printed version of this expanded Online Action Guide about bilingualism, just call 1-800-639-4122.

# Additional Resources about Imagination and Creativity for Learning and Teaching

## A Resource List Compiled by Robin Martin

As referenced in Lewis's article on pages 35 to 39 of this issue, the Touchstone Center for Children creates an interdisciplinary arts program in classrooms designed to explore thematically the role of imagination and poetry for all learning. Some additional works by Lewis that might also interest readers include:

*Living by Wonder: The Imaginative Life of Childhood*, by Richard Lewis (1998, Parabola Books/Touchstone Center Publications). Lewis explores various facets of children's art, play, stories, poetry, and language making. Each of the 20 essays in this book attests to the importance of nurturing and supporting the imagination as a necessary part of all learning.

*When Thought Is Young: Reflections on Teaching and the Poetry of the Child*, by Richard Lewis (1992, New Rivers Press, also available from Touchstone Center Publications). Touching on the beginnings of language, play, and the inward awareness of children, this book is a way of understanding childhood from the vantage point of the phenomena of childhood itself.

*The Touchstone Study: Bringing Arts into the School* by Lillian Goldberg (1984, Touchstone Center Publications). This study is an examination of the interdisciplinary and thematic process that the Touchstone Center brought to a five year residency program at one New York City elementary school.

*Each Sky Has Its Words* by Richard Lewis, Illustrated by Gigi Alvara (1999, Touchstone Center Publications). This 36-page picture book is an outcomeof the Center's project Speakings: The Many Voices of Language. Illustrated with luminous black and white watercolor, this poem is an evocation of the presence of language in the natural world.

*The Journey Within*, a film by Eleanor Hamerow and Naomi Trubowitz (produced by Renesance Film, 1990; also available from Touchstone Center Publications). This short 25-minute film interweaves classroom sequences of Lewis working with sixth graders, the children's poems, and Lewis' reflections on teaching and the imaginative experience.

For additional information about Touchstone's Arts and Education Projects, Workshops and Seminars, Publications Program, Archival Project, or Upcoming Activities, visit their website: http://www.touchstonecenter.net/home.html

In addition, Down to Earth Books also has some good articles by and about Richard Lewis from *SKOLE* (the predecessor of Paths of Learning). These include:

Lewis, Richard. "Emily's Tree: Imagination and the Soul of Learning" (Article from: *SKOLE: the Journal of Alternative Education*, Volume 14, Number 2, pages 70-73, Spring 1997.)

Mercogliano, Chris. Leue, Mary. "Part One of an Interview with with Richard Lewis" (Article from: *SKOLE: the Journal of Alternative Education*, Volume 14, Number 1, pages 1-15, Winter 1997.)

Mercogliano, Chris. "Interview with Richard Lewis, Part Two" (Article from: *SKOLE: the Journal of Alternative Education*,Volume 14, Number 2, pages 62-69, Spring 1997.) Parabola article, "The Pulse of Learning" (Article from *SKOLE*, Volume 6, No. 1, Winter 1990, pp. 132-139, or in *Challenging the Giant* volume I, 2nd ed., pp. 219-223. Reproduced with permission from Richard Lewis.

To obtain any of these articles from *SKOLE*, contact: Down-to-Earth Books, c/o Mary Leue, P.O. Box 488, Ashfield, MA 01330, USA, phone (413) 628-0227, e-mail maryskole@aol.com. Or visit Mary's web site: http://www.spinninglobe.net/

### Other Books Suggested by Richard Lewis

In the field of study and inquiry around childhood imagination, many of the best books are decades old, but worth the extra hunt that it takes to track them down through interlibrary loans at your local library. Or, to locate the out-of-print books on the Internet, we recommend www.abe.com or www.amazon.com.

*Imagination: Inquiry into Sources and Conditions that Stimulate Creativity* by Harold Rugg (New York: Harper & Row, 1963). Although this book is long out of print, you can still find it at some libraries.

*Primary Understanding: Education in Early Childhood* by Kieran Egan (New York: Routledge, 1988). Book is part of a series on critical social thought. Also out of print, but available from some libraries, or on inter-library loan.

*Ecology of Imagination in Childhood* by Edith Cobb, with an introduction by Margaret Mead (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977, reprinted in 1993).

*Education Through Art* by Herbert Read, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1958, 3rd revised edition).

*Rosegarden and Labyrinth: A Study in Art Education* by Seonaid Robertson (1982, Spring Publications).

*What Is Art For?* by Ellen Dissanayake (Reprint edition 1990, University of Washington Press).

*The Arts and Human Development: A Psychological Study of the Artistic Process* by Howard Gardner (1973, reprint edition 1994, Basic Books).

In addition, the Paths of Learning Resource Center describes several other books and online articles with alternative and holistic approaches to arts education and nurturing the imagination. You can explore these by visiting www.pathsoflearning.net/index2.cfm, and try a keyword search for "imagination."

For more resource ideas to supplement these reflections, we invite you to visit our Online Action Guides, at http://www.great-ideas.org/guides.htm, where you can more easily link to the referenced books and web sites as well. Or, for a printed version of this Online Action Guide about imagination, just call 1-800-639-4122.

# 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.

**American Homeschool Association**
**Post Office Box 3142**
**Palmer, Alaska 99645-3142**
**http://www.americanhomeschoolassociation.org**
**AHA@americanhomeschoolassociation.org**

AHA is a service organization created in 1995 to network homeschoolers on a national level and to provide news and information about homeschooling relevant to any concerned parent, media writer, academic researcher, education professional, or homeschooler. Current AHA services include a free online discussion list ( http://groups.yahoo.com/group/AHA-Discussion) providing news, information, networking, and resources; a special discussion list for homeschoolers interested in working with public libraries; a free email newsletter (http://groups.yahoo.com/group/AHA-Newsletter); and a website providing categorized links to the most helpful and informative pages of homeschooling information on the Internet. These include interviews with leading authors and advocates of homeschooling, a "history of homeschooling" series, and numerous resource pages. There are no membership fees, and no fees to use any of these services.

**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.

**ASCD Systems Thinking/Chaos Theory Network**
*(a special interest group of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development)*
**www.haven.net/patterns/**
**Contact: Barbara Vogl — bvogl@cruzio.com**

The knowledge gained through the "New Sciences" (General Systems Theory, Cybernetics, Evolutionary Biology, Quantum Mechanics, Field Theory, Complexity and the Science of Dynamical Systems/Chaos Theory) has shifted our world view from an object-oriented, machine-like universe to a living web-like universe. The purpose of PATTERNS, the network publication, is to bring 'new scientists' and educators together to clarify the everyday relevance of these new sciences and to link them to a deeply felt motivating vision that brings head, heart and soul together into a new pattern of wholeness. An understanding of this fundamental shift in orientation is particularly important for educators who are the designers of learning environments influencing future generations.

**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 488**
**Ashfield, MA 01330**
**(413)628-0227**
**maryskole@aol.com**
**http://www.spinninglobe.net**

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 *Paths 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.

**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**

*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.ties-edu.org**

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**
**http://www.encompass-nlr.org**

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**
**http://www.haven.net/edge/matrix.htm**

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 them in our 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.

Erratum Notice

Due to an unfortunate editing error, the last paragraph (*Paths* 10, page 60) of Leslie Shores's review of *Homeschooling: The Teen Years* was incorrectly printed. The text should have read: "Finally, there is one more aspect of the book I sorely missed—a sense of humor. It is universally known that all human beings dealing with teenagers cannot survive without one." *Paths* regrets and apologizes for the error.

**Institute for Democracy in Education**
**College of Education, McCracken Hall**
**Ohio University**
**Athens, OH 45701-2979**
**(740) 593-4531**
**www.ohiou.edu/ide**

Promotes educational practices that help students develop democratic attitudes and values by directly experiencing the ideals of equality, liberty, and community. IDE is a partnership of teachers, administrators, parents, and students working for positive school change. IDE publishes the journal *Democracy & Education*, which provides first hand accounts of democratic practices and critiques of authoritarian trends such as standardized testing. IDE also sponsors conferences and workshops and publishes curricular materials.

**John Dewey Project on Progressive Education**
**411 Waterman Building**
**University of Vermont**
**Burlington, VT 05405**
**(802) 656-1355**
**www.uvm.edu/~dewey/**

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.

**Jola Publications**
**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.

**Living Routes - Ecovillage Education Consortium**
**72 Baker Rd. Shutesbury, MA 01072**
**(413) 259-0025**
**(888) 515-7333 (toll free)**
**http://www.LivingRoutes.org**
**info@LivingRoutes.org**

Living Routes is a growing consortium of sustainable communities (known as "ecovillages") and universities working together to offer accredited experiential programs that empower participants to help build a sustainable future. Semester programs are currently offered at the Findhorn Foundation in northern Scotland and Auroville in southern India. A North American Summer Institute and a January term program at Crystal Waters, a permaculture community in Australia, are also available.

**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**
**(888) 771-9171**
**www.ncacs.org**

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.

**National Home Education Network**
**info@nhen.org**
**http://www.nhen.org**

Encourages and facilitates the vital grassroots work of state and local homeschooling groups and individuals by providing information, fostering networking, and promoting public relations on a national level.

**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.

**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.

**Partnership Education Consultants**
**Center for Partnership Studies**
**P. O. Box 30538**
**Tucson, AZ 85751**
**(502) 547-0176**
**www.partnershipway.org**

A network of professional development/school reform consultants who help schools implement the principles of Partnership Education presented in Riane Eisler's book *Tomorrow's Children*. Partnership Education is a comprehensive approach to the content(curriculum), structure, and process of teaching, emphasizing values of caring., community, inclusiveness, and cooperation. Advanced studies in Partnership Education are being offered through Prescott College and California State University at Monterey Bay.

**Pathfinder Center**
**P.O. Box 804, Amherst, MA 01004**
**256 North Pleasant Street, Amherst, MA 01002**
**(413) 253-9412**
**plc@valinet.com**
**http://www.pathfindercenter.org**

Supports teenaged unschoolers and their families. Offers strategic consultations for families considering teen unschooling or interested in improving their unschooling. Publisher of *Liberated Learners*, in which two teen homeschoolers tell their story each issue. Locally PC provides a wide range of activities for unschoolers to learn and play.

**Prescott College, Admissions Office**
**220 Grove Ave.**
**Prescott, AZ 86301**
**(800) 628-63642**
**admissions@prescott.edu**
**www.prescott.edu**

A private liberal arts institution offering BA and MA degrees. Emphasis is on self-directed, interdisciplinary, and experiential education in the fields of Adventure Education, Environmental Studies, Education, Humanities, Intergrative Studies, and Arts and Letters. Offers undergraduate program based in Prescott as well as external undergraduate and graduate programs.

**The Self-Education Foundation**
**POB 30790**
**Philadelphia, PA 19104**
**(215) 235-4379)**
**www.selfeducation.org**

The Self-Education Foundation funds communities initiating their own education. It gives small grants/awards to groups working across cultures and disciplines to build more resources for self-education, including independent media, inspired homeschooling/unschooling groups, self-educating prisoners, student-led school reform, and others. Publishes pamphlets and a newsletter to facilitate networking. For more information contact info@selfeducation.org .

***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.

**Sudbury Valley School Press**
**2 Winch Street**
**Framingham, MA 01701**
**(508) 877-3030**

Sudbury Valley School has educated young people in a free, democratic environment for over thirty years, and educators associated with the school have written numerous essays and books on the philosophy and concrete results of the school's distinctive approach. SVS Press distributes these thought-provoking writings, along with audio and video tapes, periodicals, and planning kits for starting new democratic schools.



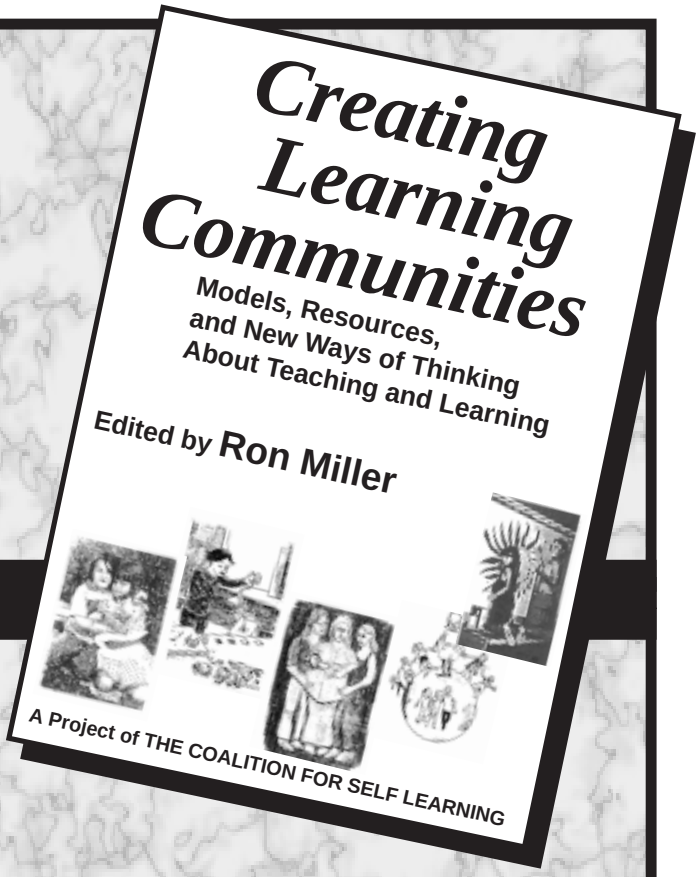
**Youth on Board**
**58 Day Street, P.O. Box 440322**
**Somerville, MA 02144**
**(617) 623-9900 x1242**
**http://www.youthonboard.org**
**youthonboard@aol.com**

Youth on Board is a nonprofit organization that helps young people and adults think differently about each other so that they can work together to change their communities. They offer highly interactive training programs for young people and adults and a wide array of publications on youth involvement issues, including the book *14 Points: Successfully Involving Youth in Decision Making*.

**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.

# The *future* of **education** is here!




*Discover how parents, teachers, and young people are organizing collaborative life-long learning centers to nourish personal growth and participatory democracy.*

Thirty leading innovators in alternative education, cooperative homeschooling, and sustainable community development (including Linda Dobson, Pat Farenga, Wayne Jennings, Bill Ellis, Wendy Priesnitz, Katharine Houk, Kathia & Alexander Laszlo, and more!) demonstrate how learning communities could replace conventional schools as the primary educational model of the twenty-first century.

***"This is a wonderful, extremely useful, book illustrating how creative partnership-oriented learning communities are springing up all over the world.... This important self-organizing educational movement can help lay the foundations for a more equitable, peaceful, truly democratic way of life."***
Riane Eisler, *Author of The Chalice and the Blade,* Sacred Pleasure, *Tomorrow's Children*, and *The Partnership Way*

---

***"In* Creating Learning Communities, *people of uncommon good sense answer the right questions which school politicians always forget to ask. An eye-opening book, worth reading out loud to your friends."***
John Taylor Gatto, Author of *Dumbing Us Down* and *The Underground History of American Education*

**Creating Learning Communities $21.95**

**The Foundation for Educational Renewal**
P.O. Box 328, Brandon, Vermont 05733
(800) 639-4122 www.PathsOfLearning.net

The Foundation also sponsors *Paths of Learning* magazine and the online Paths of Learning Resource Center.

**PathsofLearning**
P.O. BOX 328
BRANDON, VT 05733-0328
http://www.great-ideas.org/paths.htm



*"Children's initial empathy for the natural world is not simply a passing phase; it is a deeply rooted concern for the establishment of their place within the phenomenon of their being alive."*

— From "The Touchstone Center," page 39