

**It's relatively easy
to take a person
out of school -
It's much more
difficult to take
the school out of
the person!**

**EDUCATION OTHERWISE
AUGUST 1998
NEWSLETTER 123**



DISCLAIMER

The opinions in this publication are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the Editor, nor of Education Otherwise as a whole. The newsletter's primary purpose is to provide support and communication between members.

All contributions (including adverts) have been accepted in good faith and have not been in any way endorsed by Education Otherwise, which cannot be held responsible for the consequences of responding to any of them.

COPYRIGHT

Any item published in this newsletter may be reprinted in other home-education magazines in the UK or abroad or on the Internet. If you do not want your contribution reproduced without your consent, please state clearly that you wish to retain the copyright.

EDITING THE NEWSLETTER

The newsletter is edited by volunteers. If you would like to know more, please contact the Newsletter Co-ordinator.

If your newsletter does not arrive, please check with Janet Wilkinson, who maintains the database.



Archive p.17

THE NEXT ISSUE

The Editor of the Next issue is:

Wedri Hayward

18 Bedford Road, Colchester,
Essex CO4 5LS Tel: 01206
752817

Children's pages Editors:

Jenny and Ellie Cowell

18 Colne Crescent, Warehouse
Hill, Marsden, Huddersfield, W.
Yorks HD7 6AD

The dead line for contributions is:

September 1st 1998

Please include your name, address and telephone number and mark material **'FOR PUBLICATION'**. Contributions are more likely to be included if they are concise and it would be helpful if they were typed. Some editors may be able to accept material on disk.

There will be special sections on the following subjects:

A More Structured Approach

Mike Allen,

71 Belgrave Road, Loughor, Swansea
SA4 6RF (**October 1998 - deadline 1st
September**)

Special Needs (December 1998)

Performance (February 1999)

Please share your experiences and expertise with other members and send your contributions as soon as possible to the relevant address

**Education Otherwise Association Ltd.,
Registered Charity No. 1055120**

LIBERTY, FREEDOM AND ALL THAT JAZZ

BELINDA (woman, wife, mother) - Has a BA Hons in the History of Jazz Voice and Jazz Vocal performance. She wears orange wedge-heeled shoes. She sings and teaches Jazz Vocals. She makes ceramic pots. She tries to be lovely to her kids. **She's round and loud and smiles a lot.**

ALAN (man, husband, father) - Has a BSc Hons in Maths and Electronics. He wears white and orange Reebok trainers. He is a computer consultant/analyst/programmer. He works from home. He plays badminton. He reads to Gus and Barnaby when they want. **He's slim and fit and plays his drums a lot.**

GUS (boy, son, brother) - He wears fluorescent orange Adidas trainers. He plays basketball, plays with LEGO/Technic, loves movies, goes to a professional printmaking studio once a week, creates and writes a cartoon strip called 'Dopey Dad' for the magazine 'To Be Free: a Radical Alternative for Children and Parents', enters lots and lots of competitions (and wins!), collects Star Wars figures, Beanie Babies (bean-filled cuddly animals) and 'Magic - the gathering' ('Magic' is a trading card-game in which you and your opponent are rival wizards duelling for control of a magical plain), hangs out, reads books (because we home-educate we are allowed 75 books a month from 2 local libraries) and comics into the early hours. He works on designing and creating and filming an animation film (with funding from the National Lottery). He sits around contemplating life and counts how many red cars he sees when we go on long journeys. **He's just himself a lot.**

BARNABY (boy, son, brother) - He wears brown suede boot-type shoes or Woolworth's black slip-on gym shoes. He rides his bike, chats to everyone, makes dens and cakes for his cuddly animals,

plays with his friends, paints himself with face-paints, does headstands and cartwheels constantly, goes to a printmaking studio once a week, collects Beanie Babies and 'Magic' cards, works on making Plasticine characters and the script for his animated film, plays badminton (is professionally coached) and listens and dances to obscure jazz and reggae music turned-up full blast! **He's bouncy!**

I have really enjoyed being the Editor of this issue. I've made it mine! My beliefs - beliefs that I and my family hold dear to our hearts. The whole process of actually collecting all these articles, quotes and thoughts and placing them in this newsletter has been very liberating. It made me re-affirm my commitment towards home-educating, the rights of the young people in my family and all that jazz!



When I volunteered to be the editor of this Autonomous Home-Education newsletter I had a certain understanding of what autonomous learning meant. The definition of the word autonomy taken from Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary is - *the power or right of self-government, the doctrine that the human will carry its guiding principle within itself.*

This seemed clear to me.

This issue is dedicated to all those families that support their young people in finding out, discovering, absorbing, acquiring and choosing their own guiding principle with out coercion or manipulation. I asked for articles from home-educators who 'did it' the non-curriculum way - I asked friends, fellow home-educators, educationalists and family to write. I have included in this issue the articles that most closely stick to 'Chambers' and my definition of autonomy. Over the years my understanding of what autonomous education means has

changed. I have always believed that you cannot be a libertarian parent and not be an autonomous home-educator - that goes without saying. But can you be an autonomous home-educator without being a libertarian parent? No, I don't think that you can. How can we give children freedom in their education when education is so much, much, much, more than just the '3Rs'? Education is everything. Learning and living go hand in hand. How can they be separate? How can eating/cleaning your teeth/poverty/dates of Queens/reciting poetry/listening to music/singing in the bath/buying cuddly animals/debating the theories of Evolution....not be education. How? All of everything is education. So my understanding of autonomous education is captured in one phrase - **'Autonomous Education is Autonomous Life'**. Choices. It's about choices. Making your own choices. Choosing what and when and how and with whom and how much and with what and what for and if at all. All that is life.

Thank-you to everyone that has contributed to this newsletter. Thank-you for your words and your vision. It's wonderful to know that I'm not alone and that I'm not Crazy!

"The difficult I'll do right now, the impossible will take a little while, Crazy they call me.....Crazy...." - Jazz Standard

Read and enjoy! Best wishes

Belinda Harris Reid, The Old House, Station Road, Buckfastleigh, Devon TQ11 0BU - Tel/Fax 01364 643343 email: bline@compuserve.com

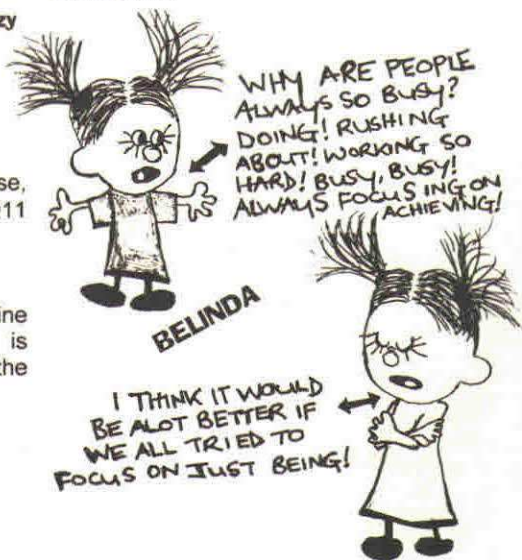
Sadly most of us use the masculine pronoun 'he', I realise that this is fundamentally sexist, but in respect of the author's work I have not changed this.

The Harris Reid family have been members of EO for over 8 years and have been actively involved with North London EO, Hertfordshire EO, The Otherwise Club in London and the South Devon Education Group. I am also a founder member of **The Libertarian Family Network** - The LFN's focus is clearly defined in our concepts, these form the foundations for the libertarian parenting and family group in South Devon. I have included our concepts in this issue. I hope you find them stimulating!

To all those who do not see their 'special words' on Autonomous home-education in this issue - many apologies.



"Home education, as I see it, is not about producing prodigies or nurturing precocious talents. There is no hot-house development of geniuses going on in any of the households I know. Looking at all the home-educated children we know, I see they are a mixed bunch generally, perhaps happier than average, certainly more independent, perhaps more interesting and caring, but they are as ordinary children should be." - Jean Bendell - 'School's Out'.



SCHOOLHOUSE CONFERENCE

John McAllion, Labour MP for Dundee East, in whose constituency **Schoolhouse Home Education Association** is based, recently opened the "Home Education in Scotland: Progress in Partnership" conference in Dundee which was supported by a grant from the National Lottery Charities Board. The event proved very successful, with excellent press, radio and TV coverage, and home educators may be reassured by some of Mr McAllion's remarks which have already been widely quoted:

"I think it is very fitting that Dundee should host a conference of this kind as we are trying to forge a new identity as a city of learning.....There has been tension in the past when education authorities have been unwilling to engage in debate with home educators.....Education authorities are obliged to respect parents' wishes and may not withhold consent from parents who choose to educate their children in this way....It is very important that events such as this attract open-minded people who are keen to learn and work together constructively.....The Government is committed to developing a more inclusive society, but recognises there is no single universal answer to ensuring how this can be achieved.....Diversity should be celebrated rather than feared."

Mr McAllion has listened objectively to the views of home educators in Scotland and has now spoken openly and with conviction about issues which concern us. His Dundee constituents, of all political persuasions, can vouch for the fact that he is a man of action as well as words, and he would no doubt be encouraged to receive any letters of support from home educators who wish to write to him at the House of Commons.

Schoolhouse Home Education Association, 93 Blacklock Crescent, Dundee DD4 8EE Tel: 01382 864930/646964

(EO was represented by **Gwen Baldock**.)



The American Way

We are a home educating family living about 10 miles from Newcastle-Upon-Tyne. We have 2 children - Brady (5 years) and Bethany (3 1/2 months).

I am American and my husband is British. I would love to hear from other Americans who are home educating in the UK - and possibly get together for American holidays such as 4th of July and Thanksgiving, as well as giving support and friendship at other times. We would also welcome hearing from any home educating families in Northumberland or Tyne and Wear. We would be interested in organising regular get-together as it can feel quite isolated at times. Anyone else, please feel free to contact us as well!

The Taylor Family, 13 Brierley Close, Blyth, Northumberland NE24 5AX - 01670 354130 email: care@careo.demon.co.uk



150 or so went mad in Dorset

Could a better time have been had by the 45 families who went to the Seaside Camp at Dorset on the weekend of the 15th May? If so then it is difficult to see how. The weather was fantastic and so were the people, the site was magic and so was the beach.

Next year's has already been provisionally booked with the dates being Thurs 13th to Tues 18th May. Full details to appear in the near future with lots of things planned. If you have any suggestions for next year please get in touch. Thanks to all who came, you made it what it was.

Andy Blewett, Seaside Camp, '99 PO Box 5 Belvedere DA17 5ZU 0181-306 0168 - email: aand@mcmail.com



MEMORIES, IMAGES AND BITTEN NAILS

I asked my sister Sammy Vidal-Hall to write a piece on autonomous life-learning for this issue. I knew she would write with clarity and passion and sensitivity. And so I include her piece.

I was lying in bed in the dark. Very ill. My heart has not been 'pumping' as it should. Questions about my life have presented themselves to me. But I have found answers in many aspects of my life. I have become stronger, clearer in my identity and self-worth, in being a large (fat, I reclaim that word - I am a WOW! - Woman Of Width) woman and a mother. I have become more radical, more outspoken, more empowered. Illness is very healing.

I was lying in bed in the dark and Sammy read me her piece - **AUTONOMOUS; BEING FREE TO DO NOTHING**. I lay and listened in silence. She came to the end of her piece. Tears flowed down my cheeks. Yes! Her words are true. I remember. I want to tell you my story.

I remember the time, I was 4 years old, my Nursery School in Malawi, East Africa, clinging to my father's tie - "I don't want to go to school!". But I had to go. I had no choice. I started to bite my nails then - I still do. Images, as Sammy reads her words. My small self, rekindling memories of school time.

Hillview Primary School, Malawi. I had Sellotape put across my mouth for giggling. "You can't laugh Belinda, your supposed to be quiet and obedient and listen and learn". Quiet. I stood in the corner. What did I learn? Humiliation, fear, anger and hate. Bitten nails. My happiness, my laughter stolen away. Memories.

Hampstead Prep School. Blazer and Boater. Curtsey to my Headmistress. I

remember rounders on Hampstead Heath and fish-finger for lunch on Friday.

Boarding School. Crying into my pillow - hating it. But no words came to tell. Maybe no-one would listen. Chewing my nails. Playing lacrosse in the snow. Freezing red bare legs. 3 years of Latin - I remember nothing.

And to Queen's Gate School (Private girls London day-school). Biology essay written in green ink, hours of work, a red line through the whole lot. "Do again Belinda, do not use coloured ink". Okay Biology teacher, but practise what you preach - do not use coloured ink on my words! Words I don't speak, I can't speak, what child can? Project on bees. I made a balsa wood cover with cut-through section. Maybe A+++Huh....dream on.....C. My presentation was too elaborate, not appropriate. SAYS WHO? I lost marks for my individuality. And in the process I lost some of the 'Belinda-ness' in me.

And so, so, many more memories. My education. We all have these and our children do too.

Please don't send your children to school and don't school them at home.

Sammy's words rekindled those memories again. Her piece is long! But take heed of what she says. Listen to her words. Thank-you.

AUTONOMOUS; BEING FREE TO DO NOTHING

I want to share my understanding of autonomous learning.

Autonomous means being free to choose, and autonomous learning, the freedom to choose whatever one wants to learn, in whatever way one wants to learn it, however, wherever, systematically or symbiotically.

But I think the most fundamental aspect of being an autonomous child is having the choice to *do nothing*, to learn nothing, and to be free to exhibit nothing of what one has learnt, or what one hasn't learnt, so that no other person can evaluate your ebb or your flow. In fact I think that autonomous learning is about nobody at all having any vested interest or investment whatsoever in any of your thinking or doing, because what you think, or learn, or don't, or forget, or feel is entirely your own business which affects nobody else except yourself, because it is important, or not, only to you, because it is yours and solely yours. Being interested in someone because you like them, because you care, is different than vested interest.

As adults, our thinking and doing must hold responsibility, we are accountable to others, most especially our children, for our actions. Children do not have this obligation, their child-time is for them to grow themselves, their *self*, without any expectation of accountability. Childhood is the time for children to *be* children, without the demand that they engender adult culpability.

Learning, like thinking thoughts, or liking people, or feeling happy or feeling sad is unequivocally personal. If we choose to share these things with other people then that must be a personal choice. In a way we honour people by sharing these parts of ourselves with them, it is an act of trust and friendship. If these things are taken from us, or instilled in us, against our will, then that is a sort of theft, stealing our choices away from us, our self-determination, our self-regulation, our spontaneity. This thieving is a denial of each person's ability to hold within themselves their own guiding principle, and to deny this is to believe that some people know better what should be learnt, thought, felt, by others than the others do themselves. But not only that, those people, who think they know better for others, sometimes actually *act* on these beliefs and *make* the others do things

which the others then do because they *have* to. They do as they are told to do, to think, to feel, to learn, because they are smaller, weaker, dependent in so many ways, oppressed, financially poor, without the protection of their *own* secure housing, frightened, alone. Children are all these things. And this restriction of their individual freedom, at the deepest core of a person, the imposed orchestration of their thinking, their loving and hating, their knowing, by someone else, bigger and powerful, well, that sounds to me like fascism.

Fascism of the mind.

These are strong words.

There are many rungs on the ladder which reaches towards full blown fascist thinking, all compulsory schooling and imposed teaching is somewhere there, between the bottom and the top, inculcating obedience to authority and warping the capability to think truly independent thought. "*The aim of totalitarian education has never been to instil convictions but to destroy the capacity to form any.*" - Hannah Arent, social philosopher. Being libertarian parents, leaving our children's autonomy alone is about trying not to be on that ladder at all.

Schooling, within school or at home, is obviously the antithesis to an autonomous approach, because its underlying premise is that somebody knows better, is wiser, and must therefore be *obeyed* so that the learner can eventually satisfy somebody else's expectations, if they *try* hard and *work* hard and get to know what they are *told* to know - somebody else's idea of what is important.

The Steiner philosophy is Rudolf Steiner's idea of what is important, outlining when what is to be learnt and how and with what emphasis.

The National Curriculum is the government's idea of what is important,

teaching the lessons of conformity and homogeneity, conveniently moulding people for the workplace and passive citizenship.

Autonomous learning is where each person walks their own path, or stands still - their own stillness, or runs their own run. Learning, or otherwise, comes from *within* each of us and nobody else knows the needs, passions and essence of that *withinness* except the person the *within* belongs to.

'Schooling' or 'educating' implies an act done by somebody to others, it has an ominous taste about it. Better always to support our children to think their own thoughts, speak their own words, imagine their own experiments, ask their own questions, dream their own imaginations, whether they are simple, illogical, wild, unfounded, brilliant, radical - far better they think their own thoughts than they become a vessel for any amount of tried and tested theories and knowledge from books, learned sources, accepted wisdoms, pedagogues. Far better to grow with their own uniquely individual knowledge, thoughts and feelings which allows each child the possibility to adapt and flow in any way they choose, now or in adulthood, than to stem this by 'educating' them against their will so they can *do well* and possibly *get a good job*. How sad to give up our uniqueness so early, so that later we *might* be able to *work*. I *might* be able to *work*, therefore I am, what a miserable *raison d'être*. Descartes would never have got anywhere with that one.

Einstein proposed that *imagination is more important than knowledge*, he imagined ideas which nobody else had thought before, he thought beyond the knowledge available, that was the beauty of Einstein. Knowledge can be learnt and there's a life time to learn it, imagination is already there and grows with each imagining - it cannot be learnt, only eroded.

What we have been taught to forget is that learning is simple. It is only difficult to learn something you don't want to learn, when you are force-taught. When I was at school, I didn't understand poetry except for one war poem by Wilfred Owen, later I started to find poetry I liked and understood, feminist poems, radical poems, the Beat poets echoing the sixties, something had changed, the *wanting* to discover poetry had happened, it became pleasurable. We can learn anything we want *if* we want to. If we don't want to, we shouldn't bother.

"...The truth is that reading, writing, and arithmetic only take about one hundred hours to transmit as long as the audience is eager and willing to learn.....Millions of people teach themselves these things, it really isn't very hard." - John Taylor Gatto (New York State teacher of the year)

We feel justified to put our children in day-prison, or 'teach' them at home, classroom in the kitchen, for about *eleven years*, from the time they are just leaving their babyhood until they are touching adulthood, when it is known to be possible to learn to read and write in one hundred hours - at two hours a day that's fifty days which is not even *two months*. This is unjust to human beings. This is a prison sentence for the innocent. Imposed schooling of any sort, institutional or parental, is a prison sentence where children learn only how to be prisoners.

In years to come, perhaps hundreds of years, we will not believe we ever treated small people this way and called ourselves civilised.

Everything there is to know is not knowable by each person, so if there is a choice, as there must be, is it not best to let the individual choose their own wisdom and also their own areas of *unknowledge*!

Many families have made the huge step from school to home. We now need to be braver, we need to make the even bigger

step from instruction to autonomy, we need to leave the school mentality behind us, the philosophy of guidance, of compulsory compliance, inculcating sheep-thought, and trust that children will think what they will and learn what they choose and be whoever they want to be. Because children are people.

We must never abandon them, never leave them lonely, without neglecting them, let's leave the children alone.



Children and women share imposed powerlessness. Their story is interweaved.

Women are dehumanised when we are defined, as we are, by a phallogocentric culture where women have never had a depth of voice in the *creation* and development of that culture, where women have not had any part in creating *that* which imposes on women the telling of who they are, what woman *is*, that culture which then defines all women and reinforces our silence. We have had *false-naming* imposed upon us, the *power of self-naming* taken from us, denied the power to name ourselves, women.

It's like me saying I'm an atheist and I don't believe in god, the very denial, the words, the thought is formulated within the god culture which is a culture my atheism has had no part in creating. My atheism is diminished by having to be expressed with reference to a god I do not believe in. The word atheist itself, the speech I use to express disbelief, exists only within a culture which *assumes* a god. So in denial, I speak the words of god-belief which I don't believe in, male-god-belief which I believe in even less.

This is the same for women living within the culture created by men's *assumption* of supremacy, women trying to find our own speech, voice, self-naming which is our own, to express *ourselves*, our equality, our resistance, in speech which

has only ever existed in a culture and language of inequality, that culture, that *speech*, which *assumes* women's subordination and quelling.

This is the same for children. Children are dehumanised when they are defined by a parental culture where children are prevented from expressing their own unique experience of *being* children and have never had a voice in the *creation* of that adult-supremist culture which developed to parent them.

Children need parents, we became parents *for* our children, but the children's voice is missing.

Children colour in their lives within the parameters of the parenting culture, sometimes in bold colours, but it is always the adults who draw the outlines. Childhood described from this adult perspective will always dehumanise - *dechildise* - children, because their own essence, their voice, their *selves* has never played any part in creating *that* which imposes on children the description of who they are, what being child *is*. They too, have had *false-naming* spoken onto them, the power of *self-naming* denied them. Throughout history, adults have intrinsically woven the rendering of children silent into childhood itself. We must not take silence to mean assent. There is screaming in that silence.

Being a parent does not grant us any *natural* authority over our children's lives, any authority we assume we have taken by force. Admit this. We need not continue to disenfranchise our children from the culture of childhood which we create but *they* actually live. We can begin by giving our children their right to voice. We can start now. We can stop teaching and asking and questioning and expecting and coercing and telling them what they will do and know and be and become, we don't have to colonise our children's lives. Their lives can belong to themselves.

We can start now. Tomorrow is another day too late. Look at them, look at your children, look with your heart, believe me, another day is too late.



Work books always make me wonder, work books and other 'teachy' things, aides to learning.

Home educators often say their children are autonomous and then they say their children like doing work books, that their children choose, of their own volition, to do work books. I find this very strange.

Work books are something parents like. I don't believe that free children *choose* something as uncreative, overtly instructive and covertly judgmental as work books. If children didn't have an underlying need to please their parents, a requirement which *all* parents instil in their children *at some level* from infancy onwards and which I believe is deeply manipulative, coercive and damaging, then those children would not choose work books to learn, to play, or to express themselves in any way. Work books are deadening, a medium to direct and control thought and inquiry, a mechanism for grading human beings against each other, rather than supporting each individual's choices and passions. And there can be passion, in free-learning, as part of living. I experience this passion when I read, devouring the words and thoughts because I have a hunger to discover something deeply important to *me*. The *me* is the essential part in learning. Children who are subjected to work books, teaching aides, imposed tutoring, curricula, timetables, are not doing their learning for themselves, from themselves, the *me* of their self direction is being diverted where somebody else decides it should go. Leaning against your will kills passion. The very act of being *subjected* to these infringements, without the freedom to walk away, which is always denied to children, even home-educated children, is in itself a method of numbing the *me* in each child.

Childhood is the time when we grow the *me* part of ourselves, it can grow freely, or stunted.

Children who have to *perform* to receive attention or approval are being stunted, they have to manipulate their true needs and interests, warp themselves, to secure *caring* from their parents and the act of doing this describes the implicit threat *all* children live with: that affection, care, appreciation will be withheld unless they do as they are *expected* to do, however subtle the expectation, do as they are told, in their learning as in their living.

Obedience destroys the passion to discover.

Obedience destroys imagination.

Has your imagination ever fully grown back?

Can you imagine freedom?

Can you imagine something in place of misogyny?

Can you imagine childhood created by the children themselves?

Some people say that children like work books so they can test themselves. Children only test themselves when somebody has taught them inferiority. Children test themselves because they know, they feel, that somebody else wants them to *be tested* so they, the parent, the teacher - because in conventional 'home education' the parent becomes teacher, the *master*, the *owner*, can assess the commodity they believe belongs to them, their possession, the child's value in ability, the child's worth in accordance with society's criteria of achievement, that currency which buys ever impending failure.

If parents - and I include home-educating parents - think of everything their child does as *education*, if they are thinking about what their child *should* know, finding out where their child's knowing is *lacking* by comparing them to others, by assessing their child's *progress* in relation to the expectations of school

standards or other curricula, then that child is being coercively educated. All conventional schooling, based on that authority and strength a more powerful person assumes over a less powerful person, even within 'home-education', is coercive.

Keeping a 'home-education' diary of children's 'educational' activities is an extension of this, coercion breeding invasion: the things they do, the games they play, the books they choose, the cakes they bake, the questions they ask, documenting all of this is spying, keeping them under surveillance in their own home, reducing their lives to performance for assessment, actually *affecting* their expressions of self by the imprint our expectations make on them, seriously invading their privacy of life.

Leave them alone.

If I ever wonder about whether something I do is respectful to children, I think about how I would feel if it was a way people related to me.

How would you feel if your partner kept notes on you?

To score you.

I don't agree with the invasive practise of babies being weighed and measured at birth or at any other time so that *progress can be assessed*, their actual *growing* documented. I don't agree with medical and dental 'check ups' on well children, administered *on the assumption that something might be wrong*, feeding on fear. I don't agree with any form of knowledge testing because the intention behind it is always to assess what is *not* known against what *should* be known. I don't agree with *documenting* somebody else's life as they live it - as if living life was an experiment. Continual, even partial observation makes conscious the process of living and learning and playing which, like healthy breathing, is of itself

something which just happens from within. We dehumanise our children by expecting them to create product, to become producers, to *become* product, their existence is distorted by being chronicled for evaluation, the flow of their lives subliminally becoming process rather than being.

We not called human *doings*, or human *achievements*, or human *purchasings*.

Human *beings* - I think this is important. *Being* comes before anything else and childhood is a wonderful opportunity to get in as much *being* as possible, free children and *being* just seem to go together, children who can *be* themselves. Demands, even undercurrent expectations, that children *do* and *learn* and *deliver* crowd out a child's world, so much so that the *being* and the growing of self, the freedom of self, gets squeezed out.

To squeeze the *being* out of children might produce obedient pupils, compulsive consumers, compliant workers, faithful followers, believers, soldiers, techno-addicts, submissive citizens, but will it leave us our heart, our empathy, compassion, our individuality, our own thinking, our imagination, our integrity, the feelings which swell us with joy and darken us with grief?

What we take away from children when they are growing themselves, their *being*, leaves adults empty for the rest of their lives.

We are those adults.

Leave the children alone. Leave the children's letters, paintings, stories, jottings, poems, sketches, cardboard things with glue, games, plans, discussions, their thinking, feeling, creativity, laughing, playing, growing, their doing nothing muchness, all this and so much more which parents construe as 'work' and keep in folders to prove

'education', leave this, a person's private property, alone. It is dangerous when everything a child is becomes a commodity, a form of merchandise which they exchange for love. It damages a person's dignity to be put in a folder.

Non-schooling children do not have to present 'work' to the Education Authority, they do not have to be 'inspected' like a specimen. This is the law as I know it. Don't be forced to coerce your children, a fifth columnist within your family, because the Education Authority frightens you. Empower yourself, learn the law as it relates to autonomous non-schooling, read, discover, become brave.

Parents do not have any *natural* authority over their children's lives, what we do have is responsibility, not that assumption of imposition where parents coerce their children for *their own good*, where parents make their children *produce* for the inspector's approval, not this, not this. What parents have is a *responsibility of honour* which becoming a parent confers on us: to uphold and maintain the possibility - the actuality - of our children's freedom *however* our children choose it. To maintain this in the face of a child-cruel society and the authoritarian demands which so many Education Authorities *gently* inflict on us, we must empower ourselves, read, discover, find voice, speak strength to each other, become brave for our children.

In truly autonomous living and learning, there mustn't be even a whiff of any expectation that children will please anybody except themselves.

Children who have the liberty to please only themselves will follow their own interests which grow out of who they are, in a myriad different ways, each an individual. Intrinsic to being an libertarian autonomous non-schooling parent, is finding ways to facilitate our children's self-chosen needs and interests, their wants and choices, so our children can be

happy. This isn't always easy, but this is what parents need to do, to follow behind, when asked. This is truly valuable.



The Libertarian Family Network's founding document, which we call our *concepts*, define our understanding of each child's right to equality, integral to which is having complete autonomy in their non-schooling. You can't be libertarian and not be autonomous. One of these concepts puts forward that "*Play is an integral part of childhood*" and this is further expanded and underscored by the following: "*There is no such thing as 'laziness' in childhood*", and "*Doing nothing' is a valid choice for children*".

I've been asked: so what is *doing nothing*? And I have struggled to explain myself.

What is *doing nothing*? I've been told that surely children are always doing something, learning something, working at something, even when they are sitting quietly. I don't like this, preying around children's private stillness, hoping for *something*.

So what the hell is *doing nothing*?

My understanding of this, and an articulate explanation, has been muffled somewhere deep in my feelings without words to clearly express what I know with my whole heart: that the notion of *doing nothing* is so very important. That *doing nothing* is inextricably linked to autonomous being, learning and living. That the essence of *doing nothing* holds within it something of what childhood is before the child is *made* to grow up - as children are, before their time, by their parents - made to go to school, or to be taught, to *receive* an education to have their privacy taken away, their privacy of thought, of feeling, of play, of being a child, to have something vital taken away, the part of us which is, and will never again be, enchanted. You see it clearly with very young children,

toddler training they call it, breaking the spirit.

I found the words. I knew them before, I had read them to my son Arran when he was little, but yesterday I rediscovered them and I sat there and I wept and I wept and I read the words slowly out loud like a testimony to the dreadful loss which every child experiences sometime in childhood, whether they go to school or not: the beginning of the losing of self. Because *doing nothing* is only something you can do or feel from yourself.

I found the words. So to everybody who wants an explanation of my meaning of *doing nothing*, I offer you Winnie-the-Pooh and Christopher Robin's simple story of farewell.

The House at Pooh Corner by A. A. Milne.
Chapter ten in which Christopher Robin and Pooh come to an enchanted place, and we leave them there...

And we begin with Pooh hurrying after Christopher Robin going Nowhere especially, for Explore as Pooh would say, or a What-shall-I-do-about-you-know-what as Pooh would say, and them walking along together and Christopher Robin asking Pooh what he liked best in all the world; and Pooh thinking about this and that and his friends Piglet and Christopher Robin and eating honey and 'hummy' days and birds singing and Pooh telling Christopher Robin about these things, the things best in all the world.

...*'I like that best too.'* said Christopher Robin, *'but what I like doing best is Nothing.'*

'How do you do Nothing?' asked Pooh, *after he had wondered for a long time.*

'Well, it's when people call out at you just as you're going off to do it, "What are you going to do, Christopher Robin!" and you say "Oh, nothing," and then you go and do it.'

'Oh, I see,' said Pooh.

'This is a nothing sort of thing that we're doing now.'

'Oh, I see,' said Pooh again.

'It means just going along, listening to all the things you can't hear, and not bothering.'

'Oh!' said Pooh.

And they walk on deeper into their story and come to an enchanted place at the top of the Forest called Galleons Lap, into this place of their shared magic, quiet and green and everything which is the world is here with them at Galleons Lap. And then quite suddenly Christopher Robin begins to tell Pooh about Things: Kings and Queens and Factors and Europe and Islands and Suction Pumps and Knights and Brazil and after describing these things Christopher Robin becomes quite silent, looking out beyond Galleons Lap, sitting there and not wanting it to ever stop, wishing this enchantment for ever.

... *Then, suddenly again, Christopher Robin, who was still looking at the world with his chin in his hands, called out 'Pooh!'*

'Yes?' said Pooh.

'When I'm - when - Pooh!'

'Yes, Christopher Robin?'

'I'm not going to do Nothing any more.'

'Never again?'

'Well, not so, much. They don't let you.'

Pooh waited for him to go on, but he was silent again.

'Yes, Christopher Robin?' said Pooh helpfully.

'Pooh, when I'm - you know - when I'm not doing Nothing, will you come up here sometimes?'

'Just Me?'

'Yes, Pooh.'

'Will you be here too?'

'Yes, Pooh, I will be really. I promise I will be, Pooh.'

'That's good,' said Pooh...

And Christopher Robin asks Pooh to never forget him even when Christopher Robin is

a hundred years old and Pooh is ninety-nine and Pooh promises he won't ever forget and Christopher Robin reaches towards Pooh's paw, to touch him.

...*'Pooh,' said Christopher Robin earnestly, 'if I - if I'm not quite -' he stopped and tried again - 'Pooh, whatever happens, you will understand, won't you?'*

'Understand what?'

'Oh, nothing.' He laughed and jumped to his feet. 'Come on!'

'Where?' said Pooh.

'Anywhere.' said Christopher Robin.

So they went off together. But wherever they go, and whatever happens to them on the way, in that enchanted place on the top of the Forest a little boy and his Bear will always be playing.



Silence.



When my daughter was three or four days old I held her in my arms and rocked back and forward sobbing because she was never going to have to suffer the indignity of going to school or ever be told what to do or be.

Willow is eight now. She has a huge yellow Winnie-the-Pooh Bear who she likes very much. Willow's Winnie-the-Pooh Bear is a She.

You can do anything with imagination, you can imagine freedom.

You can do anything with freedom, you can change the world.

That A. A. Milne could write those special words and still send his son in real life, Christopher Robin, away to be schooled, to deny the words he wrote, feels so very sad for Christopher Robin.

'I'm not going to do Nothing any more.'

'Never again?'

'Well, not so much. They don't let you.'

Can any parent reading that story, feeling that story, ever school their children again, teach them things, expect them to know answers, spellings, multiplication tables, all sorts of Things?

Or shall we leave their autonomy intact with the possibility of the enchanted Forest being there for as long as they need it, the feeling of which they might hold within them for the rest of their lives?

Silence, except for the falling of tears on the page of a book.

....In that enchanted place on the top of the Forest a little boy and his Bear - and a little girl and her Bearess - will always be playing....



A. A. Milne -**The House at Pooh Corner** - Mammoth 1991 (re-printed by permission of Egmont Children's Books Ltd.)

David Deutsch and Kolya Wolf - **Home Education and the Law** - available from 19 New Cross Road, Oxford OX3 8LP

Neil Taylor - **Elective Home Education: Guidelines for Local Education Authorities** - published in draft format in the Education Otherwise newsletter No 121 April 1998.

© 1998 **Sammy Vidal-Hall**, Homecroft, Brownston Street, Modbury, Devon PL21 0RQ

The Vidal-Hall family have been members of EO for over 10 years, the South Devon EO co-ordinators for five years, are founder-members of the Libertarian Family Network and editors of **'To Be Free: A Radical Alternative for Children and Parents'**

OUR RIGHTS OF FREEDOM

How sad to read that people are still sometimes misled and intimidated by unscrupulous or ill-informed LEAs. (Newsletter - June). Re: the 'guidelines', Anne and Rob Wade's nightmare fears are certainly alarming but we are not yet living in a dictatorship and we should have some faith in the good-will and reasonableness of legislators. If our arguments are sound and our rights of freedom reasonable we should never be afraid to use them or to state them simply. If the guidelines are a simple statement of the rights of responsibilities of those involved, surely that is acceptable no matter how subtle or complex these things are in practice. Who would be offended?

Eighteen years ago, as a young single mum, I found myself in the position of being unable to refuse home visits even though I knew they undermined me as a parent and helper to my wonderful though vulnerable little girl. No school-child had to suffer these torments. Her status as a learner was undermined each time. I could walk into the kitchen to switch the kettle on without devout believers 'in alien forms of learning' beginning to test her 'achievements'. As she was following an autonomous style these were entirely inappropriate and threatening occasions. I really do thank god and wonder at her resilience, for she has grown into a delightful young woman, a pleasure to know and a success in life.

Now, as an old married woman, I have three more wonderful little children. When the times comes I will not object to the odd home visit, but should it ever become necessary to do so, I hope I will be viewed as someone acting reasonably and legally on behalf of the children, not as unreasonable, extreme, threatening the freedoms of us all, a potential child-abuser etc..

Best wishes to all you home-educators, between us all, the practical, the idealistic, the naive, the political and the plain crazy - we make a world.

Barbara Stark - 24, Watson Avenue, Mansfield, Notts., NG18 2BS Tel: 01623 661195



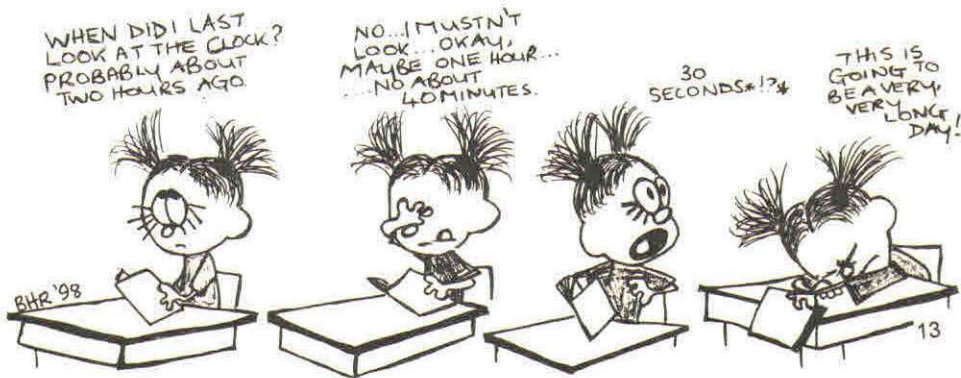
ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

Would any EO members aged 8-13 like to start a role-playing club for a game I am planning called Advanced Dungeons and Dragons 2nd edition+? If people are interested who are outside London, we could still meet up sometimes for a role-playing club day.

Does anyone else like the Lone Wolf books by Joe Dever?

Luke Goaman-Dobson - 5 Southern Road, London N2 9LH Tel: 0181 883 4395

BELINDA AND HER EVIL TEACHER MISS STODD



Autonomous Learning in Personalised Education

Reading the news about schools each day, you might be forgiven for thinking we do not know how to conduct effective learning. But we have many examples of successful learning to build on. It just so happens that school is one of the least successful. As Reimer noted *"Some true educational experiences are bound to occur in schools. They occur, however, despite school and not because of it."* One reason is that schools are often hostile places for autonomous learning.

Because it is devoted almost entirely to autonomous learning, one of the most successful is the public library system. But because education has become defined as schooling, we put our educational resources into schools, and have less and less left over for those institutions that are truly open and educative and in which people learn for themselves, such as public libraries.

Autonomous learning needs some description, not least because it has become squeezed out of the debates on education which are conducted on some notion of standards to be imposed on us by others - it is the "you will do it our way!" principle favoured by all totalitarians. Autonomous learning is based on another idea - it is the "I did it my way!" approach. At this point it is possible to go into all sorts of technical discussions about autonomous learning, but I prefer just to quote John Holt on the matter:

"I believe we learn best when we, not others, are deciding what we are going to try to learn, and when, and how, and for what reasons or purposes; when we, not others, are in the end choosing people, materials, and experiences from which and with which we will be learning; when we, not others, are judging how easily or quickly or well we are learning, and when we have learned enough; and above all when we feel the wholeness and openness of the world around us, and our own freedom and power and competence in it." - (What Shall I do Monday? - p.95)

Autonomous learning raises two difficult questions. One is the issue of human rights and responsibilities, and the other is the issue of selfishness. Taking the issue of rights first; in a democracy, it is seen as a principle that we have the right to decide what goes into our minds, and our responsibility is to maintain this for all others. The point has been argued many times e.g. by John Stuart Mill in *On Liberty* by Tom Paine in *The Rights of Man*, and in the writings of Bertrand Russell. It is the reason we declare subliminal advertising to be illegal. But I choose to quote again from John Holt:

"Next to life itself, the most fundamental of all human rights is the right to control our own minds and thoughts. That means, the right to decide for ourselves how we will explore the world around us, think about our own and other people's experiences, and find the meaning of our lives. Whoever takes that right away from us, by trying to 'educate' us, attacks the very centre of our being and does us a most profound and lasting injury. He tells us, in effect, that we cannot even be trusted to think, that for all our lives we must depend on others to tell us the meaning of our world and our lives, and that any meaning we may make for ourselves, out of our own experience, has no value." - (Instead of Education - p. 8)

John Holt defined school as a prolonged course in practical slavery. It cashes in on the fact that all sorts of intellectual systems - Religions, Fascism, Monarchy, Communism, Capitalism, Consumerism, Patriotism etc., - are ready to offer a kind of safety in return for servitude. A free-thinking mental life cannot be as warm and comfortable as a life enveloped in some creed or other. On the other hand, Holt declared, it is always better for children to figure out something by themselves than to be told - provided of course, as in the matter of running across the street, that lives are not endangered in the learning. In the first place, what children figure out, they remember better. In the second place, and far more important,

every time children figure something out, they gain in confidence in their ability to figure things out. (see Learning All the Time p. 138)

But some general social system is held to be necessary to maintain some semblance of order, otherwise the barbarism of 'might is right' will prevail. Selfishness, greed and super-greed will take over - as, of course it has in the adult world at present, where governments try to teach that the serious work of making sense of the world cannot be done co-operatively, but must be done in a dog-eat-dog competition. They assure us that greed is not a vice to be mastered but a virtue to be encouraged, and organise National Lotteries to encourage and legitimise it.

Democracy with its attempts to balance diversity, tolerance and power-sharing for the benefit of all, in declarations of human rights and responsibilities as the basis of law, is complex, difficult, demanding and imperfect. But as Winston Churchill observed, it is the worst system of organisation - except for all the others. In other words, if you do not make some sustained attempt at democracy, you will have to put up with something worse - tyranny, totalitarianism, greed and super-greed or whatever.

I thought I would let John Holt have the last word:

"What children want and need from us is thoughtful attention. They want us to notice them and pay some kind of attention to what they do, to take them seriously, to trust and respect them as human beings. They want courtesy and politeness..." (Learning All the Time - p. 140)

by **Professor Roland Meighan** D.Soc.Sc., Ph.D., B.Sc. (Soc.), L.C.P., Cert.Ed., Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and jazz pianist.



HOW GOOD IS YOUR LEA?

At the Council Meeting on 28th June, a decision was taken to collect and produce a pamphlet for LEAs that would illustrate LEA practices that EO families consider positive and helpful.

I am mailing all LEAs to ask for their current literature for parents who inform them that they are educating their own children, and, possibly, asking a few questions too. Since it is anticipated that a significant number may not reply, and that local EO members are aware of the attitude and approach of their LEA, this project would benefit enormously if co-ordinators or members could ask their LEA for their current material and send me this, with their own experience and knowledge of what LEA does. (Good practise is what we are looking for, but if you could send anything else, it could be useful for reference.) It would help if you could also let me know about LEA procedures when a family comes to its attention; the variety of ways that parents provide evidence of education taking place; the frequency and nature of the contact, including the position and educational experience of the officers; how the LEA responds if concerned about the education being provided; what resources are made available to local families; and anything else you may think useful.

The contents of the pamphlet will depend on the material received. My initial feeling is that it would be beneficial to us if it could encourage LEAs to be flexible and respectful in attitude of everyone's values.

Please send me what you can as soon as possible. I hope to have a substantial part of the material by the end of September.

Christine Adey, 1 Dunbury Cottages, Milton Abbas, Dorset DT11 0DH



BIBLIOGRAPHY

A Bibliography is not meant to be a tiresome list. It is not intended to teach a person what to think, but strives to give things to think about, to expose a person to as many ideas and therefore choices and chances as possible. Here are some that have inspired me, challenged me, made me angry, made me cry, empowered me. They are scintillating and exuberating! Enjoy!

NON-SCHOOLING, CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND CHILDHOOD OPPRESSION

Chris Shute

- Compulsory Schooling Disease: How children Absorb Fascist Values - Educational Heretics Press 1993

John Holt

- How Children Fail - Pelican - 1982
- How Children Learn - Pelican - 1983
- Teach Your Own - Lighthouse Books - 1982

Roland Meighan

- John Holt: Personalised Education and the Reconstruction of Schooling
- The Freethinkers' Pocket Directory to the Educational Universe - 1995
- The Next Learning System: and why Homeschoolers are trailblazers - 1997

All the above published by Education Heretics Press

A.S.Neill

- Summerhill - Pelican - 1985
- A New Summerhill - edited by Albert Lamb - Penguin Books - 1992

John Taylor Gatto

- Dumbing Us Down - The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling - New Society Publishers, Philadelphia, PA - 1992

John Shotton

- No Master High Or Low: Libertarian Education and Schooling 1890 - 1990 - Lib Ed, Phoenix House, 170 Wells Road Bristol BS4 2AG - 1993

Ivan Illich

- Deschooling Society - Pelican - 1986

Jean Bendell

School's Out, Educating Your Child At Home - Ashgrove Press, Bath - 1987

Alice Miller

- For Your Own Good : The Roots of
- Violence in Child-rearing - Virago 1983
- Though Shalt Not Be Aware: Society's Betrayal Of the Child - Pluto Press 1989
- Banished Knowledge: Facing childhood injuries - Virago 1990
- Breaking Down the Wall of Silence: To join the waiting child - Virago 1991

Chris Shute

- Alice Miller: The Unkind Society, Parenting and Schooling - Education Now Special Report - 1996

Rosalind Miles

- The Children We Deserve - Harper Collins -1994

OTHER

Andrea Dworkin

- Life and Death: Un-apologetic words on the continuing war against women - Virago - 1994

Jerry Mander

- Four Arguments for the Elimination for Television - Quill 1978 (Television and Advertising)

Harris L Coulter and Barbara Loe Fisher

- DPT: A Shot In The Dark - Warner - 1986 (Vaccinations)

Viera Scheibner

- Vaccination: 100 years of Orthodox Research Shows That Vaccines Represent A Medical Assault On the Immune System - Viera Schneibner - 1993 (Vaccinations)

Lynne McTaggart

- What Doctors Don't tell You: The truth about the dangers of modern medicine - Thorsons 1996

Ricardo Semler

- Maverick! - Arrow - 1994 (About 'work', and how it can be changed for the better)

EDUCATING ARCHIE by SEG

VIII/98

Camping at a music festival - what better way to spread the **ED** message!

NO SCHOOL? YOU'RE NOT NORMAL SON



WOSS YER FAVOURITE SUBJECT THEN, EH?



I LIKE GEOGRAPHY BEST



NO WAY MAN - NOBODY LIKES GEOGRAPHY

OK, RIGHT? MY DAD'S JUST BEEN IN AMERICA, TO A BIG CITY WITH SKY SCRAPERS AND YELLOW CABS AND THAT. WHAT'S IT CALLED?



NEW YORK



GOT IT IN ONE SQUIRE



HE SHOULD HAVE ASKED AT THE AIRPORT



MORE IS LESS

Joshua (8) and I (33) sit on the floor doing LEGO. "What is a comrade?", Josh asks. This leads us to a discussion about Communism and the Russian Revolution. At this moment Thomas (5) bursts in with Oscar (2) close behind. They have been playing together downstairs and have discovered that one of the pupae we have sitting on our tank have hatched... "Come and see the butterfly" he enthuses and we race down excited to examine it. We debate what to do with it. The children decide to let it go. In the garden the children say goodbye, Oscar gently strokes its wing and Thomas puts it on a flower. It is free.

This is how we educate. We don't teach, we don't follow a curriculum, we don't tell our children what they need to know. We don't need to. It's all there in them. They are naturally curious about the world in which they live and are constantly asking questions. We try to provide the answers - often they have their own explanations about how things work, or why things are as they are. Sometimes these match the adult view, sometimes they are their own unique way of understanding. They do the things they want to do, follow their own interests, their own direction, not ours. Most of the time they play - sometimes together, sometimes on their own, sometimes with adults, sometimes with friends. Other times we are out and about doing things, visiting places, 'places of interest', meeting people etc.. And all the time they are thinking, questioning, making sense of the world they live in. They have a thirst for knowledge, a desire to know. They also have their own thoughts which are as valuable to them as anyone else's.

It appears obvious to me that the best way to learn about the world is to live in it, to experience how it works first hand. We don't teach, but we do make ourselves available to answer questions and to make it possible for them to do the things they want" It's the MORE IS LESS principle. The more we

interfere with the learning process by trying to teach, the less true learning takes place.

Corinne Lindsey, 45 Bowden Hill, Newton Abbot, Devon - 01626 361856

The Lindsey Turner Family are founder members of The Libertarian Family Network.



PLASTERCINE AND SOFAS!

I asked my children what Autonomous home-education meant to them. These are their replies...**!?!? Autonomous home-education is.....

At midnight, making out of Plasticine a Venusian Tenticlon Bush from Venus, which can jump from planet to planet, up to a trillion billion kilometres. It's average life-span is 2000 years without atmosphere e.g. floating around in space. Its digestive system is very slow and it takes about 50 years to digest a tomato. Apart from the spring which helps it planet jump and its tentacles which can retract it doesn't have any muscles at all. It's skin can be any colour as long as it has green pigment included - but it always has purple tentacles and spots!

- **Gus Harris Reid** - Devon

Lying on the sofa being too tired to say!

- **Barnaby Harris Reid** - Devon



UNCONTROVERSIAL THINGS!

Felix Wade (*Anne and Rob Wade's son*) *home-educated - now a man, a saxophonist, a philosopher and computer-games player extraordinaire. I asked Felix to write something radical - all about everything regarding children's rightshere are some magical snip-bits I received.*

.....Hum. I could write about coercion and difficult things nobody will believe, or I could write about autonomous learning and the evil of school and uncontroversial things everyone

agrees with in a wishy-washy content-free sort of way. "What exactly do you want?", "We want to be free, to do what we want to do!" - Planet of the Apes.

...Parents in EO and educationalists like the idea that children should learn what they choose. Teachers even like that idea. But if you take it to the logical conclusion, which is that parents should never under any circumstances stop them from learning what they choose, and should in fact assist them, suddenly nobody likes it at all. There are weird and horrible things called irrational memes which are to blame for this sudden change in parents' attitudes, when you get down to specifics like "should there be a bedtime", "should he watch television whenever he likes" "should he eat whatever he likes whenever he likes", "should he be allowed to ride without a seatbelt", and so on.

Everybody has their own niggling little glitch. Some parents will be open to finding satisfactory ways for their children to ride unseatbelted, but will demand dogmatically that they say things like "please can I have some more" and "thank you for having me". Others are perfectly fine on the issues of safety and politeness, but create issues like wastefulness or laziness to coerce their children over. Of course I'm not saying that many children desire to break traffic regulations, or insult their hosts at parties. But that's not the point. If you want your children to seek truth rather than be forced to comply, you must never be dogmatic....

...Parents routinely decide for children whether or not the children are being wasteful, anti-social, dangerous, expensive or lazy. "You can't stand around with the fridge door open!" "I worked hard to buy that food, electricity, cardboard, and I'm not going to allow you to just go ahead and have fun with it!". Perhaps these are difficult subjects? Perhaps you have to force your children to comply with your opinions on these subjects, because your opinions are too difficult to express. But it's more than that. You have been in constant company with your children

all their life. Who could it be easier to reason with? Is their something inherently unreasonable about children? Is reason an ability that is only learnt very slowly, culminating at around age 18? If so, what makes learning to be reasonable such a mammoth task? Perhaps children have to learn to be reasonable about each individual issue, rowdiness, irresponsibility, waste, laziness....but that isn't learning to be reasonable. That's learning to comply. No, being reasonable is a simple concept, and it's the obvious way to interact. It's being unreasonable which is difficult, and it isn't learnt, it's a bug.



FEATHERSTONE 1998

A castle in open grassy parkland with cows, sheep and rabbits. A river in a wooded valley, wild moorland and Hadrian's Wall nearby. Open fires and friendly faces. Animated discussion and intimate conversations. Music and dancing, workshops and trips out, fun and games and sharing. Come and join us.

A National EO Gathering 3-10 September 1998

For more information and booking form send SAE to : Lucy and Keith Charlton, 2 Wistow Rd, Newton Harcourt, Leics, LE8 9FT

LAST DATE FOR BOOKING - 10th
AUGUST

An Open Council Meeting will be held at Featherstone Castle, nr. Haltwhistle, Northumberland, on:
**Saturday 5th September
at 10 am.**

All EO members are welcome to attend.

Please send items for the agenda to Lucy Charlton (general secretary) in good time.

EO FAMILY DIARY : THE FORTUNE-WOOD FAMILY

This month's diary, in keeping with the theme of autonomous education, is written by two other members of the Fortune-Wood household: Rowan (11) and Tamsyn (10) (Cottia and Seth are out playing with friends, so that's their take on autonomy!)

Rowan writes:

Autonomous education is best because I'm free to make my own choices. This is very important because no-one else is inside my brain - only I know what my preferences are and I'm in the best position to know what's best for me. This is also very important because if adults make all my decisions for me, especially about what I need to learn, then I don't think I'll be a very creative person when I grow up. The more creativity I have the more I make right choices.

I like doing lots of things and I think everything I do is to do with education (even sleeping!). Amongst my interests I like playing the violin - this wouldn't be nearly so enjoyable if I had to do it to please someone else or at a time when someone else thought I should be practising. My teacher is really nice and very non-coercive which is why I like going.

I also like history subjects. Recently I've learnt lots about the Mongols and I'm also interested in the Vikings and the Middle Ages. I get my information from books and from the internet and from television and going out to old castles and other history places. If I was in school I couldn't get enough attention to get the help I needed with learning what I want. If my mum and dad thought-up topics that I had to do then it wouldn't be so creative.

Playing games and watching television programmes are also very important to me. Some people think that these are not

educational things, but they give me loads of ideas and I learn a lot about other people from playing.

Tamsyn writes:

I like non-coercive education because there is no-one telling me off and upsetting me all the time. I have a comfortable environment to do my learning and if I'm unhappy I can't think properly even if it's a subject I might really enjoy.

I like drawing and this is educational because if I'm drawing an animal then I learn about all the parts of the body. I like doing that because I want to be a doctor when I grow up and I'm interested in how the body works. I've been watching a really interesting programme about the body. Some of the doctor's ideas are a bit coercive and mean, but it is very clever how the body is explained.

I like playing the recorder. I don't go to a class because I learnt all the notes and now I am teaching myself. Also the teachers kept changing and I didn't like this.

We never have to worry about not having friends because we meet lots of people in home educating groups.

I like reading and writing but I wouldn't like it if I was told when to read and it would be boring if I was told what to write. It would be a silly idea to try to do it for someone else and if I learnt things for someone else I would just forget them in a couple of days, but when I choose to do something then I'm trying to impress myself.

Camping is fun and next week we are going to Pembrokeshire. We all decided together where we would go and I like the freedom of the campsite where there is space to run around and we can cook on the beach on an open fire

and the kids are fine. They see me enjoying things, enjoying learning, and they share it with me, especially the African drumming. Gaining knowledge, experience, learning are all part of being human. It is not something that is imparted to you as you grow from childhood. That is the problem that a lot of adults have. They bought the crap that they were given at school about adults knowing it all. Now they are adults and they think something is wrong with them because they don't know it all. Giving my kids the space they need to learn is hard, too, because I am doing this basically on my own. I have 2 or 3 good friends who share similar beliefs but they do not all live near me. The people that I have day to day contact with are those who are constantly asking, "How's the home teaching going?" No matter how many times I answer, "Fine" and change the subject or simply state, "It's just the way we live" I keep hearing it. I keep hearing about SATS and 3 year olds starting nursery and how my children need more socialisation and how brave I must be and how other parents couldn't do it and what about GCSE's and don't I need more time to myself and what other children are achieving (ie being awarded) and what key stage are we working to? I feel as though I am constantly competing in a race that I never entered. Sometimes, I want my kids to be the best at everything just so I can tell these people where to go. But that isn't why I am home educating. I have to keep reminding myself that I am doing this because it is what I believe is best for my children's personal as well as academic development. I suppose it is getting easier. As they grow and show me all that they are capable of, I get more confident - confident enough to leave them alone and just be there, just watch. I've watched my eldest learn how to read, months after her friends at school were being- taught- to- read- like- this- with- a- finger- under- each- word. I watched her as she listened to one friend read her a reading scheme book in this way and say, "Wow, you're

reading good" only to be answered with "But you can't read yet." Six months later, it clicked for her. She just picked up a book and read it to a family friend. (I think I was more proud of how she dealt with the snooty friend than of her reading.) That was my first lesson in how to trust my children in their own learning.

However, autonomous education for my second daughter is quite different. Another time, while watching something on one of the educational programs (which they chose to watch, by the way,) I decided to explain something to her. I didn't get very far before being silenced by her shouting, "DON'T TEACH ME!!!!". Again I find myself fighting to keep my mouth shut. I realise that my goal as a parent is not to have something tangible at the end of the day, or the term, or the year. My goal is to raise children who know what they want to do, because they've been able to try things: children who know how to do what they want, because they've been able to figure it out for themselves, children who are happy most of the time, but know how to deal with life when they're not. I hope that my children will be capable of autonomy in many aspects of life. I also hope that they (we) never stop learning.

Julie Ridley - 32 Cheltenham Road, Chorlton, Manchester M21 9QN



..... From 2 week olds to 49 year olds can learn. From sucking your thumb to learning something new. I myself am good at reading, writing and maths but some children might not want to read until they are 12 but some children might want to start writing when they are 4. You could learn at home in 6 hours what you could learn at school in 93 hours.

Sadie Ridley Birks - Manchester



equality, the kids have equal chances today - girls can do metalwork, woodwork, etc these days. Well, they're only partly right I'd say, children may have equal access to subjects but sexism is still there, it's just become a lot more subtle and operates on an almost unconscious level. Classes being continually reminded of how men have dominated maths and science, boys and girls lined up separately, comments on girl's appearance but on boys performance, etc. probably mean little in isolation, but remember how many years kids spend in school. Its a case of small incidents being repeated and reinforced, time and time again, maybe without the teachers even realising it. If the system has its low pay status targeted directly towards women, then schools give them the exact requirements it needs.

You don't need to spend long in a school to learn those with the most power are the ones who make the decisions. Power exists in a situation when one person attempts to end the free will of another. When the will of one person has been imposed on another, a situation of domination takes place. The power is the formation of a relationship between two parties, in this case child and teacher, who become the oppressor and oppressed. The lesson the child learns is to obey the anonymous omnipresent voice of authority, believe everything they're told, live life on autopilot, numbly accept the destruction and oppression going on all around you.

So there it is in a nutshell, the hidden curriculum. I've always thought that schools are designed not turn out too many intellectual/analytical people, they've got to fit the requirements of the system which needs a readily available workforce to fill its jobs, to serve its bosses and to turn out several tons of plastic junk! The message schools provide is clear: We (the teachers) are in charge you (the pupils) are relatively powerless and depend on us, you need us, we are right,

you can be right too if you do what we tell you, when we tell you, but watch out if you don't 'cos we'll come down on you like a ton of bricks.

To end on a more optimistic note, just imagine how life would be if we had all been sons and daughters of home educators with a libertarian approach. I don't mean just a few, how about a few million! You could forget about minor difficulties like war, exploitation and dictatorship for a start. What a different place the world would be.

The hidden curriculum - file under social control!

Paul Hitchman, 36 East Avenue, Exeter, Devon EX1 2DX (01392 660216)
mail: su3696@eclipse.co.uk

This extract is re-printed with kind permission from **To Be Free: A Radical Alternative for Children and Parents**



"Curriculum is a drawer which cannot hold all the discourse on Education, so we quite slyly and deliberately hide the rest under the carpet, and the more we stuff away out of sight the more the furniture gets distorted and unstable."
- From the **Hockerill Lecture**, under the title of **"Spirituality in Education"** (King's College, London, 1996)



Being free, I've never been taught anything. I play on my bike, I play on my hoop rings, my Mum and Dad read to me, I play. I play with life.

Willow Vidal-Hall - Devon

in cases where LEA's do not behave reasonably we must realise that their co-operation is not an optional extra. Just as there are laws and duties relating to home educators, this equally applies to LEAs. They have a legal responsibility to act in a reasonable manner toward all the people they exist to serve, whether home- or state-educating. If they fail in these duties, there are avenues to make complaints. We intend to make enquiries about the complaints procedures with regard to LEAs implementing bad practise and misrepresenting the law as it relates to home-education and we will write something into the newsletter when we have some further information.



CRIME AND DISORDER BILL

A few weeks ago a clause came before the House of Commons Standing Committee debating the Crime and Disorder Bill. Due to our low profile and lack of contacts in parliament, this only came to our attention at a very late stage due to the vigilance of one EO member. The Clause relates to truancy and in brief allows LEA's to designate a place to which young people regarded as being out of school without lawful authority may be removed by the police.

Subsection (4) reads: *'A child's or young person's absence from a school shall be taken to be without lawful authority unless it falls with subsection (3) (leave, sickness, unavoidable cause or day set apart for religious observance) of section 444 of the Education Act 1996.'*

This caused us concern about the position of home-educated young people, not least with regard to how the police might establish that children were lawfully out of school without being forced to carry ID cards.

The Children's Legal Centre (an organisation providing professional legal

advice on a wide range of issues regarding young people) agreed that the wording of the bill was potentially a cause for concern to home-educators. With only a day to go before the committee sat to discuss this clause, a number of EO members undertook to phone, write, email or fax every member of the committee with our concerns. In the end, the wording of the bill was not changed, but far from receiving a hostile response from MP's, as was anticipated by some, all of our concerns were heard and we now know that at least some members of parliament are aware of the legality of home education and also the willingness of home educators to argue for their rights.

With reference to this clause as it relates to home-educated young people, The Head of Operational Policing Policy Unit, Paul Pugh wrote: *'The Minister explained that the power will not apply to children who are lawfully educated at home, it will only apply to those who are absent from a school without lawful authority. A child can only be absent from a school if he or she is a registered pupil at that school. A child who is not a registered pupil at a school clearly cannot be absent from a school.'*

The following quotes from Hansard indicate not only the degree of success in communicating our position to MPs but also the reassurances we received from the relevant ministers:

'...Many people do not realise that several thousand families in this country choose to take personal responsibility for the education of their children in accordance with section 7 of the Education Act 1996. Many thousands of children are educated outside the state and private systems and by their families at home. I do not criticise that, because that freedom exists and many parents argue - not without force - that their children achieve as much, if not more, than those who go through the formal school system.'

'... Although I am sure that the Government do not intend that they should be picked up, the parents concerned should have the reassurance that their status in the law is recognised and that they are not overlooked. They [home educated children] are going about their business within the law and should not be interfered with by legislation as long as they respect the Education Act.'

It has been suggested by the House of Commons that we may like to write directly to the Home Secretary stating our concerns and seeking reassurances, perhaps acknowledging that there was concern raised at the Committee stage of the Bill.

His address is: Rt. Hon. Jack Straw MP, Secretary of State for the Home Department, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AT



UPDATE

In light of the EO council's decision (taken at the Kent gathering on June 28th 1998) NOT to ratify Neil Taylor's proposed guidelines (as outlined in draft format in EO newsletter No 121 - April 1998) and the strong concern our group has for autonomous issues, The Libertarian Family Network is undertaking to independently, in cooperation with EO, inform all LEAs of the existence of autonomous education as a legal mode of education and the laws as they relate to this option - including the choices families have with regard to satisfying LEAs of suitable education, most especially where families choose not to have home visits and choose alternative methods of communication. Our support remains wholeheartedly with Education Otherwise as a national and collective support organisation for all styles of home education.

In place of Neil Taylor's proposed guidelines, which we - and so many other EO members - fully endorse and support, we understand that the council decision is to send a basic information and introductory leaflet in addition to a pamphlet about LEA good practise around the country. We believe this decision is a gross error made out of fear.

We want to personally and collectively thank Neil Taylor for the incredible amount of work he has put into the guidelines. His work has particularly allowed the issue of alternatives to home visits to be brought to the awareness of the wider membership of Education Otherwise. This in itself has been empowering to many.

With respect to our personal friendships within EO, the LFN collectively feels we need to openly express our concern that EO needs to carefully reassess the ways in which the time, care, and commitment of volunteers is valued and acknowledged, otherwise there is a danger that there will cease to be willing, new blood to take the place of families where their home-educated young people are growing into adults. There will come a time to pass the baton gracefully and let those families who have younger children grow their vision of an EO which is strong, unafraid and proud, the voice which we believe spoke through those proposed guidelines.



We welcome anybody, from anywhere in the country, to give us a ring if they would like further information or advice about autonomous education and the law as it relates to this option.



Sammy and Nick Vidal-Hall (EO coordinators - Devon / Autonomous and Legal support) 01548 830716

Belinda Harris Reid (EO publicity South West) 01364 643343

Linda and Paul Hitchman (EO coordinators - Devon) 01392 660216

Corinne Lindsey - 01626 631856



*They fuck you up, your mum and dad,
They may not mean to, but they do.
They fill you with the faults they had,
And add some extra, just for you.*

Philip Larkin, - 'This Be the Verse' -
Former Poet Laureate



the Tank Engine - you like reading that one." "No, Mummy. I know that story. I want to read the words with no cheating."

I'm not saying that we've always been calm about how much (or little) the children seem to learn but just as I'm starting to worry, they say something which 'soothes the troubled brow'. Thankfully for them, I'm studying full time now, so I don't have the same amount of time available to hassle them about the things they 'ought' to be learning. Maybe that's the answer - when we get panicky over whether we should be teaching them something useful, we can go out and teach ourselves something we are interested in - leaving the kids to get on with the important job of being kids - learning when, what and how they want to learn.

Beverley Young - Lancashire
email: beverley.young@btinternet.com



LEAVING THE KIDS TO GET ON...

Over five years ago we removed Cassie (then aged 4 years 5 months) from school. Intending this to be a temporary measure until a suitable school could be found, we stuck to a very structured routine. It took between six months and a year before I finally admitted that maybe half a dozen arguments per day with my little girl weren't the answer. By this time, we had also decided that there was no such thing as a suitable school.

By the time Alexander reached the age where education became compulsory, I'd decided that autonomous education was by far superior - for my daughter at any rate. But, once I get an idea in my head, it takes a lot of shifting. For autonomous, I had read unstructured - Alexander had other ideas. One month before his fifth birthday "Mummy, can I read?" "Yes, sweetheart. What do you want to read? Go and get the book and we'll read it together." "No, Mummy. I want to read it by myself." "Alright - go and get Thomas

'SPECIAL NEEDS' SUPPLEMENT - DECEMBER

Dear EO'ers, bearing in mind that there will be a Special Needs Supplement in the December issue, would anyone like to share their experiences of special needs situations with us? Of particular interest to some would be letters about chronic Fatigue Syndrome (M.E.), Allergies (including food intolerance) and compulsive/obsessive behaviour. But all contributions will be welcome. Looking forward to hearing from you

Lesley Belgium (Acting Special Needs Coordinator) - 52, Camberley Road, Bristol BS4 1SZ (0117 9530624)





Please note that this is included as part as a regular on-going article and does not come under this newsletter's theme of 'autonomous education'.

EO DIARY: The Bunn Family

Has anyone else ever felt so isolated that they're contemplating sending their children to school just to fit in and shut everyone else up? I must admit I've been tempted these past few months. Two new families have moved in nearby each with very violent boys aged under four which means I've had to restrict Meri's playing out. This has become a battle, I may have won in that she only plays in the garden now, but I've lost a part of the closeness we shared as she now resents my authority (how I hate authority). Also one of the boys seems to rule the other children and so if Meri doesn't follow them (usually to places she's not allowed e.g. the bum) she's ostracised by the others - I even overheard them telling her to just ignore her mummy and go with them, wonderful child that she is she refused. The antics of a gang of older children succeeded in making me so paranoid that I hardly went out for weeks. The girls just ignored the taunting or else retorted with withering sarcasm. Their attitude plus the letters I received from other EOers helped to put my minuscule problems into perspective and give me the support I needed to stick two fingers up at the world and get on with real life.

During the 'wilderness months' we fled to my mum's for a couple of weeks where we cleaned and planted-up her garden as a birthday present. We also took the opportunity to visit the local museum and do a bit of shopping (which becomes a luxury as anyone who lives miles away from proper shops can tell you).

On the way home we stayed with friends in Carlisle, he makes guitars, she works for the National River Authority. As usual she had photocopies of school worksheets for us which Megan loves. We spent a brilliant

couple of days birdwatching and walking, even discovering an ancient right of way bordered by a hedge which we believe (by using the 'counting the species' method) to be about 700 years old.

As for work - well I set a general knowledge exam for Jess and Meg, they both did really well though we do need to do a lot more work on times tables. We spent a day at the Dun Beag Permaculture project making willow domes and tunnels and chopping rhododendrons (a weed up here). Jess's art teacher decided that she was too young for her class of OAPs and that she needs to be with her peers at school so she has lost her art lessons which is a shame - I thought she was doing really well. Because the weather is sporadically brilliant (and also because the kiln is full) pottery has been put on hold until the autumn when we shall move onto glazing. We have been camping a fair bit (even in the rain). Andy took the older three on a 15 mile hike leaving Meri and I to spend a whole weekend alone. The weather was fantastic, Jess's nose got sunburnt and so did Emily's ears! The highlight of the past few months has to be adopting a collie X pup from Milton Animal Rescue Centre. We have called him Scruff, he's great fun, a good lesson in responsibility and a wonderful addition to the family - though I don't think the cat would agree.

Emily has set herself 5 books to read for English, amongst them was Twelfth Night so we rented the video. It was so good that we must have watched it about 6 times by now. The 'YES' vote in Ireland and the nuclear testing in both India and Pakistan have set off some interesting conversations and fact-finding missions (to try to understand the importance of these events we thought it necessary to learn some of the history behind them). It has been one of the few times that we've actually bought a newspaper every day to follow events. For Andy and I it has been like a flashback to our days at college when everyone was really worried about the repercussions of the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. Trying to put things into global

perspective seemed the right way to ally any fears of a nuclear war. We have decided to cancel the magazines we subscribe to, Focus because it is too sexist (without hope of redemption) and Newsweek because it is so boring (as well as arrogant - USA rules OK).

Last week we met up with some homeschoolers in Duoon for the Environment Fair which was a good day out.

Bolstered by my 'coming out' as a home schooler I booked a place at the Schoolhouse Conference in Dundee. This was excellent, lots of information and support. I even got to meet Roland Meighan who has written many books on flexi-schooling and who believes that homeschoolers are trailblazers of the next 'education system'.

For the Solstice this year we decided to go to Kilmartin Valley and camped at Arduaine where we were treated to the most magnificent thunderstorms. Our fellow campers were mostly young German lads and Emily (far too shy to actually go and talk to any of them) spent alot of time eavesdropping. She realised that her German wasn't as good as she thought (she wanted to try for her GCSE this year).

On the Sunday we visited Kilmartin Museum which is one of the best museums I've even been in. There was loads for the girls to do and fantastic audio aids with each exhibit. I'm going to try and organise a day visit if anyone is interested.

Also I would like to organise a camp in Cornwall next year for the solar eclipse if anyone has any room for tents. So after a period of self pity and paranoia I'm feeling quite aggressively confident and the girls are feeling industrious. I think I can safely say that all is right with the Bunnns again! Many thanks to all who wrote or rang.

The Bunn Family, 16 Berryburn, Ilames, by Tighnabruaich, Argyll PA21 2BQ



MEMBERSHIP CARDS

In trying to make the job of the database less arduous we have been looking at ways to simplify the sending out of membership cards. More and more of you are kindly paying by banker's order which saves the database in one respect but adds the burden of sending out a membership card and list of concessions. It has already been decided to print the list of concessions in the Contact List and we are considering sending everyone a membership card once a year with the December newsletter. It would be valid for a year and each family could fill in their own name. It would also save those who renew by cheque from having to send a s.a.e.. If you have any strong feelings about this please would you let me know.

FUNDING TO KICK-START LOCAL MEETINGS

At the last Council Meeting it was agreed that some money could be spent to encourage more local members meetings. Often someone is willing to organise a meeting but cannot finance the cost of sending out letters or renting a place to meet. If there are no meetings in your area (check with your local co-ordinator) find out what a local room would cost to hire (remember to say we are a charity). Aim for this to be self-financing but apply to me for contribution towards the first 3 or 4 meetings and any postage costs.

CREDIT/DEBIT CARDS

From September 1st 1998 we should be able to accept Credit/Debit card payment and books for a £25 transaction limit.

Priscilla Park Weir - Treasurer



(though it tends to be more of a winter activity) but what comes from this is not couch potatoes left in front of the T. V as a cheap source of child-minding, but the most amazing discussions which lead in all sorts of learning directions. Of course children need space to do things without parents being their shadows (allegedly "doing nothing" - should not be interfered with because we never know what knowledge is being formed in someone else's mind) but non-coercive parents are engaged parents, not negligent parents. The difference is not one of engagement, but of taking one's cue from the child, not from some pre-ordained agenda of what is needful.

It is for this reason that I think non-coerced children, who are not set artificial boundaries springing from parental convenience or ideology, are actually the safest children. Yes, my children love to play with candles, but they are happy to come and get my help because they know I won't refuse. They have no need to experiment in dangerous secrecy. The same is true when it comes to bigger issues of safety. We share our theories about everything, openly and honestly and always on the understanding that our theories are just as much up for grabs as the children's. This creates an environment in which the children are very rational about our advice - they know we are not giving it just to get them to do something they don't want.

The second lot of objections come under the general heading of self sacrifice. "If you give in to children all the time they will become selfish monsters and you will become worn down to a frazzle, just a slave with no life of your own."

It is not my experience that "giving in" to children makes monsters. Infact my children are at their most unhappy and irrational when their needs are not being met and the evidence of children's penal institutions and some of the world's most damaged and damaging dictators (as

Alice Miller showed in "*Breaking Down the Wall of Silence*") is that not meeting children's needs for unconditional engagement without coercion is what leads to tragedy.

Respecting our children's autonomy and being prepared to take seriously the moral demands of parenthood does not however mean that our children do not learn the same respect for the autonomy of others. In our house we talk about "common preferences". The idea is that we are all on the same side and all of us can win. Whenever there is a disagreement about what members of the family want or need then together we create a consent based solution; not a compromise (where everyone gives in) or coercion (where someone loses) but some outcome that everyone genuinely prefers. If it sounds fantastically idealistic I can only say that it works for us and that the more we practice it the more it works. If it sounds like hard work, then sometimes it is, but it is also enormously rewarding work and does become less time consuming and laborious after the initial efforts.

It relies on all our creativity and on our children believing that we really are on their side and not out to manipulate them in some subtle way. When the creativity is working well we do find that all of us can get our needs met. The fear that parents will spend their lives self-sacrificing is certainly one that we once had, but it is one that faded once non coercive parenting became more familiar and the children had come to believe that we meant it. Self-sacrificing is not, for us, the norm or a sign of success. It is possible for our children's needs to be met and for our needs to be met. We don't have a bed-time for anyone, but the children are very gracious about helping us to get some time alone as a couple. We don't have a lot of spare money, but the children are always generous in their outlook on how money can be used within the family.

them to be truly autonomous in their education, to discover their interests and be supported in creating their own knowledge wherever it lies. Child-led education is not just about letting them read at the age they want (whether it's 3 or 12) but about helping them to follow their interests in every sphere, whether it's the things traditionally called education, like maths and history, or the things that come outside that artificial line like experimenting with fire, watching T.V or doing nothing at all.

FREEDOM TO LEARN REQUIRES FREEDOM TO LIVE!

Jan Fortune-Wood St. Barnabas Vicarage, Overgreen Drive, Kingshurst, Birmingham B37 6EY
Jan.MikeFW@btinternet.com



Being autonomous is about doing what you want when you want it, not before or after or in an allotted time, just when you want it, *if* you want it which is the most important. The autonomous way is all to do with being yourself and thinking your own thoughts and doing your own doings and playing your own games and I feel this is the only possible way you do anything gracefully.

Arran Vidal-Hall - Devon



MIRACLE IN PROGRESS

When I first started finding out about styles of home-educating I had already taken my children out of school. I had started out quite structured or at least always meaning to have some structured times when I would sit down and do workbooks or such-like with the children. However, my life turned out to be too busy

for any of that!! For some time, I wondered whether I was doing the right thing. The situation is that Dave and I have 4 children the eldest has some special needs. Their ages are 7, 5, 3, and 1, and I did begin to wonder whether there was enough time in the day. Then I read a few books like Summerhill (A.S. Neil), John Holt, and Dumbing Us Down by John Taylor Gatto (what an amazing book) and I began to realise that I didn't have to do anything structured at all. I just had to trust the children. In theory it all made sense, this autonomous education idea. So we sat back and watched. The reality has proved the theory over and over, so far it's been wonderful.

Children are so amazing. Every child I can see now, is a Miracle in Progress, except so often grown-up's take the credit for the miracles. They have so much more potential and ability than they get credit for and if we trust them, support, encourage, love and accept them they can all achieve countless miracles in their lifetimes.

Left to follow their own intuitions, motivations and interests, my children are giving themselves a fantastic all round education. Everyday is packed full of opportunities for learning something new and they rarely miss one of them. Their natural curiosity is allowed to flow without timetables or a curriculum to stop it. No-one ever tells them that they're not old enough or haven't learnt enough yet, to find out about something new. No one ever gives them messages that they need grown-ups (who know better!) to direct them in their process or finding out about the world around them. It's an interesting thing really, that despite the masses believing something different, deep inside this feels so natural. I have come to believe that life, and any part of it, doesn't have to be difficult. Home education is really just part of life - the kids and us just get on with it. It's free-flowing and effortless. It doesn't need anyone to get worried about it or impose rules and regulations on it - it just happens like

breathing in and out, like eating when we're hungry, like laughing when we're happy, Like loving because it feels good!

Shara Ouston - 32 Partridge Rd, Newport, Isle of Wight PO30 5NS (01983 822965



UNTIDY HOUSES...

The children do determine their own life/education by their own interests. I've found the more we tell them, the more they want to know, and their ideas for why things are or happen are wonderful and as many EO parents have written, I often feel they are educating me! So far, few of my suggestions have been rejected, and I really hope that it will continue like this, with them adding more and more of their ideas until they become self-taught ultimately, as teenagers, and adults.

Belonging to EO has given me so much confidence in myself and in the children's innate desire to learn - all those people with untidy houses, chaotic routines and happy children who write in the newsletter are such a comfort and an inspiration, making me feel that home-education is the very best, not exclusive or 'all playing' as outsiders presume. (Though there is lots and lots of all kinds of that too!) I feel that having the space/time to do nothing (appear to do nothing) is important and obviously lacking. How can it be spontaneously included in school based routine-led education?

Kirsten Freiesleben, Little Witheridge, West Worlington, Crediton, Devon EX17 4UA



CO-ORDINATORS' UPDATE

Co-ordinator standing down:
Mary Scott - Somerset

The following are offering themselves as new acting Co-ordinators:

Joss Nowell - Bristol - Tel: 0117 939 8612
Chris Curtis - London West - page 41 in the Contact List

Future new members would be very grateful if those holding the Contact Lists could indicate the above information in some way.

Areas seeking a Co-ordinator:
England: Cambridgeshire, (Hertfordshire), Humberside, Isle of Mann, Somerset.
Scotland: Argyle and Bute, Tayside, Grampian.
Wales: Cardiganshire, Gwynedd, (Pembrokeshire).

Please contact me if you are interested in finding out more about the role of Co-ordinators.

Isobel Bogucki - Co-ordinators' Secretary



MAGIC: THE GATHERING

If there are any players (or ex-players) out there who would like to swap or sell cards please contact us.

Gus and Barnaby Harris Reid
Tel: 01364 643343



FORCING CHILDREN!

Why do adults usually force children to go to school? It's because the adults' parents sent them to school and because they think it's good for them and they think they'll learn lots of things. Adults think children will like school, but actually they hate it. No one will listen to children, so they can't have a choice to not go. I don't go to school. I think it is terrible how adults force children to go to school.

Barnaby Harris Reid - Devon



BELINDA AND HER EVIL TEACHER MISS STODD



Autonomous Home-Education!

At last, something I know about - I'll write, I thought. Although perhaps that's a bit contradictory: so I asked them, my offspring, for their views. My sob Janek is 19, my daughters, Anastasja and Elizabeth 17 and 14 respectively. I asked what they thought the disadvantages of being EO'd had been.

Elizabeth thought she would have made more friends at school because there would have been more people around: Anastasja said "None", and Janek said "Are there any?" So far so good: I asked about the advantages.

Anastasja said it meant she'd had the chance to do practical things like carpentry, cooking, water sports, decorating, etc., rather than academic

stuff, which she hates. Elizabeth likes "getting to choose what to study and do". Janek, bless him, said: "Everything - having a life".

It occurs to me that I should stop writing now and go out in a blaze of glory, but then perhaps there's more glory in graciously passing on my method to the rest of you EOers.

Well, anyway: what I did was to send Janek to nursery when he was almost 3, for two hours a day. Within a fortnight, he'd turned into the kind of child you wouldn't like your children to spend time with. After half a term there was the two-week Christmas break, during which he went back to being his old, normal self.

Then another term complete with personality change.

So I checked out every kind of school - state, private, free, Montessori, you name it, and was also lucky enough to go to a talk by John Holt - I decided to EO.

At the beginning of each school term I always made us a mini-curriculum and time-table: this never lasted even a week, and in good weather often didn't start. We have always talked (about life, death, the universe, brain transplants, anything really) and this has led to myriad outings and interests.

When they have required a specialist teacher, I have usually managed to find one: finding the money is always a problem, but e.g. Anastasja is now teaching water sports and working at the local sailing centre office as a means of earning her living, while Janek is on the B.Mus. Performance course at the Royal Academy of Music, and has just been offered a \$10,000 scholarship towards his fees at Berklee Music College in Boston. (If anybody would like to send him a donation towards the \$12,000 we still have to find, please don't be shy.)

Elizabeth wants to work in the TV or film industry, and has finally started to put pen to paper, writing scripts. As far as I remember, she has rarely written anything other than brief thank-you notes in her entire life. Janek is very similar.

At 15, Janek was allowed to go to our local 6th Form College to do 5 GCSEs in a year. He found it hard work at first because he was playing in 11 orchestras and ensembles at our local music foundation, having drum, trumpet, piano and classical guitar lessons, and training 7 days a week 15 miles away because he was in the junior Olympic development squad for the canoe team. Three weeks into the first term he made the decision to give up canoeing, as he knew he wanted to be a musician, and that he needed the

academic qualifications. (He got 3 Bs and 2 Cs).

Anastasja took GCSE's at the college (1-A, 2-Bs, 2-Cs) but dropped out of A levels and went to work, thus demonstrating that a 12 or more year stint at school would have been wasted. And miserable.

I shall never understand why a) "education" is regarded as only an academic thing, and b) people try to force their children into being academic during the part of their lives when they should be learning skills to enable them to cope with adult life, and while they are able to learn fastest.

Home-educating has been our way of life since Janek was born really, almost 20 years. I would definitely do it all again, and feel it has been a major factor in my children each having very definite personalities, and a confidence and maturity that is not usually seen in teenagers. I am also very pleased to have discovered, from various friends of theirs, that their peers don't see them as different. In fact, the comment they get most often on telling a friend that they were EO'd tends to be "What? Lucky!!". My children think so too.

Marg McArdell, 40 Worcester Close, Mitcham, Surrey CR4 1SP (0181 648 8830)



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

- quote taken from "The Next Learning System: and why home-schoolers are trailblazers" by

Roland Meighan.



WHY AUTONOMOUS EDUCATION?

I was late going to university and I had had a lot of responsibility in my work. Perhaps because of this, I was outraged that the staff felt entitled to insist on what we should learn. Life is too short to waste on things I am not interested in: there are more things I want to study than I will ever have time for as it is. I wanted support, resources, stimulation and information. I wanted high quality sparring partners in an exciting exploration of new ideas, introducing us to the latest research and going deeply into the subject.

Some of the lectures were good, but in tutorials some of the staff had no sense of equality, no conception that as the people who understood the subject better, they should start from where we were at, or respond to what we wanted to know. *They* would tell us what we should know. Our duty was to absorb it, and prove that we had learnt it. I was prepared to accept guidance on necessary basics (I later realised that this is a fallacy), but there was no recognition that we were autonomous people with individual interests, experiences and abilities.

Examinations, which I had enjoyed as a game I was good at, seemed increasingly irrelevant. Two friends got high marks in finals by reading (and memorising) only what was marked as essential on their reading lists, and refusing to think beyond what was required for each essay. They wanted a good degree - any degree, I didn't know how they could bear to go through it all without any interest, and I saw how disconnected exams are from enjoyment of a subject, and real learning. And when exams are imposed on me, they carry the implication that I am irresponsible, a child, not be trusted to learn what I need...

A child? Slowly I extended the possibilities. At what age did one become entitled to this trust? I realised why I had been so alienated in the sixth form. I had studied a lot, but not the curriculum I had been assigned against my wishes. For some time sixteen was as early as I was prepared to trust people to know

what they needed. Ivan Illich and A. S. Neil were idealistic and out of touch with reality. Of course you can't give that freedom to anyone younger... can you?

Then we had a baby, and it dawned on me that he was a complete person with a mind of his own, right from the start. All we had to do was protect him and give him space and opportunity to develop. I couldn't treat him as I had been brought up, as something imperfect to be moulded and forced into shape. That cripples us, turns us into tidy little bonsai trees, instead of allowing us to attain our full stature. It clips our wings so we can be controlled, instead of allowing us to soar freely and develop whatever potential we were born with. I saw it as our job to surround each child with a semi-permeable membrane. We protect them from harm coming in, but they are free to go out through the membrane at their own pace, as they grow and feel able.

I began to realise how I had been misled about child care. I knew that breast-feeding was better, but there was so much more information that was not widely known, like the way the breast produces the appropriate antigens within four hours for any infection the child has. Absolute magic, and so easy. I couldn't starve him by leaving him four hours between feeds, or to cry through the night until he 'learnt to be good,' as I had been brought up to 'know' was 'necessary'. Child-led weaning felt right, but frightening. I had fantasies of him never letting me go, but he did eventually decide, without any manipulation, that he had had enough.

Above all I realised that 'breaking his will' while he was still young enough to be dominated was not 'a sad necessity which saves the child pain later,' as I had been taught - it was the child rearing philosophy that enslaved so many Germans, and enabled Hitler to control them. The only defence we have against an Orwellian future, or environmental catastrophe, is to bring our children up to think strongly and clearly, to demand and give

equality and respect, to take responsibility for themselves and their part in society, to learn from the beginning how to argue well, how to insist on human rights in the smallest matter, how to protest and use non-violent direct action effectively.



It was toilet training that gave me a model of how I could trust him to learn what he needed in his own time. So many people still suffer as adults from anxiety and shame about toilet training. One of the reasons people give for supporting euthanasia is that they are not prepared to go back to that loss of dignity. It is appalling that our experience of toilet training was so humiliating that the thought of returning to that vulnerability makes us suicidal.

I saw him, playing naked in the garden at eighteen months, repeatedly going to one particular stone to wet it, while his friend of the same age was taken by surprise each time she peed. She often tried to copy him, but was usually too late to reach the stone. I watched this continue over that summer, and saw that although they were equally interested in gaining control over this fascinating phenomenon, she was not physiologically ready to do so. It looked as if her nerves had not yet grown in sufficiently for her to feel when her bladder was full.

One day I made them a big bowl of brown playdough, and they spent all day making turds and running to flush them down the loo with great glee. The next day they experimented with using the loo themselves. After one success, he stated that he was not yet ready for this.

A few months later they wanted to go to the local playgroup for a couple of mornings a week. They had to be toilet-trained before they could attend, so he decided to wear pants but not to use the loo while he was there. He would ask for a nappy as soon as he got home. I would put one on without comment. I never used his obvious control to

pressure him into adult behaviour before he chose. Neurologically he might be ready, but there are other aspects to this piece of development.

I hoped that if we refrained from imposing our schedule, it would be his own achievement that this would create a sense of empowerment that might enable him in all sorts of ways in the future, and serve as a basis for acquiring skills throughout his life, a confidence that they can be learnt organically, in one's own time, and integrated fully and securely. We must not steal this from him by taking control of the situation and manipulating him into being clean.

Our part was to give him a clear example of what society expects. No problem - they had always rushed after us to watch us on the loo, never tiring of the entertainment. I should not pressure him but support him non-intrusively until he felt ready to move into society on a more adult footing. This mainly entailed protecting him from impertinent enquiries - it is extraordinary how some adults feel entitled to ask children personal questions that they themselves would find offensive.

Eventually he told me he was frightened, but he did not know what of. Perhaps, like many children of this age, he was struggling with a dawning awareness of mortality, that everything changes and nothing lasts, and this had become linked to part of him disappearing down the loo. This possibility helped me to respect the magnitude of what he was working through, but I did not suggest it to him. I reassured him that he would find it OK when he was ready to do it, and helped him look for a practical solution. He settled on putting a potty inside the bath, drawing the curtains and shutting the door. After three days of this, he decided it was unnecessary, and he could use the loo.



He was voracious about learning anything and everything, as long as it was entirely on his terms. He would try almost anything we

offered, and would cooperate with most aspects of living together if we asked politely and gave good reasons. He saw red if he was told, ordered, to do something. Our mothers considered him to be a 'difficult child', and that we had got what we deserved because we had been the same. But we enjoyed him, and did not find him difficult, though he could be exhausting. He was a constant delight, with his never ending flow of originality and creative ideas. He talked early, and he argued rationally as soon as he could communicate. If he refused to do something, he usually explained why, quite civilly. He refused to be congratulated on any achievement, for instance, because it implied that we had the right to judge him: 'If I let you congratulate me for one thing, that means you can criticise me for something else, and it's my business.' He seemed to have a style of learning something, doing it once, and then refusing to do it again for months. I felt that he wanted time to consider what he would be letting himself in for before he committed himself to being able to do it. The only real area of conflict was bizarre: he *would* persist in walking along the edge of the bath, holding on to a clothesline plugged into the wall, and repeatedly pulling it out of the plaster, which was a problem since we had other no drying space. I still don't know why we couldn't resolve that.

His friend was sent to nursery school, and Rob finished his studies and got a job. I was ill and found it stressful trying to keep up with Felix on my own, and when he said: 'I don't want to go to school: I know what it'll be like, and I can't stand being told what to do,' I replied tartly that it might be an idea if he learned to. He said, 'I tell you what, I'll read you a book every day, so you'll see I'll learn to read, and then I'll be able to learn everything else, and I won't need to go to school.' I said that he was welcome to read a book every day, but he was still going to school, that it might be irritating having to fit in, but Rob and I had both found it was worth compromising, and that we had got a lot out of school. We introduced him to his teacher well in advance, and the families of the autumn intake worked hard all summer to help the children make

friends with each other before they started. It was a lovely group, and it could all have been good, with sensitivity and flexibility, and a teacher like Molly Jenkins (*School without tears*). But the teacher was near retirement, and tired. Her first requirement was obedience, as he had feared, and while he was prepared to cooperate to enable the group to function, he was not prepared to live under a dictatorship. I often helped in the classroom, and it was sad to watch those lovely little children lose their sparkle.

After that depressing year in school, we picked up again where we had been, though thereafter he was always a little more rigid and defensive and extreme. At first his education was autonomous more because he would tolerate nothing else than because our philosophical convictions were clear. We wanted him to have time to recover from school, and I kept a rough journal of what he did. We were amazed at how full a curriculum he could be said to be covering - apart from writing. Gradually, as I saw how much he absorbed, how creative he was, how powerful his thinking was, I extended my ideas on freedom in education from adolescents to younger children. I realised that there was little difference between what Felix was thriving on, and what I had wanted at university. Free schools might not be just a woolly idealistic notion. Did Summerhill really work? Gradually our philosophy caught up with our practice. I asked teacher friends about the philosophy of education, but they all said they had never had time for such reading since college, and they hadn't met much there. As there was no distinction between his education and the rest of his life, we gradually became aware that autonomous education entailed non-coercion in every aspect of his upbringing.

It still felt rather... insecure, untidy. How do you know that you haven't sold them short, that you have covered everything you 'ought' to have offered? I found reassurance in reading the exercise books of the children of friends. Felix might explore more on a topic in a couple of days than they did in a term - but that anxiety recurred for me periodically

without warning throughout his childhood. National EO gatherings were a lifeline, an opportunity to share misgivings that had to be hidden from his grandmothers who were horrified at 'how we were depriving the child.'

It was writing reports for the LEA which created most confidence in what we were doing. These were not asked for, but we felt it was a way of taking charge of the situation and having some input into the file they presumably kept. Every time it was the same: I felt panic at having done nothing, and a sense that we were about to be found out. It was too easy, too enjoyable. How could we have achieved anything if we hadn't worked hard? I would tear my hair and wail 'But we haven't *done* anything.' Rob would say placidly that I always said that, and we probably had. And then I would start throwing down on paper any fragments that came to mind, and I would go through the journal I sometimes remembered to write up. Each time, we were astonished at how much had happened, and I became more confident and assertive with the LEA and even with our families.

But what really took me by surprise was how orderly and systematic his learning looked in retrospect, despite the apparent randomness of his day to day activity. Educationalists sometimes talk about children's learning as if it would be total chaos if they didn't have the guidance of a curriculum, well planned in advance, and administered by an adult who is prepared to force them through it in the right order. We followed his interests, offered him ideas but imposed none of them, and genuinely watched with curiosity how it all unfolded. Again, it was magic, so easy. Of course it wasn't all easy. I was often unbearably tired, and although we had chosen to live low, a car would sometimes have made all the difference. And without many models to follow, there were recurring anxieties about whether we were selling him short, whether we were imposing immature, anti-authoritarian, self-indulgent notions on him, depriving him of a good education, a good start in life. I was with someone once when

she was making a spirited defence of her educational provision to an inspector, and I asked her afterwards if she had any anxieties. 'Not about the intellectual aspects of education,' she said. 'That's so easy. They devour whatever you offer them if they haven't been damaged by school. It's the emotional aspects how do we make sure that we don't put our stuff on them, after all we went through?' And that has been the constant anxiety of so many of us who were harshly brought up. All we can do is the best we can, and acknowledge our limits honestly so the child isn't mystified by the discrepancies between what we talk about and what we do.

As we work actively to think in new ways, new connections form among our brain cells. Adults don't do much of this. But children do, and we can help the quality of the networks that form in their brains by protecting their space, so they can pursue their thoughts until they have finished. I visualise school children as having these networks chopped off by each interruption, creating short sequences of disconnected nerve pathways. I see how the powerful thinking of small children is pruned as they go through school. Free children may have longer neurological sequences, with more connections to other sequences, so the pathways of their thought processes lead to sophisticated, complex and original conclusions. I watched Felix learn to think in a way that was as organised and structured as learning to walk and talk. I was amazed at the power of his thinking. It seemed to me utterly trivial *what* he learned, as long as it was adequate material for his brain to use for this process of growth.

Anne Wade, London - Middlesex

Always remember Anne's words:

".....it is our job to surround each child with a semi-permeable membrane. We protect them from harm coming in, but they are free to go through the membrane at their own pace, as they grow and feel able."



MEET FOR FUN!

Are there any little 7 year old girls in the Salisbury area who would like to meet for fun, swimming, dinosaur discussions, and long-term friendship? **Tashy** loves being home educated but misses daily contact with other girls her own age or thereabouts.

Also.....If there are home educating families in the Salisbury area who would like to get together during the week for support and fun. I have found a small pavilion near swings and a super slide that is low rent and available.

Please contact **Katrina** or **John** on 01722 716318 for further details.



SOLENT AREA EO NEWSLETTER

To subscribe to the newsletter which has details of events in the Solent area (Hants. - West Sussex) Contact Bill Matters, 15 Peter Weston Place, Chichester, West Sussex.



A MORE STRUCTURED APPROACH

The next special supplement will be about a more structured approach to education. If you have views on why we need a more structured approach or would care to share your teaching methods or ideas on the subjects with us, then we'd like to hear from you. This subject always raises debate because members are all individuals with their own ideas on what is best for their children, so we are hoping to receive many lively articles. Please put pen to paper, or start typing now and send your articles to:

Mike Allen, 71 Belgrave Road, Loughor, Swansea, SA4 6RF.



FRIENDSHIP AND SHARED EXPERIENCES

I have been home-educating my son Damien (nearly 13 years old) since April. School life became unbearable for him when his father died last year and he was subsequently repeatedly picked on by a teacher and attacked by a fellow pupil.

We would like to hear from anyone with a similar aged child/children and/or similar experiences.

Our interests include: target shooting, cycling, walking, swimming, reading, listening to music, pets and playing computer games. We look forward to hearing from you.

Pam and Damien Simone, 71 Wheatlands, Stevenage, Hertfordshire SG2 0JU



CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

My name is Joel, I am 11 and home educated. I am currently involved in a group called Young City which focuses on: children's rights, having your say, loads of fun, trips and outings, meeting new people, newsletters, setting up a young people's pub.

If you are interested and live in Birmingham for a free copy of our newsletter send SAE to **Joel Harley**, 22 Danzey Grove, Kings Heath, Birmingham, B14 6JY.



EO Camp

Ecological Community - 160 Acres, deciduous woodland, 1 1/2 miles from the sea, North Pembs. tel: **Ianto** 01239 821097



REGIONAL DIARY

EVENTS ORGANISERS PLEASE REMEMBER, WHEN GIVING FULL DETAILS OF ACTIVITIES, THAT THE NEWSLETTER CAN BE READ BY PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT MEMBERS OF EO

All regular meetings listed below will now be automatically included in every issue. Please notify the Newsletter Co-ordinator of any changes.

BATH

Hedgehogs meet for a wide variety of outings and events.

Contact: *Jo Ball & Andy Hannen,*
25 Larkhall Place BA1 6SF
Ros 01225 471253

BERKSHIRE

Wednesdays - Ice skating at John Nike Leisure Centre, Bracknell, 1.30pm - 4pm (lesson 1.30 - 2) £1.50 including lesson & skate hire. Close to M4, A329M.

Fridays - Indoor and outdoor activities at Woodford Park, Woodley, Reading, 1pm - 4pm, £3 per family. Table tennis, kite flying, model boats

Contact: *Pat Connor 0118 9662123*
2, Whitegates Lane, Reading
RG6 1ED

BRISTOL

Alternate Mondays - Ice skating

Alternate Tuesdays - Swimming at Bishopsworth Pool, 1.30 - 2.30

Fridays, Totterdown YMCA, 10.45 - 2.00, term time only.

Contact: *Kathy Nolf 0117 966 8265*

BUCKS (SOUTH)

Fortnightly meetings in a church hall, crafts and other activities, £2 per session.

Contact: *Trish 01494 783 398*

CAMBRIDGE - NEW GROUP

Regular meetings, visits, outings, etc including (from September):

Fridays Music & French group

5-8 yrs £2.50.

Contact: *Penny Kouzarides 01223 322703*

Monthly at Alconbury, Christian Group open to everyone.

Contact: *Audrey Hill 01480 219881*

CLEVELAND & DURHAM

Last Wednesday of the month

Contact: *Pauline 01642 55 628*

CORNWALL

Contact: *Anna Wheeler 01209 890378*

DERBYSHIRE

Wednesdays - 11am-3pm.

1st Wed Watermeadows, Mansfield (swimming), 2nd Wed, Atlow nr Ashbourne, 3rd Wed, Matlock area, 4th Wed Long Eaton area.

Contact: *Trevor Denyer 01629 56609*

DEVON

Contact: *Sammy & Nick Vidal-Hall*
01548 830716

Linda & Paul Hitchman
01392 660216

DORSET (BOURNEMOUTH)

Weekly meetings and visits.

Contact: *David Dowl 01202 763688*

88 Westcliff Rd Westbourne
Bournemouth BH4 8BG

Send SAE for details

ESSEX

Essex Epicycle gives details of all events. £2.50 for 4 issues.

Contact: *Sandie Cottee 01268 73325*

17 south View Rd, Rettendon,
Chelmsford CM3 8DX

FIFE

Outings & get togethers

Contact: *Karen Spy 01337 830976*

HEREFORD AND WORCESTER

Second Wednesday of each month at Yvonne Rowse's house, near Kidderminster.

Last Wednesday of each month

Jane Charles and Chris Harper's house near Malvern.

Contact: *Yvonne Rowse 01209 400750*

HERTFORDSHIRE

Fortnightly Thursdays in Hatfield
Contact: Jeffrey Bengé 0181 442 7528

ISLE OF WIGHT

2nd Saturday of the month
gathering/workshop
Weekly activities at Newport Youth
Club 10am - 1pm
Contact: Rachel 01983 872997
Alison 01983 563862

KENT

Regular meetings & activities:
Canterbury -
Contact: Anita 01227 722140
Bishopsbourne -
Contact: Hannah 01303 892417
Barming -
Contact: Jean 01622 820206
Dartford -
Contact: Angie 0181 3007238
Events list available.
Contact: Send sae to Amanda Mackenzie
16, Brambletree Cotts, Borstal
Rocheater, ME1 3TN,

LANCASHIRE

Monthly in Bolton, St Johns Hall,
Darwen.
Contact: Angelika Walter 01254 603 497
108 Tockholes Rd, Darwen
BB3 1LL (SAE please)

LEICESTERSHIRE

Monthly meetings at Friends Meeting
House, Leicester plus meetings at
homes, visits, newsletter etc.
Contact: Lucy Charlton 0116 2592118

LONDON

CHOICE- newsletter covering events,
info, views in London & SE £4.50pa
Contact: PO Box 5, Belvedere DA17 52U
Angie 0181 300 7236
Andy 0181 306 0188
http://choice.memail.com
<eochoice@memail.com>

Mondays (alternate) Hubert House,
Temple Hill, Dartford. Playing,
games, projects, garden, hall & art
room.
Contact: Angie 0181 300 7236
Andy 0181 306 9999

Tuesdays - 11am Chissold Park
playground.

Contact: Charlotte 0171 254 0419

Wednesdays -Honor Oak playground.

Contact: Keith Hertog 0181 776 859

Fridays - 11 - 2, Dartford Hall.

Garden, art room, dining room.

Contact: Mary or Andy 0181 306 0168

MANCHESTER

Bi-weekly at Peel Moat Sports
Centre, Stockport. Sports, games, soft
play, gym (over 16's) £1.10 per child.
Monthly Art Classes at Stockport Art
Gallery and meeting at Friends
Meeting House for older children.
Contact: Gil Wilson 0161 442 8723

NORFOLK

NEON gives details of all events. £1
plus four large saes.
Contact: Ali Willer 28 Cozens-Hardy Rd
Sproston, Norwich. NR7 8QF

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

Tuesdays (1st & 3rd) at Kingsthorpe
Community Centre, Northampton +
visits & outings.
Contact: Gloria & Geoff Weighill
01604 713816

OXFORD

Weekly meetings - 267 Marston Rd.
Classes in Art, (all ages) Philosophy
(over 8's) German, (all ages).
Fortnightly, Science Theory &
Speakers Corner.
Monthly, parents meetings
Contact: Wendy Plested 01865 514973

SUFFOLK

Meetings every 3 weeks with grant-
aided professional workshops.
Contact: Sarah Guthrie 01379 783678

SURREY

Fridays - Ice skating at the Spectrum
1.30-2.30, £2.35 (+65p for group
lesson).
Tuesdays- fortnightly visits, walks etc
around Guildford. (SAE please)
Contact: Penny Meader, 11 Thompsons Ct,
Pirbright, Woking GU24 0JG

SUSSEX

There is something happening nearly every day.

Contact: *Isobel Bogucki 01403 261178*

Anne Rix 01435 862794

Tuesday Club at Lindfield

Contact: *Liz Evans 01444 414058*

Monthly Newsletter/ Events List -

£8pa or £4 for 6 months, cheques to ESEO please.

Contact: *Lyndon Pugh, The Barn,
Mongers Farm, Barcombe,
Lewes BN8 5BQ*

TAYSIDE

Lots of different activities each month.

Contact: *Catriona Morrison 01382 864930*

WALES

Mondays - Cardigan area, meetings & outings nr Newport

Contact: *Anne Pope 01239 710905*

Monthly meetings in Llanelli/ Swansea area.

Contact: *Sue Haggerty 01269 861902*

Weekly meetings in NE Wales / Borders area.

Contact: *Genny Bove 01978 757489*

*49 Westminster Rd, Moss
Valley, Wrexham LL11 6DH
£2 for a year's listing*

WEST MIDLANDS

• Birmingham

Alternate Mondays - 10am - 4pm, St Paul's Venture, Malvern St (A-Z, p90, 2B). Grassed playground, urban farm, football pitch, indoor space. £1 per family plus 50p per child. Drinks (tea, coffee, squash) provided, bring packed lunch.

Contact: *Rod Drury 01384 349064*

Dee westbury 01527 452329

Last Wednesday of each month 10.30 - 12.30, Centre for the Child. Central Library. Three multimedia computers.

Contact: *Rod Drury 01384 349064*

• Dudley - Wolverhampton

Third Friday of each month, 10.30 - 3.30, Cotwall End Nature Centre, Dudley (A-Z p41 5H). Twenty acre site with walks, play areas, ponds. Wildlife, heated room. £1 per family plus 50p per child. Drinks provided (tea, coffee, squash), bring a packed lunch.

Contact: *Rod Drury 01384 349 064*

• Walsall

First Thursday of each month 1.30 - 3.30.

Contact: *Penny Clarke 01922 745465*

YORKSHIRE, NORTH & EAST

Regular meetings & visits etc

Contact: *Merayah Allwood 01904 448643*

jemergram @ zetnet.co.uk

YORKSHIRE - WEST

Outings & activities.

Contact: *Diane 01484 846946*

Third Friday of each month at Community Arts Centre, Chapel St, Bradford. **CANCELLED**

Contact: *Trish 01274 788938*

First & third Wednesdays 10.30 - 1.00, Ground Floor Centre, Hebden Bridge. Other activities arranged.

Contact: *Katherine 01422 844459*

Last Thursday of each month 11.00 - 1.30 at the Civic Centre, Huddersfield.

Contact: *Diane 01484 846946*

Clare 0113 2690061

Second Friday of the month, 1.00 - 4.00at Moortown Baptist Church, King Lane, Leeds. £2 per family.

Contact: *Judith 0113 2265515*

Clare 0113 2690061

Tuesdays - 10.30 term time - swimming at Shipley.

Contact: *Julia 01274 487182*

TO BE FREE: A Radical Alternative For Children And Parents

"Do not fear to be eccentric in opinion, for every opinion now accepted as obvious was once eccentric" - Bertrand Russell

This Journal exists to create a feeling, a knowledge, both the philosophy and the everyday living of being libertarian and autonomous non-schooling families, to support, exchange and share our understanding of this way of being with our children. Within this journal we must also discuss other areas of our children's lives and our own, because birthing and breastfeeding, marriage and partnerships, medicine, vaccination, racism, sexism, eating, Alice Miller and Andrea Dworkin and A.S. Neill, toys, politics, television and technology, deep ecology, brothers and sisters and so much more become part of any true dialogue about trying to be a libertarian parent and being a child growing up in a libertarian family.

Subscription rates for 3 issues (A4/40pp): waged £7.00/Low Income £5.00/Single copy £3.50 (inc. p&p). Cheques made payable to TO BE FREE and sent to the Vidal-Hall family, Homecroft, Brownston Street, Modbury, Devon PL21 0RQ Tel: 01548 830716

BELINDA AND HER EVIL TEACHER MISS STODD



Advertising in the newsletter is free, but if you are running a business or hoping to profit from your advert, please send an appropriate donation. Cheques should be made payable to 'Education Otherwise'. Remember that EO is run entirely by volunteers and has no income except members' subscriptions. Adverts should be limited to 50 words and sent (with any donation) to the editor of the next issue. Advertisers who wish to discuss larger ads should contact the newsletter co-ordinator.

only the child can make a true choice for themselves.

- Each child deserves honest and supportive communication to explore their needs and feelings, without parental prejudice, coercion or manipulative guidance.
- Parents have no right of authority over their children's lives, any control parents take, they take by force. Parents do not have an ultimate veto against the child's wishes, even where the parents believe their action is for the child's own good. Each child has the right to decide if they will eat sweets or not, brush their teeth, swear, say please and thank-you, learn to read, go to bed early or stay up all night, wear a coat or go barefoot in the rain - among other things.

4. Play is an integral part of childhood.

- There is no such thing as 'laziness' in childhood.
- 'Doing nothing' is a valid choice for children.

5. Each child is defined and damaged by sexism. If parents fully embrace their responsibilities to the child, they will be exploring ways to challenge the inherent sexism, at the deepest levels, within society, marriage/ partnerships and families.

- Although sexism is everywhere, it is most acutely communicated to children by their parents and the relationship which exists between their parents - it is conveyed more strongly by fathers, because sexism is the language of men.
- It is vital to be working towards a situation, within two-parent families, where fathers are

committed to dual-parenting, to enrich both the lives of the child, and ourselves as parents.

6. Compulsory schooling, imposed schooling of any sort, is a systematic mechanism for the repression of children's rights, humanity and spirit its existence serves to mould children to society's need for compliance.

- School brings an abrupt end to the relationship intrinsic in breastfeeding and bonding in early childhood.
- Each child's need for emotional nourishment cannot be met by school.
- In a supportive environment each child will learn all they need to know in the process of living. Their natural curiosity leads them to all the learning they need.
- Each child's needs, including their need of knowledge, is unique.
- All forms of testing are detrimental to the child.
- Each child's individual and personal thoughts, ideas and feelings are more important and valid for them than any amount of other people's theories and knowledge learnt from books and other sources.

7. We recognise the legacy of our own childhood in the ways we relate to our children. All impulses to treat our children with physical, mental or emotional coercion are based in the painful experiences inflicted in all our childhoods by our own parents.

- In order to avoid the pain of mistreatment and parental betrayal, each child will justify this treatment as being necessary for their well

Chair: Eleanor Stapleton

63 Sweet Briar Grove, Edmonton, London
N99LU Tel: 0181 8884 1368

Vice Chair: Vacant

General Secretary: Lucy Charlton

Church Lane Cottages, Newton Harcourt,
Leics. LE8 0FT Tel: 0116 259 2118

Treasurer: Priscilla Park Weir

212 Gordon Avenue, Camberley, Surrey
GU15 2NT Tel: 01276 22735

Publicity Officers:

Beverley Young - Tel: 01772 492245

Anita Jamal - Tel: 01904 645659

Belinda Harris Reid (South West) -
Tel/Fax: 01364 643343

Newsletter Co-ordinator: Sue Hutchin

Oakwood, Snoad Hill, Bethersden,
Ashford, Kent TN26 3ED
Tel/Fax: 01233 820008

Co-ordinators' Secretary:**Isobel Bogucki**

20 Rusper Road, Horsham, West Sussex
RH12 4BD Tel: 01403 261178

Single-Parent Contact: Sarah Martin

Rose Cottage, Three Holes Bridge,
Wisbech, Norfolk PE14 9JR
Tel: 01945 772336

Special Needs: Lesley Belgium

51 Camberley Road, Knowle, Bristol BS4
1SZ Tel: 0117 9530624

Researchers: Paula Fielding-Bell

1 Hill Top Cottages, Knott Hill Lane, Delph,
Lancs. OL3 5RJ Tel: 01457 872946
email: P.J.Rothermel@durrham.ac.uk

Catriona Morrison

93 Blacklock Crescent, Dundee
Tel: 01382 864930

Database Secretary: Janet Wilkinson

58 Brindley Close, Wembley, London HA0
1BS Tel: 0181 998 325

*Subscription renewals, address changes,
membership cards etc.*

School Phobia: Geraldine Adams

Tel: 01631 565551

GSCE Contact: Wendy Pledsted

Tel: 01865 514973

College Contact: Valerie Gomon

Tel: 01908 511247

Enquiries Secretaries Co-ordinator:**Eileen Wilson**

39 Tatenhill Lane, Branston, Burton-on-
Trent DE14 3EZ Tel: 01283 532547

Membership Secretaries Co-ordinator/**Stationery: Pam Bellinger**

The Wallingford Arms, 237 Broadway,
Didcot, Oxon OX11 8QJ

Tel: 01235 814999

*EO stationery, reusable labels (£2.50 per 100)
leaflets, posters, membership forms, car
stickers (Donations towards postage and
printing welcomed).*

EO Stalls: Lucy Charlton

Church Lane Cottages, Newton Harcourt,
Leics, LE8 0FT Tel: 0116 2592118

Publications: Chris Harper

For details of EO publications, information
leaflets and back-issues of newsletters,
send a SAE to: Badgers Holt, Birchwood,
Storridge, Malvern, Worcs. WR13 5HA
Tel: 01886 884740

*If you have had your publications list for a
while, ring Chris to check on the availability of
the items you want before ordering.*

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

*If you have a problem, contact your nearest
council member.*

Christine Adey - Dorset

Andy Archer - Leics.

Jude Ashley-Walker - Isle of Wight

Pam Bellinger - Oxon.

Isobel Bogucki - Sussex West

Lucy Charlton - Leics.

Jill Fisher - Leics.

Val Gomon - Bucks.

Sue Hutchin - Kent

Priscilla Park Wier - Surrey

Gary Podmore - Yorks.

Eleanor Stapleton - London - North

Anne Wade - London - Middlesex

Bruce Wallace - Highlands

Janet Wilkinson - London - Middlesex

Beverley Young - Lancs.

education otherwise

Education Otherwise is a membership organisation which provides support and information for families whose children are being educated outside school, and for those who wish to uphold the freedom of families to take proper responsibility for the education of their children.

Our principal aims are to:

- encourage learning outside the school system;
- reaffirm that parents have the primary responsibility for their children's education and that they have the right to exercise this responsibility by educating them out of school;
- establish the primary right of children to have full consideration given to their wishes and feelings about their education.

For further information send an A5 s.a.e. to:
P.O. BOX 7420
LONDON N9 9SG

HELPLINE 0891 518303

(calls charged at 50p per minute at all times. Recorded message,
average call length; 1- 2 minutes)

<http://www.netlink.co.uk/users/e_o/>
<e_o@netlink.co.uk>

