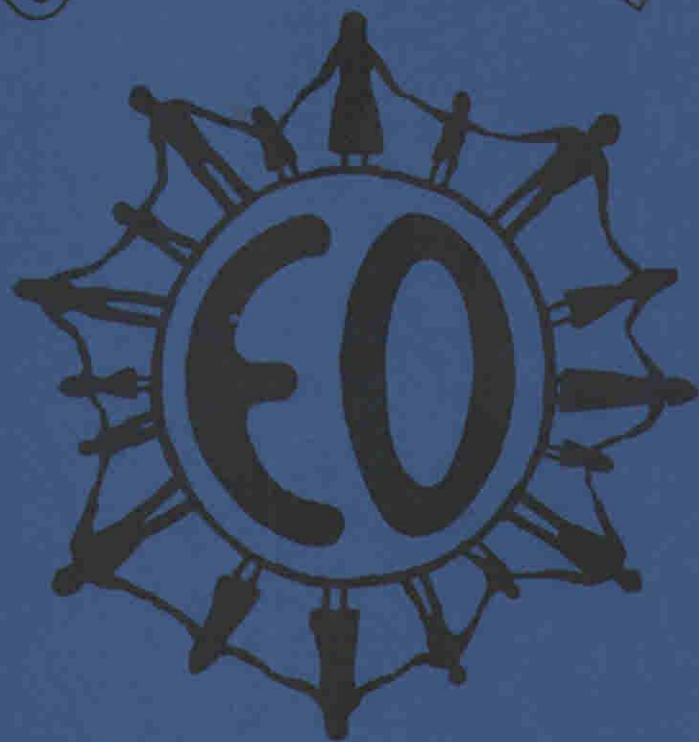


EDUCATION  
OTHERWISE



NEWSLETTER

NUMBER 12  
DEC. 1979

EDUCATION OTHERWISE  
NEWSLETTER NO. 32  
DECEMBER 1979

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## EDITORIAL

Alan Pye has resigned from editing the Newsletter, due to pressure of work at home. He has carried this responsibility for nearly two years and we are grateful for all his hard work. This issue has been put together by an editorial group consisting of some of the Publications Group: namely Dick Kitto, Ros and Dom Sweetman, Dianne Cox, Sheila Stocking and Stephanie Leland.

At the November Core Group meeting we at last succeeded in making a start on removing some of the administrative load from Dick. Henceforth, John Elenor will act as Treasurer, and Dom and Ros Sweetman as Membership Secretaries; Dick will continue to handle initial enquiries and give advice to members in difficulties.

These changes affect all members who pay by banker's order, as we will be moving the EO bank account. Enclosed with this Newsletter is a form to cancel your old standing order and take out a new one - please note that the annual subscription is now £5 (£4.50 if you pay by banker's order). Please make sure that you send off the form IMMEDIATELY (or your banker's order might be paid twice).

We hope very much that you will continue your membership and go on supporting EO. Only by growing can we hope to establish a real basis for effective local activity and mutual support. In addition, our increasing membership (now well over 400) of families joined together to assert their personal responsibility for their children's welfare enable us to make our views heard more effectively. Thirdly, in spite of the increase in the subscription rate our finances are still far from rosy and we'd like to emphasise that the new rate is a minimum; we feel sure that many of our members could manage, and might be glad, to subscribe more - a few of you already do so. Incidentally, although the new rates are the 'minimum' ones, if you really feel you cannot afford them, do please write and tell us - it has always been our policy that no-one should be excluded on financial grounds.

When on the subject of money, please do read from beginning to end the reports on the case of the Harrison family. It so easily could have been you - and the outcome could easily affect the future of EO.

EO Editorial Group, 69 Leathwaite Road, London SW11.

# THE HARRISON FAMILY APPEAL

The Harrisons are long-standing members of EO, and are at present facing a court case whose outcome may have a significant effect on EO as a whole. The following article about them was written by Brenda Parry, and appeared in the "Daily Telegraph" of 30th April 1979; it is reprinted with the kind permission of the "Telegraph".

It's soon after daybreak. There's flour to be ground, bread to be baked and the chickens to be fed - the start of a typical day in the life of the Harrison family. They live in a tiny smallholding nestling in the shadow of the hills near Tenbury Wells, Worcestershire. But it is this daily routine, or rather lack of routine, that threatens the happiness of this family of six with its two dogs, six cats and a cow.

The children are being educated at home, but Geoff and Iris Harrison have been given an ultimatum by the local education authority: "Show evidence that the children are being suitably educated for their age, aptitude and ability or send them to school." Deadline is next Monday.

It is a battle the family has fought with the authorities since the eldest child, Wanda, 16, came of school age. In a sense the family has won. For now Wanda is beyond school age; the second daughter, Andrea, is 15; Grant is 13, and the youngest, Newall, is nine. A brighter and more able family of children is hard to imagine. Mr Harrison, a heating engineer, and his wife, a grammar-school girl who became a fashion model, are convinced that their children are being brought up, however informally, in a manner that will equip them for life in the 20th century far better than most children being put through the State system.

The children themselves, articulate, bright and with the sort of respect for their parents and each other rarely found these days, say they will never go to school. Although they have many friends they tend to find children of their own age "silly about pop and things like that."

While the family pretends to be unperturbed by the local authority's threat there is no doubt that a cloud is hanging over them. In the past the authorities have threatened to take the children into care. "When I think of the life my children lead and then read of others battered and maltreated I go cold with fright," says Mrs Harrison, whose life is devoted to her family and its problems.

Two years ago, she thought she had won the legal battle over the children's education. But it seems she was wrong. A spokesman for Hereford and Worcester County Council said an attendance order had been served on the family following a meeting of the education committee which heard reports from education officers and social workers. "We want evidence that the children are being educated suitably for their ages, aptitude and ability. If that cannot be given the children must be sent to school or legal action will follow."

To this Mrs Harrison says: "Then a court will have to decide what education is."

When I called on the Harrisons Wanda, Grant and Newall were hard at work shovelling earth to divide a fish tank they are building in which they hope to have some 3,000 rainbow trout. Andrea, who has just returned from a violin lesson, was studying shorthand. She has already taught herself to touch-type as had her sister.

Scattered about the old farmhouse were dozens of examples of the family's creative work - wool spun from the fleece of local sheep, woven rugs, intricately worked tapestries and garments that would enhance any Chelsea boutique.

Wanda prefers the outdoor life. She has tried her hand at wood-turning and loves growing things. The day I was there she had potted several dozen plants for selling at the local market and put some exotic seeds - birds of paradise and yellow guava - in her propagator.

The boys' first task of the day was to clean out and feed the chickens. Given a few chicks, Grant bred and reared 60 hens. He also built their runs. Now the birds have provided him with a successful business which produces some 40 eggs a day. "It was the best way to teach him maths" says his mother. He keeps his own books and is showing his younger brother how to do the same. "They learn what is required. And they learn when they want to."

Mrs Harrison knows that if she left home tomorrow the house would run smoothly with no squabbles over who does what and no nonsense about not knowing how to do it.

The whole, evidently successful, method of education goes back to Wanda's first traumatic days at school when she had difficulty with reading. The authorities wanted to send her to a school for the educationally sub-normal. But her mother taught her to read through the phonetic methods of shorthand.

As their father did as a child, the Harrison family have experienced reading problems, one of the reasons why their parents were not anxious to put them through the state system. "There is no question of their being educationally sub-normal, but they have problems which I believe I can cope better with in the home than in any school situation," says Mrs Harrison. At nine, Newall does not enjoy reading, "but he will learn when he wants to and needs to." Grant, too, has reading problems, but he is mastering them with the support of his sisters and his mother's enthusiasm.

When I asked the children if they would be photographed in the trap they have made for their pony they refused. Grant said: "We are not something strange. We don't want to be pointed at in the market place. We just want to get on with our lives."

I left thinking they were living just the kind of creative life thousands of city dwellers crave as they cram into their tube trains - a life where children are never bored and where coping

with everyday problems rather than illusory ones is of prime importance.

If the case reaches the courts the magistrates will be faced with the unenviable task of deciding what is right for the Harrison children.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### THE PRESENT SITUATION

Iris and Geoff Harrison have been educating their four children at home full-time for a number of years. Throughout that time their LEA has been in disagreement with them over the "efficiency" of the education they are providing. Two years ago they were taken to court over their daughter Wanda, and they have now taken this case to the Ombudsman on the grounds that the LEA did not honour the agreement made at that time.

Now the LEA are taking them to court again because they have not complied with school attendance orders in respect their three school-age children; the case has just been adjourned and will come up some time in February. All those who know the Harrisons and their long history are dismayed at this continued harassment, and will want to join in supporting them in their present situation.

Their solicitor has written to the Clerk of the Court: "I can indicate immediately that very serious and significant issues of law are likely to be dealt with when this case is heard." He sees that this case could have strong repercussions throughout Education Authorities as a whole and this is borne out by the fact that the LEA will be represented in the Magistrates Court by Counsel rather than a solicitor.

This then is a very important case for EO, since its outcome is quite likely to be used as a precedent for judgments in future similar cases. For this reason it has been decided not to rely upon Legal Aid which could have a restricting and inhibiting effect on the Harrisons' freedom of action; but, to launch an appeal to raise the necessary funds. It is impossible to estimate what the cost might be; if it is settled in the Magistrates Court it could be up to £1,000, and this is what we have set as our initial minimum target; if taken to the Crown Court or high courts it could be very much more.

In a letter to another EO member, Iris Harrison wrote:

"Last time we went to Court it crucified us financially - to be self-employed and claim legal aid gave so much complication - too much to go into here - but we just had to go without essentials such as shoes. Grant ended up in wearing shoes two sizes too small as he grew and grew that year. The girls and Newall just had to wear plimsolls. To think of going through such misery again for the children's sake appalls me..."

Since this case involves all practising EO and ultimately every child in the country to gain freedom from institutionalised education please see this as your case and we will do everything in our power to help the Harrisons to carry it through to a triumphant conclusion. We hope very much that EO members will make a significant contribution towards this appeal. If the total sum received exceeds the final costs of the case, the Fund will be retained to support other similar cases.

Cheques and postal orders should be made out to HARRISON FAMILY SUPPORT FUND and sent to Dick Kitto, The Manor House, Theltenham, via Diss, Norfolk; they will be acknowledged.

\* \* \* \* \*

## EO NOTES

First Steps: One of the baffling queries that have arisen in compiling the new "First Steps" is the legal position that results from withdrawing children from a state school. So far I have been unable to find anyone in the legal profession able to clarify this and I would like to attempt another approach - to find out people's actual experiences. Can you help me?

To explain the legal position: Section 39 of the 1944 Education Act states: "If any child of compulsory school age who is a registered pupil at a school fails to attend regularly thereat, the parent of the child shall be guilty of an offence against this section."

There are no reservations or qualifications about this: if your child is registered and does not attend, you are automatically liable to prosecution. This is in fact the section of the Act which is used against the parents of truants and school refusers. Therefore we always advise families where children are attending state schools to de-register them by writing to the school's headteacher that you are withdrawing the child and requesting de-registration.

The headteacher may agree to do so, but he is not bound to. Clear regulations about de-registration are set out in the Pupils Registration Regulations 1956. These are quite elaborate and there is no need to go into them in detail except the one relevant to our situation, which is Section 4, sub-section a(iii): "The name of a child is to be deleted from the school register if ... his parent has satisfied the authority that he is receiving full-time education suitable to his age, ability and aptitude otherwise than by attendance at school."

You see the problem? You cannot have satisfied that your child is receiving... etc, if under Section 39 (s)he has up to that time been compelled to attend school. So it appears that you have two alternatives, both highly unsatisfactory:

- 1) For your child to continue to attend school, and to negotiate with the LEA about your otherwise proposals and secure their

assent to de-registration in advance of withdrawal. This could however lay you open to indefinite delays if the LEA stonewalls either deliberately or due to inertia. In fact it appears to give the LEA the power to say "No, we don't approve this proposal, your child is still registered at X school and if (s)he doesn't continue to attend we will prosecute you and you will have no defence." Your only recourse then would be to appeal to the Minister (under Section 68 of the Act) but heaven knows how much delay that would entail, and meanwhile your child is still lingering on at school.

- 2) To withdraw your child and hope that the headteacher is willing to de-register and if not to run the risk of immediate prosecution under Section 39, against which it seems you will have no defence.

This is a double-bind situation that seems to give the authorities very considerable powers of coercion if they choose to use it in that way.

Of course there are possible ways round the situation, which I won't go into here, but they are quite tiresome and costly, and ought not to be necessary. What we would like to clarify is how people have actually fared who took the straightforward course of withdrawing their children and getting on with EO.

Could people who have done this (or tried to do it and failed) write to me as briefly as possible setting out how they got on?

Education Bill (No. 2): This Bill is at present being hastened through Parliament. One of its main purposes, and the reason for haste, is to implement the education cuts that are an essential part of the Government's economic strategy, but it also contains important clauses relating to school admissions. These will affect the procedure by which parents express a preference for a particular school, and this involves amending some clauses in Section 37 of the 1944 Education Act; this is of course the section that also affects parents who express a preference for education otherwise than at school. The exact implications of these amendments are (as seems to be the rule in education law) not entirely clear, and I am making an effort to obtain legal advice about whether the changes could affect EO families.

ACE: Children's Rights Conference: 150 people attended this conference but only about three of these were children. This draws attention to the fact that children have very few rights and that the movement to improve this situation does not derive from the children themselves but from adults who are mostly fighting for rights which they think their children want or ought to want rather than rights the children have expressed a demand for themselves. As regards education the primary responsibility for this lies with the parents, and once a child is registered at school with the headteacher. In this context EO can be seen to be a movement for the rights and freedom of parents rather than for the rights and

freedom of children. But how can children establish their rights since their dependent situation means that they have no economic or social leverage and are thus subject to the goodwill and interpretative ability of adults? And anyway at what age and to what extent are children mature enough and competent enough to be able to evaluate and assess such questions?

These and similar problems were tossed around at this conference by many people who had obviously given them much thought and were very concerned about them. But practical affairs were not neglected, and several initiatives showed signs of emerging, including a proposal to set up a Children's Commissioner, or Ombudsman. The meeting was in fact a good example of the sort of useful conferences set up by ACE, which attract a lot of concerned people under one roof to talk together and out of which emerge positive and practical initiatives.

The next meeting of a similar nature is on "Alternative Schools within the Maintained System", on Saturday 8th December (see Notices).

Dick Kitto.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Education THRU' the Press

Cuts: An article in the NEW STATESMAN (14th Sept) claims that, in its first five months, the Thatcher government has done more that will radically change the structure and direction of our education system than the last Labour government even got near to in five years - both by cuts in public expenditure and by (supposedly) giving decision-making back to the local authorities. This does not extend to the improvement of educational opportunity and standards.

Savings: "...Mark Carlisle, Secretary for Education, says that the Government will reduce the school meal subsidy to £200 million, but will not shorten the school day." (GUARDIAN, 25th Sept) "...the Government has been told by local authorities that it is being 'mildly optimistic' about savings that can be made from school meals, milk and transport" (GUARDIAN, October). The Conservative proposal to charge on school transport according to distance travelled could lead to "large-scale truancy." And 15 children in mid-Wales were being taught by their parents because school transport had been withdrawn (GUARDIAN, 19th Sept). Two months later there is now a 'school' run by five mothers (OBSERVER, 28th October), the leader of whom says: "we know we are breaking the law by not sending our children to school.." Despite a refusal to supply materials, Powys education department says it will take no action at present.

Cheapo: Cheshire county council's answer to the cuts is to teach children to swim "the cheap way - on dry land" (MAIL, 28th Sept).

"Instructors will demonstrate... movements and ask the children to imagine they are surrounded by water." Said Cheshire's deputy director of education: "I don't agree that there is anything bizarre about this."

Choice: Kent county council is to give vouchers to parents that can be swapped for primary school places of their choice (MAIL, 6th October), and the new Education Act promises parents a real say in the schools they want, with a chance of appeal (MAIL, 23rd October). Meanwhile, a parent will send his daughter to school in Canada rather than the "rough" local comprehensive school in Liverpool, because she cannot go to the school of her choice (MAIL, 19th Sept).

EO: Because Avon education department "refused to believe his address", a child was told he could not attend his local school (GUARDIAN, 6th October). He is being taught at home rather than travel six miles to another school.

School: A ten-year-old boy who was consistently bullied at school because "he was the weakest in the class" collapsed and died after being chased by other boys (MAIL, 17th October).. A sixteen-year-old schoolboy ran away from home rather than admit that he had not sat his GCEs (MAIL, 20th Sept).

A new 'O'-level exam will test on saving, pay-packets and understanding a mortgage (GUARDIAN, October). In an attempt to get young Americans to read, the Burger King Corporation has launched a campaign to "get at the children through their eating habits" using a touring van-cum-mobile-library disguised as a spaceship (GUARDIAN, 16th October). The MAIL (22nd October) describes the sudden movement of American children from state to private schools following the deterioration of the former. It warns that this could happen to the British school system. Annual tests, retraining for teachers, and more discipline are proposed in New York, following the Education Board's admission that "the city's schools have almost totally failed the one million pupils and parents" (DAILY TELEGRAPH, 20th October).

Discipline: The ILEA's decision to phase out all corporal punishment within the next two years provoked a correspondent of the GUARDIAN (9th October) to say: "...this is not to become enforceable until February 1981. Presumably this will allow them to use up their supplies of canes, birches, whips etc." STOPP has asked every other LEA to abolish corporal punishment (GUARDIAN, 17th October) and, in a unique newspaper advertisement (ISLINGTON GAZETTE, 2nd November) appeals for confidential information on the use of corporal punishment in one particular North London school (Highbury Grove). Its Headmaster said that the appeal was "...nasty, sneaky, vaguely dirty..." and that he was "faintly nauseated" by it (ISLINGTON GAZETTE, 2nd November).

The Future: Nicholas Tucker, writing in WHERE magazine, suggests that children write reports on their teachers in an attempt to stimulate feedback (GUARDIAN, 6th October). He says that anyone who thinks this might encourage children to be offensive is

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL - All subscriptions are due on 1st January.

(\* delete which does not apply)

either: \* I enclose a cheque/PO for £5.00 payable to  
EDUCATION OTHERWISE:

Name (CAPITALS):

Address:

or: \* I have completed both the Banker's order forms below

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NEW BANKER'S ORDER

Please pay Barclays Bank, Holland Park, London W12 (code 20-41-56)  
the sum of £4.50 on the 1st January 1981 and annually thereafter  
until cancelled, for the credit of Education Otherwise (A/C 10351369)

SIGNED:

DATE:

Name and address of your bank  
(CAPITALS):

Your name and address (CAPITALS):

---

Note to bank: when making payments please quote No. EO

Please send this upper portion, together with a cheque/PO for £1.50  
John Eleñor (EO Treasurer), 18 Eynham Road, London W12.

cut  
here

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here

Please send this lower section to YOUR BANK, IMMEDIATELY

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CANCELLATION OF OLD BANKER'S ORDER

Please cancel my standing order for the credit of EDUCATION  
OTHERWISE at the Trustee Savings Bank, with immediate effect.

SIGNED:

DATE:

Name and address (CAPITALS):

The first part of the document discusses the general principles of the proposed system. It is intended to provide a clear and concise summary of the main points. The following sections will describe the various components and their functions in detail.

The second part of the document details the specific implementation of the system. This includes a description of the hardware and software requirements, as well as the procedures for installation and operation. It is important to note that the system is designed to be flexible and adaptable to a wide range of applications.

The third part of the document provides a comprehensive overview of the system's performance and reliability. This is based on extensive testing and evaluation, and it demonstrates that the system meets all the required specifications. The results of the testing are presented in the following tables and graphs.

The fourth part of the document discusses the future development of the system. This includes a description of the planned improvements and the timeline for their implementation. It is expected that these improvements will further enhance the system's performance and reliability.

In conclusion, the proposed system is a highly effective and reliable solution for the problem at hand. It is designed to be easy to use and maintain, and it provides a clear and concise summary of the main points. The following sections will describe the various components and their functions in detail.

revealing an "over-apprehensive image of childhood" which he finds often evident when educational reform is being discussed.

Professor Tom Stonier of Bradford University told a conference that, within a decade, children would learn the three Rs from a computer at home and go to school in order to learn "how to be effective parents, good lovers, how to grow old gracefully and face death" (DAILY TELEGRAPH, 28th Sept). Said Professor Stonier: "It is no longer enough simply to teach children how to earn a living; they need too an education on how to live." The TELEGRAPH added that ILEA's computer advisory panel had, the day before, declared that backward London pupils would soon be taught on an individual basis by computer. Computers would also be used to "write reports".

A Somerset educational psychologist says that school phobics should be forced back to their classes, kicking and screaming on the way if they must, if detailed investigation shows that it is the right approach for them (GUARDIAN, 7th November).

Dr Nigel Blagg became concerned about the numbers of school refusers (aged 10 to 16) who had settled into a routine of home tuition with little hope of returning to school. His tutor would like to see the tough treatment "prescribed" nationally "and the problem of school phobia itself greatly reduced."

Sarah Guthrie.

\* \* \* \* \*

## CORE GROUP

Minutes of Core Group meeting 3/11/79: John Elenor  
Held at: 69 Leathwaite Road, London SW11, at 10.30 a.m.

present: Dianne & Bruce Cox, Dick Kitto, Sarah Guthrie, Helen Holland, Joan Hoare, Stephanie Leland, Dominic & Ros Sweetman, Robina Pye, John Elenor, Heather Young, Georgina Winkley.

apologies from: Sheila Stocking, Helen Fletcher.

1. Bruce Cox was elected chairman of the meeting, and agreed to serve as chairman for the next twelve months.
2. Minutes of the last meeting were read and approved.
3. Matters arising
- 3.1 Questionnaires (ref:3.1) It was noted that in fact the work of collation had been done entirely by the Coxes (see item 9 below).
- 3.4 Subscriptions (ref:7.1 & 7.2) Opinion in the questionnaires suggested that many members would be happy to pay an even higher subscription. It was felt that this would be unfair to those with low incomes. A two-tier system was discussed but left in abeyance for the moment. However, it was agreed that

an appeal should be made in the next Newsletter for donations from members who felt they could afford something above the new subscription. The non-members donation appeal return-slip has been printed.

- 3.5 Fundraising (ref:8) The money set aside for the paper ad. had been spent on a duplicator since this appeared at the time a better bargain. However, the discussion still favored the ad., and Sarah agreed to place an ad. - appealing for money and members - in the personal column of the about-to-reappear Times (or, if that were too expensive, the Guardian.)
- 3.6 Appeals to Charities (ref:8b) Agreed that a volunteer is needed to talk to the volunteer in Hitchin.

#### 4. Delegation of Work

Unforeseen circumstances had prevented some of the delegation as outlined in the previous minutes (ref:3) New appointments were made as follows:-

- 4.1 Membership secretaries - Dom & Ros
- 4.2 Treasurer - John
- 4.3 Enquiries Secretary - The Coxes have agreed to try and find one from among those who have offered help in the questionnaires. Dick agreed to hold the fort until the next Core Group meeting (unless a volunteer was found earlier.)
- 4.4 Growing Without Schooling - Stephanie agreed to distribute and monitor.
- 4.5 List of members, etc. - it was reported that Courtney has almost completed this.
- 4.6 Fundraiser - agreed to defer to a later meeting. But an item should be inserted in the Newsletter about local fundraising.

#### 5. Constitution

- 5.1 Agreed that a constitution is not yet needed.
- 5.2 John was asked to clarify the legal position of the treasurer.

#### 6. Core Group Activities

- 6.1. It was agreed that minutes should be circulated to the members as soon as they are produced.
- 6.2 It was agreed that agenda items should be submitted to the chairman [Bruce Cox, Park Lodge, Tilton Lane, Billesdon, Leicester LE7 9DS.] at least three weeks before the next meeting; he and the minuting secretary could then compile an agenda to be circulated to all members two weeks before the meeting.
- 6.3 It was agreed that Core Group meetings should be preceded by a short Publications Group meeting to discuss policy items which could be referred to the Core Group; any decisions reached by the Core Group could then be acted on by Publication at their executive meeting which should follow immediately (pausing only for food and drink).

#### 7. Newsletter

- 7.1 Robina reported that Alan was too uncertain of the amount and placing of his free time for the next few months, and consequently wished to temporarily relinquish the post of editor. The group offered him a hearty vote of thanks for all the work he has done to date.

- 7.2 It was agreed that the current and one following issue should be edited collectively; items should be submitted to Dominic.
- 7.3 It was agreed that the next Core Group meeting should discuss this procedure in the light of experience.
8. Policy Documents The question of the most efficient way to produce policy documents was referred to the Publications Group.
9. Questionnaire
- 9.1 Replies indicated that a resources list was needed, which could most easily be compiled by a London member who could be in constant touch with the Membership Sec. It was agreed to ask Sheila Stocking.
- 9.2 We have been informed of the free use of a computer for programming information. Agreed it would be most useful in compiling lists of members to pass on to local contacts.
- 9.3 It was agreed that a short version of the questionnaire should be circulated annually in March. The Coxes agreed to produce the shortened version.
10. Harrisons Iris Harrison had submitted, for the Newsletter, a report on the latest round of her legal battle. After some discussion it was agreed to preface the report with a paragraph explaining the background.
11. Booklist It was agreed that a booklist is needed for parents; the matter was referred to the Publications Group.
12. Sale of Newsletters The suggestion was made and agreed to that the Core Group members should attempt to sell the Newsletters in their locality.
13. Date of next meeting 26-27 Jan. 1980 at 69 Leathwaite Road. Publications 11am - 1pm, Core 2pm - 4pm. Newsletter Sun 9.30am. Come early if you can for Publications and Newsletter meeting. Lunch will be provided on both days.

Meeting closed 1.37pm.

\* \* \* \* YOU ARE WELCOME TO COME TO CORE GROUP MEETINGS \* \* \* \*

Any member is welcome to attend any Core Group meeting as an observer, and even more welcome to join in the work of the group if they think they can stand the strain. Also, any member is welcome to submit items for the agenda (see minute 6.2 for details)

\*  
\* \* \*  
\* \* \*

# PUBLICATIONS GROUP

Minutes of meeting of Publications Group: Dick Kitto.  
Afternoon and evening of 3 November 1979

Chairperson: Dom Sweetman

Present: Ros Sweetman, Stephanie Leland, Dianne Cox, Helen Holland, John Elenor (for the legal document discussion), Sarah Guthrie, Robina Pye, Joan Hoare, Georgina Winkley.

Legal Document: The production of the new legal documents had proved much more time-consuming than anticipated; the revised "First Steps" is not within sight of completion, and the "short legal document" was becoming too long to issue free, and still had a number of outstanding legal question-marks.

It was decided that:

- 1) Dick should try to sort out the remaining queries of the short legal document as a matter of urgency;
- 2) Dianne should combine the short legal documents with acceptable parts of the old "First Steps" to produce an interim Second Edition of "First Steps";
- 3) Dom should produce a one-page version of the "short legal document", which will become part of the introductory letter;
- 4) The production of a more detailed "First Steps" should be looked on as a possible long-term task for the legal group.

Stationery: Stephanie will produce paste-ups; Ros/Dom will print it.

Early Years: Dom will discover whether the current "Early Years" can be reprinted; if it can, then re-editing by Sarah will be deferred until March; if not, re-editing will be pushed forward as early as possible, and a new edition produced. At present we have about 25 copies left.

Introductory letter: Sarah will continue to re-write parts of the old introductory letter and part of James Fearnley's introduction, and circulate to the group before the next meeting. Bruce Cox will conjoin the application form/questionnaire to make a new application form which will be sent out to new members after they have joined, and also each June to members for updating. Ros will produce a further hundred copies of the current introductory letter for use in the meantime.

Newsletter: Members of the publications group will produce the December and March Newsletters (Dom, Ros, Dianne, Stephanie, Dick). Future policy will be discussed at the next meeting, in the light of experience with the December issue. The group as a whole endorsed the principle of group editorship if this proved practicable.

The group felt that they should have the right to edit or condense contributions unless a contributor specifically stated otherwise. It was also agreed that the producers should have the right to

correct grammatical, spelling or punctuation mistakes, etc, during final typing, and also (if absolutely necessary) to condense further.

Contributors should be sought via the newsletter. Contributors should be asked to type contributions if possible, and to put their telephone numbers so that if necessary they can be contacted about editing.

It was suggested that important or interesting news items should be placed immediately after the editorial. Stephanie and Sarah will sort out division of labour between news items and media reports. Stephanie to write to publishers for review copies of books. Various lists of books (eg non-sexist books) to be produced.

We should determine the size of the Newsletter by the amount of acceptable material rather than by limitations of postage, within reason.

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#### EXAMINATIONS: Chris Stokes

If you want to get some 'O'-levels or some 'A'-levels, not only do you need to study for them but you must also jump over the various administrative hurdles. The two are in fact connected; for example, what you study may be governed by which institution will allow you to sit which exams as an external candidate.

#### What exams are there?

Broadly there are four types of public exams taken by school pupils:

- a) GCE (General Certificate of Education) - the well-known 'O'- and 'A'-levels.
- b) CSE (Certificate of Secondary Education) - grade 1 of which is said to equate to an 'O'-level.
- c) CEE (Certificate of Extended Education) - a newish exam to provide higher level education for pupils with CSE's.
- d) RSA (Royal Society of Arts) - mainly (but not totally) 'practical' subjects like typing.

For the purposes of this article, we can forget about CSE and CEE because it is not possible to take these as an external candidate. One important aspect of them is that they are teacher marked and moderated (standards compared) and the rules state that "candidates must be in full-time attendance at school." Perhaps a pity, because some of them make for much more interesting work than do some of the more traditional 'O'-levels.

#### What is the GCE?

GCEs are awarded by each of the nine examining boards, which operate nationally (some internationally) but are very much regionalised as they are related to particular universities (eg,

the Joint Matriculation Board represents Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool, Sheffield and Birmingham Universities). But perhaps the most popular Boards (ie chosen by a large number of schools and colleges, and therefore with exams more likely to be available for external candidates) are AEB (Associated Examining Board) and London (University of London School Examinations Council). They are all 'independent' and not directly accountable to government. Some say that because of this, and because vast sums of money are involved as fees, they have been slow to change or evolve.

There are two levels of GCE, Ordinary and Advanced, and results are in several grades of pass/fail; usually from A-E, where D and E are passes at 'A'-level but not at 'O'-level. For entry to some colleges and universities, these grades are more important than the acquisition of a pass certificate; but many jobs require just a certain number of passes, with grades unspecified.

Most GCEs are single subject, though there are now an increasing number of "multi-disciplinary" subjects, such as Environmental Studies. While 'O'-levels are usually taken at 16 years, there are in fact no age restrictions at all. 'A'-levels can be taken without having done 'O'-levels in the same subjects. For both 'O' and 'A'-levels, there are two sittings per year; one in May/June and one in November/December/January. Schools often use the winter sitting for pupils "re-sitting" to try to get a better grade.

#### What is the RSA?

The RSA was founded in 1754 to "advance, develop and apply every branch of science in connection with the arts, manufacture and commerce" and while some 'academic' subjects are covered, such as geography, most are work-related or practical, including accounting, typing, audio-typing, shorthand, office practice etc. There are three different stages in RSA: basic, intermediate and advanced. Usually four sittings are held each year in March, April/May, June/July and November; as with GCEs, external candidates can sit the exams at any age.

#### What do I decide first?

Put it like this: If you want to be examined in a subject and syllabus in which you are very interested, you may have difficulty in finding somewhere to take you as an external candidate. The first step, literally years before you want to take an exam, should perhaps be to find out which Exam Boards are used by which schools and colleges which also take external candidates in your area. Schools have the freedom to choose whichever Board they wish for each subject, but usually concentrate on one or at most two. Phone the schools/colleges themselves, or your LEA Education Office. Because of their size, colleges usually have Examinations Officers who can be very helpful characters about exams, so it might be worth starting there. Your local institutions may also be loath to take external candidates for subjects where there are no internal candidates, even if the same Board is being used. It's worth checking their policies in advance.

The next step will be to find out if the 'available' Exam Boards offer the subject and syllabus you want. It is said that the certificates of all Boards are equally valued in that they are all recognised by the DES - well, each to his own myth. But they do vary, sometimes considerably, in the content or syllabus for each subject they offer to examine. Schools may help you by lending you a copy of their Board's booklets, and colleges should have them available in their libraries; but failing all local help, write directly to the Exam Boards in question to request their booklets, or try your local bookseller. (The Exam Boards can also supply copies of previous exam papers to give you an idea of what to expect.)

#### Am I taking the 'right' exams?

Your interests may conflict with necessity. If, for example, you want to go to a university later, you need to sort out well in advance how many 'O'- and 'A'-levels are required as a basic entry requirement, both for the University and the particular course. Check required grades and subjects; some demand 'O'-level English Language and Maths from all entrants, and some courses require Latin! All this means sorting out which university or college course you fancy and at which establishments (see the UCCA handbook, the Colleges of Higher Education handbook, and/or the ACE 'Guide for Applicants to Universities etc.')

You may just want the exams to enable you to apply directly for a particular job. Again, English and Maths might be relevant, though grades perhaps not so much (depending on the job). But watch out for the "qualifications inflation" game, whereby some professions escalate their entry requirements annually (in order to keep out rather than let in?). Once more: it's worth checking years in advance.

On the other hand, you may just want some certification of the levels you've obtained in studying subjects in which you're interested. I suppose that, in theory at least, this is still possible!

#### Practical Examinations

The National Extension College, which runs correspondence courses for GCEs, advises its clients that "you can pass 'O'-level science examinations without practical experience of laboratory work, but 'A'-level science exams usually include a practical examination, or require you to provide a record of your own practical work. Some local colleges will help students organise this. If you are interested in taking a science course at 'A'-level, you should write to Student Services for a leaflet on Science Practical Facilities." If so for science, could similar arrangements with local colleges be made for other practical subjects such as woodwork/metalwork? You can but try them.

#### Timing

The main message is: you must go in for long-term planning! For

example, to be safe you should register as an external candidate for your particular exams at least six months before the sitting at which you plan to take them. It is worth noting that the closing date which schools/colleges give for entry as external candidates is generally several weeks before the closing date set by the relevant Exam Board, in order to give themselves time to do all the administration. Also start the process of applying to colleges/universities before Christmas of the academic year before that in which you wish to start at the college.

Schools usually allow two years for GCEs and while EO students will perhaps need different lengths of time, account must still be taken of the fact that a syllabus can vary considerably from year to year (eg set books for English Literature). So if you plan to sit an exam in 1986 and to take two years to study for it, you'll need to find a suitable Exam Board, the syllabus and the local college/schools at which to sit the exam before September 1984. And before that you may need to have discovered job/college/university entry requirements for September 1986.

### Fees

It costs money to take exams. To sit AEB 'O'-levels in June 1980 will cost £3.00 plus £2.70 for each subject taken, plus about £2.00 to the college (though colleges vary in the fees they charge). Exam Boards vary, too: London's is £3.00 per subject.

AEB 'A'-levels cost £3.00 plus £5.25 per subject, and of course the college fee.

The RSA are slightly cheaper; basic £2.10, intermediate £2.60 and advanced £3.10 - and the college fees will be lower too.

It seems that these fees have been rising at about 10-15% per annum on average.

### Useful references:

1. "How to apply for admission to a University": handbook from The Universities Central Council for Admissions, PO Box 28, Cheltenham, Glos GL50 1HY.
2. "A Guide for Applicants to Universities, Polytechnics and other colleges offering Degrees": ACE, 18 Victoria Park Square, London E2 9PB.
3. "The Colleges and Institutes of Higher Education - Guide": The Treasurer, Standing Conference of Principals/Directors in HE, Worcester College of Higher Education, Henwich Grove, Worcester WR1 6AJ.
4. "Guide to Courses: Study at Home": National Extension College, 18 Brooklands Avenue, Cambridge CB2 2HN.

# EDUCATING ARCHIE

BY SEG



SERVAS: Roger and Lesley Downie

EO members may be interested in an organization called SERVAS (Esperanto for 'we serve') which we've been in for a couple of years. Servas is devoted to building peace, in a rather novel way. It aims to increase international understanding by helping travellers meet people of the country, to discuss their various experiences, thereby greatly enriching their journey.

As a Servas host, you open your home to Servas travellers from all parts of the world. You may offer as much hospitality as you wish, normally for two nights. But you are not simply a hotel. The travellers can be expected to help with family tasks - but mainly the meeting is an opportunity for discussion of your different countries and experiences. As a Servas traveller, you are given the host list for any country you intend visiting, and then are free to contact hosts in the areas you wish to visit, and who seem interesting to you (the lists contain information on the interests of the hosts).

We've been in Servas for two summers and have received travellers from several European countries, USA, Canada, New Zealand, India and Brazil. The visits have all been worthwhile in their different ways, and we look forward to travelling Servas when our children are a little older. But already, Servas is proving a valuable educational experience for them. They are used to meeting and talking to people from many lands, hearing about their way of life, and seeing on the map where they come from - a really vivid way to learn about the world.

Anyone interested in Servas should contact Graham Thomas, 80 Bushwood Road, London E11 3BW.

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WHO SAID IT? : Answer on page 28

"If we were content to teach a child to read and write and do his modicum of arithmetic, just as at an earlier stage his mother teaches him to walk and to talk, so that he may toddle his little way upon the face of the earth by himself, it would be all right. It would be a thousand times better, as things stand, to chuck overboard all your drawing and painting and music and modelling and pseudo-science and 'graphic' history and 'graphic' geography and 'self-expression', all the lot. ... If he likes to learn, the means of learning are in his hands... If he doesn't like to learn, it is his affair. ... We, who sail under the flag of freedom, are bullies such as the world has never known before... And then, as to cost: which is always important. Our present system of education is extravagantly expensive, and simply dangerous to our social existence... We would be wise if by decree we shut up all ... schools at once, and kept them shut."

Was it: Dick Kitto, in 1976  
John Holt (reformer and de-schooler), in 1969?  
Robert Morley (actor, who hated school) in 1959?  
Unknown opposer of Education Act in 1944?  
D.H. Lawrence (writer) in 1918?

QUESTIONNAIRE REPORT: Bruce & Dianne Cox, Dom Sweetman

A questionnaire was sent out to all members of EO with the March 1979 Newsletter, with the object of building up a picture of the attitudes and circumstances of EO members. Bruce and Dianne Cox have analysed the returned questionnaires and produced a detailed report, which this article summarises. The full report can be obtained from Bruce Cox, Park Lodge, Tilton Lane, Billesdon, Leicester LE7 9DS; send 9"x6" sae plus 3 10p stamps to cover photocopying.

81 questionnaires were returned (about 25% of those sent out). Because the response was not high, the results are not necessarily typical of EO as a whole (and are already 9 months out of date). However, it does give some clue as to what you're all doing.

Children

64 families responding had 104 children of school age; of these, 36 families had 44 children out of school. Only a handful of families had more than one school-age child at home. Although about a third of these children had never attended school, many children have been deschooled for a rather short time. We can't know whether this is because there is a high turnover, or the start of a rapidly-growing movement.

Particular responses from parents whose children were in school were:

- |   |                                |
|---|--------------------------------|
| "In school but expect to be withdrawn"  | - 7 children                   |
| "You would like to take them out but don't feel that you could cope"<br>(Two families gave financial reasons for their inability to cope) | - 8 families                   |
| "You would like to take them out but the LEA has threatened you"  | - 1 child                      |
| "You would like to take them out but they prefer to stay in"  | - 10 families<br>(18 children) |
| "You support EO in principle but not for your children at present"  | - 21 families                  |

Several parents mentioned that the attraction of school was social rather than academic:

"We feel that she would be too isolated; she has a great need of children's company"

"She missed friends" (of a girl who had been out of school and then returned).

## Work

Used set timetable:	13
Planned curriculum on project basis:	4
Informal:	14
Mixed:	8

The three styles suggested were clearly not seen as being exclusive. Many who had a timetable stressed that they were flexible about it and tended to become more informal as time went by.

There were problems with the question: "Do you actually teach them?". In some sense most parents did but those children who were taught informally tended to initiate their own areas of learning rather than having this dictated by the parent:

"Teaching comes usually out of material being covered, usually from (the child) as she has problems or wishes to talk things out."

"Teaching? It depends on the definition but we seem to teach less and less."

"We do not just work a five-day week. We find indirectly as always that teaching is a seven-day affair."

"All parents - the unconscious millions - 'teach' their children, and with far greater influence - whether positive or negative - than Teachers (capital T). If the question really means 'instruct', the answer is: 'Rarely, unless requested.'"

Only a few EO children were preparing for examinations, and only 7 were using correspondence courses. Some parents employed tutors, chiefly for music. Most people found libraries helpful - one EO group had the use of a room at a library once a week.

Only 7 families had some sort of co-operative arrangement, but most respondents say they would like to be involved with others. Although many had met other EO families the likelihood of finding someone nearby with similar attitudes to education, with children who were of a similar age and who got on with one another, was not very high. (Cf social isolation in the "Problems" section).

## Relationship with the LEA

All except four families practising EO had informed the LEA (about half before and half after deschooling). The attitude of LEAs was "helpful" - 13, "neutral" - 16, "mildly obstructive" - 6, "threatening" - only 3 (two reports from Croydon).

15 families submitted a timetable, 21 did not. What we can't tell is how many people were asked to produce a timetable, and what happened if they did not comply.

26 families had been inspected: many every term or less (but 2 individuals reported "every few weeks"). Several mentioned that inspections became less frequent as time passed. Most LEAs did not have specific requirements about written work, and with only 7 of the 33 families had the LEA insisted or tried to insist on a qualified teacher.

The only family to get a home tutor was one in which the child was handicapped; help from schools was rarely sought.

The treatment of EO families clearly varies from area to area, but it would be a mistake to infer that the treatment of EO families is determined by a clear framework of rules even in one area. It may not be formally demanded that a parent is qualified simply because it may already have been informally established that the parent is "educated". It would be no guarantee that the demand will not be made in another case. Similarly a demand for specific requirements may be simply held in reserve as a way of coercing particular families about whom the LEA official is "suspicious".

### Problems

Respondents were asked to indicate some particular problems:

Children's isolation	28 families
Financial	19 families
Social pressures	15 families
Feeling that you can't cope	15 families
Lack of teaching facilities	12 families
Lack of opportunity for organised games	6 families
Child's progress compared to those in school	2 families

Particularly in the case of children's progress compared to those in school, this section was used to point out advantages rather than problems.

The more serious problems were often qualified, particularly the fourth; parents felt that they couldn't cope "occasionally" or "at first". Financial pressures were frequently described as severe, particularly by single parents.

Other problems included: lack of time, isolation of parents, the lack of an opportunity to be alone, the difficulty of coping with a younger child, and the struggle to satisfy the LEA without too much compromise.

### Yourself and EO

80% of the families had had contact with another EO member; 27 with the local contact member. Many families expressed willingness to help EO at a local level.

18 families had been involved in some attempts to set up a local group, but their comments reveal a good deal of frustration and

difficulty. Only rarely had a clear permanent relationship with other EO families been established:

"We answered a letter in the Newsletter from a local member and we now meet in each other's houses and plan activities for the future."

More typical was:

"We did have a contact but it came to nothing as the kids did not seem to have much in common and we had different educational aims. We do however correspond with a family that lives in another part of the country."

Often considerable effort led to little reward:

"We went to a meeting last year but most parents had younger children and they really wanted a local play group."

"I wrote several letters to people whose names EO gave me but nothing came of them."

"Various people met for several months but dropped out when they realised the extent of the commitment."

"We advertised in the local press - no response"

Often contact was very important as a source of moral support. This is more readily available than social contact for the children or arrangements for shared teaching/learning:

"We meet on Tuesday afternoons in a room at the local reference library. It's good for exchange of experience but we don't do any work together - the children's age and interests are too different."

Perhaps, once established as EO families, the need for contact is felt less. As one confident parent says:

"We have more than enough to do on our own and we are not near enough [to other EO families]."

### Your philosophy

Respondents were asked to pick one of three statements on EO. 44 families identified themselves as "wanting something quite different (from school) for their children" - 3 of these had religious reasons. 32 families "were driven to EO by problems that arose in school". 18 families "approved or at least went along with the sort of education schools are meant to provide, but considered that they could do better".

In the more specific questions, 14 families identified the problem of very bright children held back in school.

Many parents were doubtful about categorising themselves in this fashion; many included themselves in more than one category.

The impression is that there is a very marked, though not completely clear-cut, division between parents who want the traditional task of education done more efficiently, and those who tend to question the use or value of traditional education whether efficient or not.

One parent who did not use any of the selected categories wrote:

"The reasons we do not wish our children to attend schools are as follows:

We dislike the repressive attitude that schools generally have towards children.

The fact that children are not able to explore their chosen topics for as long as they like, when they like.

The artificial and isolated environment a school provides.

The large amount of wasted time when children could be pursuing their own interests elsewhere.

The lack of involvement a parent is able to have."

#### EO

24 families see EO as a private family affair, and feel that EO should concentrate on catering for that need. 48 saw EO as "part of a wider social and political movement to which EO should be positively committed."

Often there were reservations about the use of the word 'political', as it was taken (we assume) to mean party political. The theme of liberty was referred to often, particularly with reference to the "... wider social and political movement ... "

35 families responded positively to a third statement: "Do you feel that people are only able to contemplate home education because they have a privileged background; and that EO has a responsibility to extend that opportunity more widely?"

Some members thought that although EO is part of a social movement, "... how that movement is understood should be left to the individual member, given the diversity of membership of EO." Some felt that the differences within EO were so great that it could not be seen as part of a wider movement. However, the more general view was that the freedom and right of parents, as against the State, was a unifying bond sufficiently powerful for us to sink our differences and "... see that the otherwise law is implemented without harassment."

The only other organisations to which a significant number of parents belonged were the National Association for Gifted Children and the Advisory Centre for Education. Most respondents thought that we should seek to make ourselves better known.

## Subscriptions

73% of respondents would willingly accept an increase of the sub to £5, which has in fact happened.

Many replies suggested that there be some flexibility in the subscription rate; clearly some families would be hard-pressed to pay more. This flexibility has always existed in an ad-hoc, informal way; the problem is to find a formal scheme which will take advantage of the ability and willingness to pay of many members to keep the organisation solvent, while not excluding those who wish to join but are poorer.

Several questionnaires pointed out the necessity for published accounts which could be studied in the Newsletter.

Several members suggested that a charge be made for services and that the cost of booklets be increased. Answers sometimes implied a vision of EO as a rather larger, grander organisation than, in fact, it is.

## Summary

We were slightly disappointed at the size of the sample, but cheered at the large number of parents practising EO. It is encouraging to see that difficulties with the LEA are rare; there is a tendency for the Newsletter to suggest that troubles are more common, simply because more is written about those parents who are being harassed. We are conscious that the questionnaire appeared to be designed only for those with school-age children, whereas we had intended that all members could complete one. We hope to correct some of the deficiencies of the questionnaire and to send it out once a year with the Newsletter, as well as to all new members.

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## SETTING UP A LOCAL GROUP: Robina Pye

There are many reasons for setting up a local group. Through it one can find support and encouragement, one can share one's interests, exchange ideas and find opportunities for discussing one's aspirations and experiences. Knowledge and experience of the attitude of the LEA can be accumulated and this can be of particular benefit to new EO members.

One method of getting a local group started is to advertise in every available space: playgroups, libraries, churches, village halls, health centres (alternative ones at any rate), wholefood shops, community centres and your local newsmagazines. Some of these offer free advertising so although the process is time-consuming it need not be costly. Advertising in the local press will get the news across but in the past such advertisements have sometimes ended up as front-page splashes; so it is as well to decide in

advance if this is the sort of publicity you want and can cope with. Experience has shown that even this may not bring in many enquiries, and it is possible that it may sour relationships with the LEA.

Your advertisement may take the form of an announcement that you are practising EO and are inviting enquiries, or you may arrange a meeting stating place, date and time. The responses are likely to be few. In any case they will be varied in usefulness and attitude. You may even attract people who openly disapprove and come only to criticise - though you are perfectly entitled to ignore them! However, you may be lucky enough to discover that there are already some families quietly practising otherwise education, and others confidently intending to do so. These could be the nucleus of your group. It may be important not to restrict your group's membership to these families, since parents with children at school may have knowledge and experience that can be of benefit, and may be able to offer valuable support and advice. It may be pertinent to point out here that people join groups for all kinds of personal reasons which may be quite unconnected with the aims of the group. But I think that it is generally better to adopt a welcoming attitude to all.

An altogether simpler method of forming a group may be to contact existing EO members in your area. At the July Cote group meeting it was decided to draw up and maintain a list of members on a regional basis. If you become a local contact, new members will be given your name, and you will become the focus for a new group.

I feel that it is important not to set one's sights on bringing together a group of adults of similar philosophy and outlook. EO parents differ in many ways, and this objective is likely to remain a vision. On the other hand, if the primary objective is social experience for the children, rather than group learning, there is no need for the adults to share their philosophical position. If the adults can agree to differ, both they and the children may open the way for the development of relationships to the benefit of all.

Accounts of the setting up of local groups may be found in Newsletters 5,6,7,8,10 and 11; and in the Digest of issues 1-4. Good luck with your group.

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## REVIEWS

"Undercurrents" : reviewed by Sheila Stocking.

"Undercurrents" (a bimonthly magazine of alternative issues, with a bias towards the environment) devoted its October/November issue in this International Year of the Child to the theme of "Children in the Environment". As Lin Simonon and Stephanie Leland point out, 28 pages is not enough space to cover such a vast project; so they concentrated on issues concerning schools and the environment. Although "Undercurrents" has fallen far short of producing a

comprehensive exploration of children, schools and the environment, several important themes do emerge.

Children who are given the opportunity to leave the confines of the school with its traditional curriculum and repressive teaching methods develop greater awareness of their environment. Adults and children benefit when children are permitted to exercise responsibility and become involved with living, rather than being regarded and treated as incomplete adults who are not yet ready for or capable of taking part in 'real life'.

If this is so then why aren't alternatives more widely available? The failure of the free school movement to establish a power base, the high financial cost of alternatives and the pitfalls of becoming part of the system and accepting state funding are discussed in several articles.

Those concerned with alternative education should find something of interest in this issue. Copies are available from: Undercurrents, 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1 OAT; and also from alternative bookshops.

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"Rural Resettlement Handbook" (2nd Edition) : written and published by the Rural Resettlement Group. Reviewed by Ros Sweetman.

This book is particularly for those attracted by the sound of the Harrisons' life on their smallholding, and for anyone wishing to live and work in rural areas. Its 218 pages contain an astonishing amount of information to help such people, written by a large collection of people with relevant experience and knowledge. Topics covered include choosing a place to move to, selecting a house, looking for land, finding work; there are a selection of accounts from ideas into practice by people who have made a start at resettlement. More sections deal with parish politics, transport, health care, planning permission, legal frameworks for co-operative enterprises and countryside law.

Copies are available from: Rural Resettlement Group, The Manor House, Thelnetham, Diss, Norfolk. Please send a cheque/PO for £1.80 and a 91/2"x61/2" sae.

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"Visual Education": reviewed by Bob Emmett

We were interested in digging out resources for the children's education, and with this in mind purchased a copy of "Visual Education" for information on films, film strips, slides etc. The copy turned out to be the Yearbook and contained a list of PR departments and Cultural Relations sections in Big Businesses and Embassies. Japan sent a couple of glossy magazines, some illustrated booklets on government, education, industry. USSR - for the cost of postage - sent a parcel of rather drab booklets which put me off defecting. I can't say that the Yearbook is worth

£1.00 to EO members when de-gutted of the address list; it depends whether you have access to a 16mm projector, and the hire funds for films. But I contacted the editor and obtained permission to photocopy the list, and we'll send it to interested parties who send us a 9"x4" sae to 46 Linden Close, Eastbourne, Sussex. Copies of the Yearbook are 80p + 20p postage from: Visual Education Book Service, National Audio-Visual Aids Centre, 254 Belsize Road, London NW6 4BY.

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"School without Tears" by Mollie Jenkins: reviewed by Sandra Holmes

A sensitive and inspiring book, written by a woman who obviously loves children.

Her moving account of her own childhood experiences must surely recall for many of us, and our children, the sounds, smells and incidents of our own school days. Those of us who were forced to "socialise" when we longed for peace and quiet know exactly what she means when she talks about watching a group of small boys marching up and down and says "I liked watching but had no desire to join them."

This is a book for all those in need of ideas and encouragement. The author's enthusiasm is infectious. One longs to have been a Pickley Wizard and regrets that one's children will not have the opportunity to do so.

As the experiment is forced to draw to an end it is with sadness that we realise that the freedom and happiness which these children have experienced will undoubtedly be suppressed when they are faced with the hostility and confinement of an impersonal state system. Those of us who have been teaching our own children for any length of time know exactly what Mrs Jenkins means when she says that these children "made other children seem negative." She verifies our belief that the greatest single factor in learning is happiness and we became determined to keep our children out of the system for as long as possible.

There are many differences of opinion as to the best way of educating a child. Ideals, theories, and the writings of other people are widely quoted. While many of us are still arguing about the direction we should take Mrs Jenkins has been and come back. She is now setting out on her second journey, armed once again with intuition and the strength of her own experience. [Mollie Jenkin's 'Caravanserai' project was described in Newsletters 8 & 9]

I have always believed that the best teachers are those who have suffered at school and have joined the profession in the hope of changing it. Only by experiencing unhappiness of this kind can one understand it and, as a result, treat one's pupils with genuine sympathy and compassion.

Mollie Jenkins seems to bear this out and I, for one, would like to thank her for this book.

"Lawrence on Education": ed. Joy and Raymond Williams, Penguin Education, 1973. Reviewed by Dianne Cox.

The quotation on page 18 of this issue is extracted from Lawrence's "Education of the People" written in 1918 and reprinted in this collection of his writings on education and related issues. As Raymond Williams (himself eminent and highly respected) says in his introduction: "There is something about Lawrence's writing that in any case provokes response. Not only the vitality, the energy, that his admirers point to. Also the bossiness, the prejudices, that his detractors can point to. The fact is that these are all present. ... We can arrive at general judgements which are much too easy: 'Lawrence the most vital Englishman of the century'; 'Lawrence the liberator'; 'Lawrence the confused petit bourgeois'; 'Lawrence the fascist'. ... Lawrence, often, sounds very dogmatic, absolutely sure of himself and his case. The hurried reader can then pick out one of these cases, for approval or disapproval, and think, mistakenly, that he has understood Lawrence. But as we read more widely, in this selection ... we come to see that he went on questioning, arguing, altering an emphasis or a conclusion, restoring or admitting other feelings. We can then often say that he contradicts himself, and of course these contradictions need to be noted. ... Its value is not only that he was a very gifted man. It is also that through his particular educational history, as a pupil and as a teacher, he was one of the first to live through and give an account of situations and problems which are still, in our own day, very much alive."

I thought the book very suitable for EO people because we all too, surely, work through many contradictions about what we are doing, and to read someone else's contradictions can possibly help us to work through our own. Even as an admirer of Lawrence I occasionally got very angry - about the kinds of things that would lead to the 'fascist' label! But in some sense even those are understandable. I regret deeply that he is not still with us (at a grand age of 94!) to continue his "questioning, arguing, altering, restoring ..." My own feeling is that, despite the often contrary impression that has been given of Lawrence, he could well have been a best friend of Mary Whitehouse! (eg, read his arguments against what is now called sex education.)

If you can read all the book, good. But if you haven't time I recommend at least the section "Arguments". It contains a strong word of warning for those who are educating their children in any academic sense (excluding the 3 Rs which should rather be considered as essential skills): Lawrence was "educated" - and he clearly hated the result of it. It was little compensation that his education enabled him to understand what he had been denied because of it, compared to the 90% whose partial "education" left them not only completely ignorant of the reasons for their discontented lives in a discontented society, but also unconscious of them. It is true Lawrence talked of raising their consciousness - but he said other things too!

# LETTERS

Dear Editor,

I came away appalled from the Tonight presentation on home education (shown on BBC-1 on 3rd July). It's obvious that Dr Lansdown has no qualifications which would entitle him to pronounce on the subject. The statement that it must be difficult to split oneself into two characters, parent and teacher, comes from ignorance of the nature of parenting. A parent is always a teacher. Every time a father comes home drunk and beats his wife or neglects his children, he is teaching them, albeit negatively.

The first few most important years of teaching are done almost exclusively by the parents, but at the magic age of five years they are conned into believing they must stop teaching and delegate it to someone "qualified".

Dr Lansdown says that the home-educated are likely to be socially deprived. In fact they have a wider choice of friends and acquaintances from the whole local community, unrestricted by age, whereas schoolchildren have a practical choice from 30 or so peers. My children play with their own choice of friends from the neighbourhood (aged five to 11 years) as well as mixing with children at various clubs. They also have many friends among adults of all ages.

In the "Analysis" programme "Down With Skool!" (broadcast on Radio 4UK on 4th July) Christopher Hayes, an adviser to governments for education, said that, apart from the obvious problems for school leavers such as illiteracy and innumeracy, the worst problem is that they have no ability to get on with and work alongside adults. He actually said that they are "debilitated". So we see that being thrown in at five and "learning to live" with masses of children does not prepare anyone for adult life.

The advantages of home education were hardly mentioned. At home, my child can work at his own pace, which is the theory behind modern classroom practice but rarely works out. He also has more freedom - intellectual freedom to develop his own ideas and draw his own conclusions, and physical freedom in that 'playtimes' are not arranged by order. He learns self-reliance, and self-discipline within a framework of family discipline.

I am glad that Mrs Taylor and Mrs Vigar answered Dr Lansdown's points so calmly and succinctly, but what he said worried me because so many viewers accept readily the view of the "expert". He was presented as the "expert" whereas the parents are the real experts.

Lorna Trevelyan-Bicicchi, 73 Park Road, Caterham-on-the-Hill, Surrey

[A copy of this letter has been published in the Radio Times]

Dear Editor,

I have been practising EO for one year now with my six-year-old son, and I very much believe in children developing in their own way at their own speed. I am, however, not particularly well qualified academically, and although I confidently followed my beliefs until my child was about five-and-a-half, I now find myself unable to follow my ideal pattern as this will not keep him up to the standard expected for his age in reading and writing. Because I feel somewhat vulnerable, I find I have to put a little pressure on him.

If I were highly qualified or a teacher I think I would fight for my belief, but as it is I feel I have to leave that to those fortunate enough to have written qualifications. It follows that I do not believe in a rigid curriculum, but looking back to 12 months ago, when I was faced with a request for a syllabus, I appreciated the help of a teacher friend who introduced me to the correct terminology.

My opinion is that to provide a sample curriculum is a good idea, providing a covering letter is enclosed explaining that it should be a guide for confidence-building in the early stages and stressing to the parents that it should be adapted to suit their own needs.

Geraldine Lockington, 3 Meade Close, Billericay, Essex

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Dear Editor,

I am very pleased to hear that a qualified teacher has produced a primary age curriculum for Education Otherwise. This teacher is being told that his work is not even helpful. This is quite wrong. Some EO members are quite out of touch with the kind of parents who would like to withdraw their children from school but just don't know where to start and cannot at first understand the do-as-you-like approach. There is a vast area of thought to travel over to get from the first position to the second. Parents I have talked to really do feel incompetent to teach their own children. They forget that the skill of a schoolteacher lies in controlling a class of 30 children of diverse interests and temperaments, and in getting a minimum of information passed over to them. It's a different thing at home with one's own children. Any book that can be understood by a child can equally well be learned and taught by a parent. There are no subjects which cannot be taught at home. EO core members know this, but most parents don't know it. When I have told them how easy it is, then they suddenly glimpse how subversive it is, and shy away from the whole idea. A conventional school-like curriculum would help prevent this reaction. When a parent has presented a curriculum to a local authority and gained confidence in her own powers as a teacher, and has actually withdrawn the child from school, then they can bring in the do-as-you-like approach if that is what the child really wants and needs. I wish EO could have presented me with a curriculum nine years ago when my first child was five. Then I could have taught him at

home. Then he wanted to be taught at home. Now it is too late; he likes to be in school because he gets away from home. I knew I had the right to educate him at home, but I just didn't know how to go about convincing the authorities that I was competent to do the job - and I lacked confidence in myself.

The question of curriculum content is a very debatable one. It is for each parent to decide with their children what is best, but first the authorities have to be convinced that the parents are competent to do that, and the parents must be given confidence in their own ability. My own experience is that the questions: "Have you got a curriculum?" and "Have you got a timetable?" are just sticks to beat parents with. When I replied that I had a curriculum, I had a timetable, they weren't interested in them but went right on very tactfully trying to persuade me that my child was better off in school and that I get her back there as soon as possible. They weren't interested in what we had paid out [for courses] nor what time I devoted to Sophia. I thought they were actually interested in her welfare and progress, but when I told them that I had fixed up for Sophia to enter secondary school, they lost interest entirely and didn't visit me again.

Frances Howard, 38 Hampden Road, Hitchin, Herts.  
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Dear Editor,

We were glad to receive the June Newsletter. We originally became interested in EO because our older son Mark became so difficult at school. To bring you up-to-date, our attempts at home learning were a dismal failure. Mark went back to school and had a male teacher (the first ever!) and formed a better relationship than previously, although this was not reflected in his work. Now he's changing schools and we hope a fresh start will benefit him still more.

We are still keenly interested in EO, especially as our toddler loves books, which presupposes a clash with the local schools, who cling tenaciously to ITA and publicly request: "Please don't teach your children to read before they start school." Another major factor is whether he will adjust to large crowds of children, and we already have our doubts about this.

However, there are so many things to take into consideration. We read with interest June Blake's letter about difficulties for working-class practitioners of EO. We have no "higher" qualifications (three 'O'-levels between us!), we live on a low income, which I subsidise with freelance dressmaking, done while the little one is in bed - so the housework has to be done while he's up, with periodic breaks to introduce a new game, let him "help" me, read a book etc. Whether we could give him a "full-time" education under these circumstances, I don't know. At the same time, we have little money for books or other equipment, but visit the library regularly. For financial reasons visits to places of interest, often referred to by other parents in the EO newsletter, would be few and far between. The same problem affects

our involvement in EO events - we have no transport, so meetings, musical gatherings et al. are out of the question.

May I say we definitely prefer the higher standard of newsletter, so much nicer to read without being distracted by typing mistakes or faded printing. As to the contents, we agree wholeheartedly with your appeal for more letters from "ordinary" readers. We do enjoy some of the articles and extracts about education in general, but find some of this way above our heads, being well obscured by "officialese".

Sheila and Frank Walters, Staff Residence 8, Milton Keynes College of Education, Stratford Road, Wolverton Mill, Milton Keynes.

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Dear Editor,

I found the general tone of the last Newsletter rather disturbing because of the dogmatic statements made by contributors. Surely, if a curriculum is going to help even one EO parent, then of course one should produce it. It may seem "dishonest and unhelpful" to some members, but I know I would have welcomed it, even if only to throw out suggestions.

"Time of our own": "Phoney" field trips are less valuable to children than the regular trips to the bank, grocery store and laundromat. Our children, on the contrary, find our "phoney" outings to Greenwich, Stoke potteries, Farm Open Days, Air Museums etc. exciting and enjoyable. They find trips to town as boring as I do.

Had I read Esme Howard's comments on "Early Years" before embarking on having children (let alone embarking on EO), my confidence would have been totally shattered. "... We must not use reading schemes," phonics for teaching English "is insane" and would result in "neurosis brought on by boredom or tension, hence reading failure." The only time my children were bored was at school, where the rest of their classmates plodded through "look, listen, hear and say." Fortunately, I had already (painlessly and quickly) taught them to read, using phonics. At 8 years old my daughter's reading age was 13.8 years; at 6 years my son's reading age was 11 years. They read for pleasure, have no problems with spelling and frequently read books to their friends (still illiterate despite the Esme Howard approach used at the local school). If it suits the individual child, nothing should be considered lunacy.

"A belief in a spiritual force greater than oneself is essential to offset psychological neurosis." Does this mean we have to be hypocritical and present as Truth what we don't happen to believe? Can I choose Hinduism or Judaism, or must I make my child believe in one or other branch of Christianity?

"It is not a method which should be pushed by EO, but an objective and questioning attitude which accepts nothing that is not reasonably and objectively proven." How does this tie up with the previous paragraph?

Even on recorders, I must take exception; my son hated the recorder and had no success with it. My daughter passed Grade 1 before her sixth birthday, and her enthusiasm led to requests for lessons on Cello and piano. However toneless the sound which she produced, it gave her pleasure and a sense of achievement.

The tone of censure in Piero Landman's comment on the parent who is prepared to make a child carry out tasks, prompts me to ask if he has never met anyone who said "if only my mother/father had made me stick at..." For every suicide by a child suffering from too much school; how many are there by people who are under-educated and therefore found life frustrating and unsatisfying? Surely individual parents must decide on what is suitable for individual children? I feel that there must be as many ways of approaching EO as there are children and parents taking it on, and if EO is only for people holding one view, and if practising members are made to feel guilty for deviating, then it is falling into the trap that schools represent - that of expecting all our children to conform.

Audrey Hannan, 116 Northampton Road, Brixworth, Northampton.

Dear Editor,

I've been to see the Area Education Officer about deschooling Clara. I spent over an hour with him, and he was guardedly sympathetic. His questions were of the "what if" variety. What if Clara changed her mind later; how would she fit into school? If Tom decided to attend school, how would that affect Clara? What if Clara couldn't form social relationships? He appeared satisfied that we had thought these problems through.

He naturally attempted to determine our qualifications, but I had managed to slip in the "while at University" bit and I think he has the impression that Tom and I were mature students together. I didn't say that and neither did he, so I did not disillusion him. He said he was worried that we would not be able to offer opportunities for group activities; I pointed out that there were clubs and groups (football, sailing, theatre workshop) to which they could belong if they chose, and that we were not trying to compete with the schools, but merely to provide an alternative.

He also accepted that we could offer a one-to-one, loving and interested environment, which schools cannot, and that "teaching" (his word) in this type of environment is often more effective than in schools. He also stated that the standard of teaching declines the higher one goes in schools; that in general infant teachers are better at their jobs than secondary teachers.

He did not say "no" out of hand, then, and arranged for us to meet the Education Advisor. We will let you know the next thrilling instalment!

Bob Emmett, 46 Linden Close, Eastbourne, BN22 0TS.

## NOTICES

1. Newsletter: Yes, we want more contributions - we are sure that a lot of you have very interesting experiences to relate, opinions to expound, prejudices to air. 1000 - 1500 words is a good length, but pieces of any length are welcome. A nice neat, typed, double-spaced script is ideal, but don't worry - write it how best you can and as long as we can read it and like it we'll print it. Please, though, state clearly if you do not wish us to alter it; if you don't state this we reserve the right to condense or edit as necessary. It helps to add your phone number in case we have any queries. Deadline for the next Newsletter is January 22nd; please send manuscripts to ED Editorial Group, 69 Leathwaite Road, London SW11.
2. Janet Webb wonders if ED members would care to visit Gloucester and be guests at her home. "We are a humdrom lot here with things out of place a little! Anyone is welcome to stay a little while. We do have a single and double room... a little notice given please." Please phone Janet to discuss any visit; Gloucester 417696.
3. Growing without Schooling (John Holt's USA newsletter of deschooling) was advertised with an order form in Newsletter 10. GWS distribution is being taken over by Stephanie Leland. Please send orders to 82 Lady Margaret Road, London N19.
4. Reviews and Resources: Stephanie Leland has volunteered to co-ordinate the section in the Newsletter containing reviews and reports on resources. Please send all relevant contributions, and suitable items you see in other publications, to her at the address above.
5. ACE (Advisory Centre for Education), 18 Victoria Park Square, London E2 9PB, is holding a conference on 8th December on Educational Alternatives within the State system.

ACE also issues a number of information sheets on various aspects of education (though mostly concerned with schools) - a handout will be enclosed with this Newsletter, postage permitting. Some of these contain valuable information not easily available elsewhere, though at 10p + see they seem very pricey. Recommended for ED parents are "How Parents can get things changed", and "Is your child handicapped? Parent's rights". We can supply copies of the former to members only at the cut price of 10p + see; write to Dick Kitto, The Manor House, Thelnetham, Diss, Norfolk.