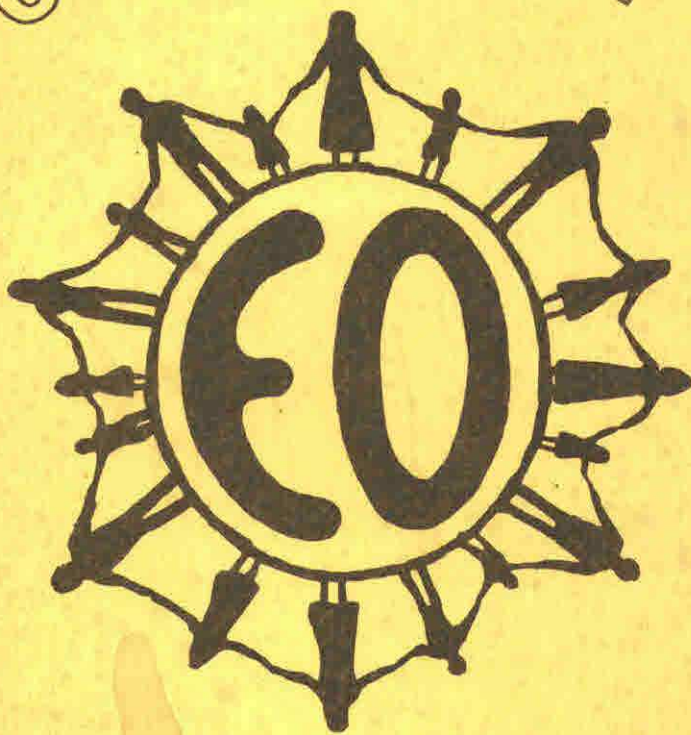


EDUCATION  
OTHERWISE



NEWSLETTER

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EDUCATION OTHERWISE  
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## EDITORIAL

This issue continues to be preoccupied with the Harrison case and the publicity which has surrounded it; we include a description of the case and an account of the legal arguments.

Thanks to all of you who braved the difficulties of new addresses and new banks and succeeded in renewing your membership; we are particularly grateful to the quite large number of you who have given more than the minimum subscription. Slightly less thanks to those whose bankers orders arrived at the old bank; we have attempted to concoct a piece of paper which will sort it all out!

We include an up-to-date list of local co-ordinators. There are more areas without a contact person than we would like - we do need more people to help at a local level. You don't need any qualifications but experience of practising EO and contact with your LEA are obvious advantages.

The next meeting of the Core Group and Publications Group is on the 26/27th April; any member who is willing to help with ensuing work is most welcome, and we can provide assistance with travelling expenses and overnight accomodation. See the Core Group minutes for detailed arrangements.

EO Editorial Group,  
69 Leathwaite Road,  
London SW11.

# THE HARRISON CASE

## 1. Impressions of the hearing

Great Witley, or what we saw of it, is a not very attractive village strung along the main road amidst beautiful rolling Herefordshire countryside. It had frozen hard overnight and Di Cox had intrepidly driven us over from Leicester, stopping every so often to scrape the ice from the windscreen. The courtroom was a plain high-ceilinged room at the back of the police station. Electric ceiling heaters glowed wanly but it was very cold and later on we were given permission to wear overcoats in Court. About 30 people were assembled waiting for the proceedings to commence. The spectators, about 10 of us, stood around awkwardly, uncertain what was expected of us. Three or four pressmen chatted at the press table, rustling copies of the Daily Mail. Only Iris seemed to be her buoyant self, moving confidently amongst us, making us at ease as if she were welcoming us to a social event. One had to look carefully to see signs of the strain she and her family had been living under for so long.

We were summoned to attention, the Magistrates entered and the case began. The prosecution barrister was surprisingly young. He spoke quietly, without histrionics: "It is not the law that parents have to send their children to school, they are perfectly free to educate them out of school. The local authority plainly recognises that right." "The Harrison children are happy, pleasant, courteous people. They have many aptitudes that other children don't possess. They are well prepared for the sort of life their parents lead." At times we wondered whose side he was on. It was plain that the LEA were keen to give the impression of being forced reluctantly to take action against their will, of being fair, reasonable people pushed to the limit.

The first prosecution expert, their Chief Educational Psychologist, went into the witness box, short, lean, bearded, matter-of-fact. Outside it had begun to snow. The world went quieter. Expressions like "learning the basics", "structured approach" winged their way gently across the courtroom. There were occasional ebullient outbursts by Ivan Geffen, the Harrison's solicitor. "What will the world be like in 15 years time, 10 years, five? How will most of us fare in a nuclear holocaust? In a civil war?" But these arresting words fell upon empty ears. Nuclear holocaust? Civil war? What was that? This was Herefordshire, this green and pleasant land, 1980 - what has nuclear holocaust got to do with us?

The snow was falling thickly and there was a stir. Should the Court adjourn? No, we will re-convene after lunch and see how the weather goes. We all congregated in the waiting room for a picnic lunch. There we rejoined the children - the Harrisons had been excluded because they were witnesses. It was decided that they should go home - there was no chance of them being called that day.

After lunch, the Chief Education Advisor, another short, lean, bearded person - almost the prototype schoolmaster. He too was

quiet, fair, reasonable. Again "structure... basics... assessment..." Andrea, aged 15, reads the Observer. How many children of 15 in State schools read the Observer? How many read the Daily Mail? How many leave school without qualifications? This all sounded irrelevant, boring, depressing, a far cry from the rousing issues of personal freedom that were at the heart of the matter. The prosecution drew to a close, one might almost say it petered out. A policeman entered from next door, and whispers ensued. "There is traffic chaos throughout the Midlands. The police are thinking of closing the M5." The Court sprang into action and adjourned until 10.30 next morning, if fine, and we all made haste to bustle home before dark.

The next day the roads were bad but not impassable, and the sun was shining. I travelled down with Steve Maddox and Anthea from Birmingham, and Chris her brother. It was the defence's turn, and Iris was their first and principal witness.

She looked nervous but fully in command. I cannot imagine a better witness: her appearance, her bearing, her every word proclaimed her sincerity and integrity. She gave an impression of great honesty, not just in what she said to the Court, but in the way she had obviously thought through and faced up to the life she and her family were leading.

The prosecution treated her with consideration and courtesy. I began to worry, were they so confident of their victory that they could afford to soft-pedal so?

Geoff was next. I know that Geoff does not take second place in the Harrison family, he is very much a person in his own right. But here in Court he deliberately effaced himself. He was there only to confirm his agreement with Iris, and that he did.

Next it was the turn of the girls. It was the first time they had seen the Courtroom in action. It must have been a daunting experience. Daunting, too, to be aware that they were almost the key witnesses, the end products upon whom the whole case rested and would be judged. So it was not surprising that Wanda appeared very nervous. In spite of this she managed to speak out: Yes, she was expecting to go to an International College in Denmark. She was going to visit it soon to decide. How? She would bicycle most of the way. On her own? Probably - she was used to looking after herself. "Perhaps you would be kind enough to read this out to the Court." Wanda held the paper in front of her, silent, transfixed. We all held our breaths. Would she? Could she? Ivan Geffen came to the rescue. "Wanda has always been very nervous about reading aloud. May I suggest she reads it to herself and then tells the Court what it says in her own words. This will not only test her reading but her comprehension as well." This was accepted; she could and she did. We all beamed with pleasure and relief, even the Magistrates. Wanda was dismissed and joined us at the back. I thought how pleased and proud I would be if this were my daughter and I'd educated her this way.

Andrea, "A.J.", took it all in her stride. Yes, she spent, oh; four hours or more a day practising her violin. She was going to take Grade VI examination soon. Oh yes, that included quite technical theory papers. She hoped to go to Dartington College of Music eventually, and to become a professional musician. Yes, she had learned shorthand and typing, but she was a bit too busy to keep it up now, her music was more important. Who could say this girl was not being educated?

And so to the defence expert, Roland Meighan, Lecturer at Birmingham University and long-standing member of EO. I couldn't help feeling a bit sorry for the prosecution experts. In a few cool concise sentences their expertise seemed to be reduced to a groping, fumbling, thumbs-and-finger exercise. "Autonomous education has not been adequately researched in this country. I can quote you a few examples if you wish. I would not expect local education authorities or their advisors to be familiar with it or competent to assess its validity." There were no histrionics, no malice, no ostentation, it was a cool, unemotional statement of the reality. And yet there was passion there too, a passionate belief in the freedom and autonomy of the family, a passion that was imbued and uplifted by his profound knowledge.

Yes, a stirring, mind-blowing day, and yet - those Magistrates so impassive, somehow so unconnected. Was there something wrong? Was Roland too expert? Iris too self-contained? The whole educational argument too radical? Lurking suspicions that this was not after all an open-and-shut victory assailed us as we drove once more down the M5 on the following morning.

And so it turned out. "Guilty." We could hardly believe it, yet we had half expected it. "Unconditionally discharged." What did it mean? Guilty and yet unpunished? Who knows, who can fathom the secret deliberations of those who hold sway over us?

I sat over supper with Anthea in Birmingham. She was facing a similar Court case. But in addition her two school-age children were summonsed to appear before a juvenile court.

"So what?" I asked.

"I can't risk it, they could be taken into care. They'll have to go back."

"Perhaps that would be better. Just until Iris's appeal goes through."

"But will she win it?" I was silent. "How do you feel?" I asked. "About the kids?"

"Jonathan'll be all right. He'll survive. He much prefers to be on his own, he thrives on it, but he'll be all right. It's Jude that worries me, that school'll destroy him. But I daren't risk it, they'll have to go back."

So Jonathan and Jude Maddox are back at school. But Iris and her family are preparing to fight another battle. They need all the support we can give them.

## 2. The Legal implications

Since there is to be an appeal it is too early to say what the final implications of the case will be. We certainly learned a lot from the Magistrates' hearing, though there is bound to be some difference of opinion about the implications of that too. In its two and a half days the arguments swayed and lurched over a lot of ground and it is not easy to pick out the crucial issues, and even less so to be sure which were the most telling ones in the minds of the Magistrates.

It seems to me that the practice of education otherwise involves two separate facets that are of concern to the law: first, obviously, education, what is the best education for children, is there such a thing as a "best" education, for that matter what is "efficient" education, what is education for anyway, how should it be practised, where, by whom, etc etc. The second is the question of human rights, whose is the responsibility, who should choose, who should be in control? The law does not attempt to give clear answers to these questions, what it does is to provide a rather loose structure within the boundaries of which particular cases can be argued out. These boundaries are made more precise and limited over time by case law, that is decisions made in the higher courts which create precedents for other similar cases. There is, however, very little case law concerning education, and consequently the legal situation remains imprecise.

As regards what education is or should be, or how it is to be judged, the law is silent, or at least vague. It must be "efficient, full time and suited to [the child's] age, ability and aptitude." None of these words is defined or otherwise referred to, and none of them have a clear meaning.

On the question of rights and responsibilities the law clearly places the primary responsibility upon the parents, but the authority has the right, and in fact the duty, to intervene "if it appears" that the parent is not fulfilling his duty (in law everyone is always a "him").

The recipient of these dubious benefits, the child, has no rights and no responsibilities except to do what he is told. It is presumed in law that the parent will act in the child's best interests, and that in the event of the parent failing to do so the authority will intervene in the best interests of the child.

At the outset of the prosecution case an exchange took place which suggested that the defence would be based on the human rights issue. The prosecuting barrister, addressing the Bench, said: "The issue in this case is what constitutes efficient education, and whether what the defendants are providing for each child is suitable by these standards. These are matters of fact for you to decide."

Ivan Geffen, the Harrison's solicitor, interrupted: "The definition of education is not a matter of fact but a matter of opinion. Since Parliament, in drafting the Bill, did not see fit to define

it, it is not for this Court nor for the Education Authority to impose its definition. Providing my clients adhere to an interpretation that reasonable people can hold, and do so in good faith, and provided that the education comes up to the standards implied by that interpretation they must be acquitted." He went on to argue that since there were many and varied opinions on the matter and one opinion could always be countered by a contrary one, the opinions of the prosecution's expert witnesses should not be heard since they were irrelevant. The Bench did not accept this latter proposal, but I felt that the point made still held water. If you are acting in a way that reasonable people can find acceptable, then you have a right to act in that way whatever the experts may say - that seems to me to be at the very roots of our legal system.

But thereafter the argument moved much more in the direction "What is efficient education and were the Harrisons practising it?" The prosecution witnesses put forward the case for orthodox schooling which we learned from Roland Meighan was based on the "transmissive system" - the teacher transmits knowledge and the child receives it. The prosecution made much of the wording of the 1944 Act: "... cause a child to receive efficient full-time education..." to try to establish that the transmissive system is the only one to meet the requirements of the law. This struck me as being semantic twaddle, but then perhaps a lot of the law is semantic twaddle. At any rate the defence didn't express it as strongly as that but they did claim that no such definition was implied in the Act and that there should be a multiplicity of educational systems, and that indeed there was a multiplicity within state schools and other schools recognised as efficient by the Ministry (Summerhill and Dartington were mentioned).

In particular they argued for the system practised by the Harrisons in which the children learned because and when they needed to, through self-motivation, and the role of the parent or teacher was to be available and to give encouragement and help rather than to "transmit". To my surprise I learned that this system, known as the "autonomous system", has the official imprimatur of the EEC, and that at the Berne Convention of 1973, no less a person than Mrs Thatcher herself (then Secretary for Education) signed a declaration that all EEC countries were committed to initiate autonomous education projects. The UK had signally failed to fulfill this commitment and according to Roland Meighan, the Harrison family represents the most successful example of this style of education that he has come across in this country.

But the prosecution would have none of this nonsense, Mrs T. notwithstanding; children, especially children with "learning problems" - needed structure in basics. "Have your children never sat down and written little compositions?" the prosecuting counsel asked Mrs Harrison. "Oh no" replied Iris. "They would never do such a thing," and she gave him a sweet smile of such compassionate understanding that it seemed as though no one could ever again have thought that this was anything but a daft thing to do and a daft question to ask - but he brought it up again in his closing speech.

So what were the Magistrates making of all this? They remained silent and attentive but their faces gave nothing away. They were being asked to judge between two different schemes of education which even the experts did not agree about. Professor Stephen Sugarman, the eminent expert on American education law, has written of education in the UK: "... there is no social consensus over what are the proper goals and means of education... Even as to basic skills, there is no agreement on how to impart them... But if both the goals and the means of education are indeterminate, what is one to do?" What indeed?

They regarded the Harrisons. I don't think they can fail to have been impressed, even moved, by their integrity, their evident "rightness". They could not bring themselves to think that such a family should be punished for acting in a manner to which they had given such commitment and thought. On the other hand they could not bring themselves to condone the flouting of official wisdom. The equivocal nature of the verdict "guilty, but unconditionally discharged" mirrored the equivocal nature of the problem as they saw it. I don't think we can blame them - their normal role is to adjudicate on facts - was the accused driving a car at 40mph in a built-up area? It isn't to make esoteric judgements on the finer points of education and education law.

Somewhere along the line we lost hold of the fundamental issue of the freedom of the individual, and under what circumstances and with what provocation the state is justified in intervening. I wonder what would have been the result if we had concentrated on the issue of individual freedom versus bureaucratic interference, rather than on that of autonomous versus transmissive education?

Dick Kitto.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### Harrison Family Support Fund

This has received very good support considering that it was launched during the Christmas-New Year period when money is always short. Contributions have ranged from £100 from one family to £2.00 from a 14-year old girl who is being educated out of school. The total is now just under £400, and £250 of this has been sent to Iris as a contribution towards her expenses of £750 incurred at the Magistrates' hearing.

Some but not all of her appeal expenses will come from Legal Aid. Much work is being carried out towards the case on a voluntary basis but even so expenses are likely to be heavy. And we must face the very real possibility that whatever the outcome in the Crown Court the case may well be taken to a higher court. So please, if you have been sitting on the fence, don't delay but send a contribution (made out to the Harrison Family Support Fund) to: Dick Kitto, The Manor House, Theltham, Diss, Norfolk.

# Education THRU' the Press

Education Bill: Parents should get full choice of schooling for their children (wherever this is possible) according to the new Education Bill going through Parliament (DAILY TELEGRAPH 14th Dec). But the Telegraph's editorial reminds us of the 1944 Education Act, which states exactly that. However, the Act's clause "so far as is compatible with the provision of efficient education..." has enabled parental choice to be denied. A spokesman explained that places can be refused under the new law, too.

Curriculum: The Inspectors of schools doubt whether a balanced curriculum is possible in today's schools - given the lack of specialist teachers and facilities (GUARDIAN 9th Jan). One of their propositions is the need for "greater and much more explicit consensus nationally on what constitutes 5 years of secondary education." (HM) Series "Matters for Discussion" no. 11; "A view of the Curriculum", HMSO £1.50)

Alternatives: The case for innovatory alternative schools financed by ratepayers is set out in a pamphlet from ACE (GUARDIAN 11th Dec)... One such is planned by parents and teachers in Crowthorne, Berks. It will be non-fee-paying, non-selective, for 11-year-olds plus (DAILY TELEGRAPH 13th Dec)... The unofficial school run by parents in Llangynog (Powys) continues to function (GUARDIAN January). Children are taught to a strict timetable by mothers on a rota system, who also pay for materials... Helen Whitfield, 14, lost her claim for damages against the Borough of Croydon for alleged discrimination at school. Helen had been told that it was "not possible" for girls to do carpentry and other crafts, and was then the only girl in her class to be offered a place (DAILY TELEGRAPH 14th Dec, DAILY MAIL 22nd Dec). Helen has been learning at home since 1978 with her twin sister Alice... A group of parents in Cuckfield, Sussex, will pool resources in order to practice education otherwise (MID SUSSEX TIMES 18th Jan). Helen Holland and others have already started workshops on various subjects, for children at home and at school.

Deaths: A 14 year old Nottinghamshire boy committed suicide rather than face his headmaster after playing truant (BBC NEWS 14th Dec). Another 14 year old in Tyne and Wear killed himself because he was worried about being expelled (DAILY MAIL 14th Dec)... The fiercely competitive system of Japanese education causes a third of all suicides there. One 13 year old killed herself because of low marks in an arithmetic test (GUARDIAN 22nd Jan). English children, while under less pressure, are driven to attempted suicide. One theory is that they have been introduced, prematurely, to too many ideas. One physician said he felt the most malign influence of the past 25 years had been the BBC. The writer of the article, Donald Gould, suggests that the very freedom of information, behaviour and experience (the supposed 'privileges' of our society) drives children to despair.

Parents: According to a National Children's Bureau report, parents need more support to equip them to bring up children properly, and that the parents also need to understand more about children's

emotional needs. It suggests preparation for parenthood should start at school (GUARDIAN 10th Jan)... Research shows that most children learn what they need at home, and not at nursery school (SUNDAY TIMES 13th Jan). Dr Tizard, a child psychologist, said that parents see more clearly than teachers what their children need to learn, and are more persistent in teaching them skills. She said "I seriously question whether nursery education... is meeting the needs of children in any way. We need a complete re-think of its purposes and content."

Drugs: Far too many primary school children are being given sedatives by their GPs, says a community health counsellor in Kent (DAILY MAIL 7th Dec). Some of the children are only five. More research shows that starting school "imposes emotional and social stress on children..." (NEW SOCIETY 1st Nov). It was found that "a disturbingly sizeable minority of children" continued to have problems 18 months after starting school. Commented one teacher: "They have to sink or swim."

Absenteeism: One child in four misses lessons, according to a one-week survey in the North-West. "It is the parent's duty to send their children to school" said the Chief Education Officer for Salford. "If they were more careful about school attendance records, attendance would soar."

Meals: The price of a school meal is to go up by 5p in February, as part of plans to cut £240 million from the Education budget (GUARDIAN 20th Dec). When the Education Bill goes through, local authorities will be able to charge what they like for meals, milk and transport... WHERE magazine says that "the fast food industry" is ready to pounce when school meals are abolished... Heads will not allow children to eat home-made snacks at school. Said a spokesman: "Heads who are concerned with the social training of their pupils will not stand idly by and see their schools turned into crummy snacketerias" (DAILY TELEGRAPH 26th Nov).

Maths: Most maths teaching is "totally inadequate for today's needs" complains the Institute of Mathematics (DAILY MAIL 26th Nov). It warns that students are "put off for life by being presented with too much abstract maths too early in their careers" (GUARDIAN 26th Nov).

EXTRA - The Harrison Family: There was wide coverage of the Harrison's court case in January, including the TV and radio interviews reported elsewhere in this newletter. As for the papers, the GUARDIAN (17th Jan) gave space to Ivan Geffen's defence, in which he said that the Harrisons were a highly conscientious and deeply principled couple whose methods... were designed to make [the children] self-reliant, confident, capable and mature individuals. The TELEGRAPH (15th Jan) quoted the prosecution, who said that the Harrisons were providing "far from a proper education for their children." He said "... if the children choose some other way of life in the future, they may not be able to cope with that." The DAILY MAIL (15th Jan) ran a sympathetic article about the Harrisons fight, and other EO cases, entitled "How to teach your child at home - and win."

Sarah Guthrie.

### EO INTERVIEWS: Sarah Guthrie

Iris Harrison was interviewed on BBC TVs NATIONWIDE (16th Jan). "We feel" she said, "that our system has a crisis facing it. Children today just aren't being fitted to face an unknown world. Our children will be able to make decisions, to face change - to enjoy change... today, most people are frightened by the world we're in."

This theme of autonomous education enabling our children to live in a changing world was expanded during the WORLD AT ONE interview (BBC Radio 4, 31st Jan). James Fearnley talked of the need for children to approach an unstable world with a sense of freedom, of sensitivity. Jackie Fearnley continued: "I think the most important thing is just being able to talk to your children. It's amazing the concerns they do have. To me, reading and writing narrows this down. They are experiencing the world at first hand... The main thing is to just slow down." James: "Having decided to leave behind a career based on education and move to the country, we have had to educate ourselves... I think it proves that if you have a strong urge to direct your life in a certain way it is not education that is going to provide the way out but it is your simple desire to do things in the way which you personally think is right."

Commenting on both Iris and the Fearnleys words, Peter Newell of ACE said that many schools were failing to teach even basic skills. Headmasters could often dominate, leading to clashes with parents over issues such as corporal punishment. He felt that one result of home education could be that the children might suffer from isolation from people and ideas. On the other hand, they learn autonomy, responsibility and if need be, the rapid acquisition of skills. For these reasons, he said, parents should be left in peace and education authorities should take a serious look at schools.

Describing EO, Dick Kitto said: "Education Otherwise doesn't stand for any particular type or style of education. It just stands for the rights of families to determine how they are going to educate their children according to their own values."

"ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS WITHIN THE MAINTAINED SYSTEM"  
ACE Conference: Sheila Stocking

At this conference, held in December, a national campaign was set up to promote state support for alternative schools. A group of parents and teachers who have been meeting since December 1978 have produced a policy document on the subject.

The document opens by pointing out the poor record of state schools in Britain when faced with the demand for innovatory alternatives. The record appears worse by contrast with a country such as Denmark, where "groups of parents, school students and teachers can set up their own schools, according to their own values and priorities, with most or all of the capital and running costs coming from public funds." Under such a system, parents can exercise greater responsibility for and control over the education of their children. Moreover, the right of children to make choices influencing their own lives is recognised.

As the scheme proposed involves the use of public money, conditions are outlined to "prevent schemes from promoting the interests of some groups of citizens to the detriment of others, and to safeguard children from the misguided zeal of cranks or grossly over-anxious parents".

The document goes on to describe a type of alternative school which would meet the objectives professed, but not practiced within state schools, by educationalists. The school would be democratic, with day-to-day running in the hands of students, parents and workers. The governing body of the school would represent each of these groups, but also the local community, the world of education, and the maintaining authority. The structure of the school would be 'open' to whoever wanted to attend, to involvement of parents and others; the school would be physically open for as much of the time as possible. It should be non-hierarchical, non-coercive and non-violent.

Because of this structure it is felt that such a school should be small (less than 200 people). The schools finances would be based on a cash grant based on the number of students and the physical costs of maintaining the buildings; the school would have considerable freedom in how this grant would be spent. It is suggested that LEAs would provide the buildings, particularly since inner-city authorities own much redundant property.

There was some dissension at the conference, with some people supporting the idea that public money should be sought on a 'token' system; but there was agreement that the national campaign should be set up. Sally Carr (formerly of the White Lion free school) is co-ordinating the campaign and will be publishing a newsletter and a register of local groups. You can join the campaign, or get copies of the policy document (50p + sae) from Sally Carr, c/o ACE, 18 Victoria Park Square, London E2 9PB.

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Islands

Jane McFie, Lower Ettrick Cottage, Ettrick Bay,  
Isle of Bute, Strathclyde.

Highlands

Strathclyde

Lesley & Roger Downie, 30 Hillhead St, Glasgow.

Mrs A. Marshall, West Lodge, Craigharnet,  
Campsie Glen, Stirlingshire.

Fife

WALES

Clwyd

Dyfed

Gwent

Gwynedd

Powys

Mary Evans, Shamar, Great Oak Rd, Crickhowell.

CO-OPERATIVE VILLAGE COMMUNITIES: Bill Walton

A 'one-off' meeting was held at Lifespan community (near Huddersfield) on the weekend of 24/25th November last year. It was held "to investigate the amount of interest in a village-type community, to put interested people in touch with each other and with information sources, and to see how any existing attempts at setting up such a group were proceeding."

Most of the time was spent in sharing information and my brain was rather overwhelmed with Maxi Co-ops, Green Towns, Ecological Land Bonds, Open Sky and Development Boards. Still, this was an encouraging sign of many initiatives and varied experiences.

From an Education Otherwise point of view, among the forty people there four EO households were represented. Although "education" was only referred to in passing, several interesting points were made.

A co-operative village of 200 people might be able to support two or more styles of education. One idea that was mentioned was to have a 'resource centre' rather than a school building. Children would gain much experience with adults in their place of work, but having a resource centre would provide a more formal learning centre for people of all ages to use as they wanted. There was information about kibbutzim in Israel, and how children generally lived in their own communities, physically separate from the living quarters of the adults. People at Laurieston Hall in Scotland are experimenting with a Children's house, with different adults taking it in turn to live with the children. It was mentioned that Botton Village (part of the Camphill Village Trust) on the North Yorkshire Moors has its own school with its distinctive education carefully structured and based on the teachings of Rudolph Steiner. And also some people living in co-operative villages may decide to use nearby state schools, thereby developing closer links with the neighbouring community.

Co-operative villages are mostly still in their formative stages though a lot of effort is going into raising capital and working out legal structures. Evidently many people are seriously interested in becoming involved. Such villages can offer exciting new possibilities (sounds like a detergent commercial!) for Education Otherwise.

Minutes of the meeting and contact addresses are available in "Communes Network" issue 46 (December 1979) which is well worth the £4 subscription for twelve issues. Available from Lifespan, Townhead, Dunford Bridge, Sheffield S30 6TG; it will also carry news of further developments.

# CORE GROUP

Minutes of the EO Core Group meeting, held on 26th January at 69 Leathwaite Road, London SW11, at 2pm: John Elenor.

Present: Bruce Cox (in the Chair), Dianne Cox, Joan Hoare, Stephanie Leland, Helen Holland, Helen Fletcher (apologies for leaving early), Courtenay Young, Dick Kitto, Sarah Guthrie, Sheila Stocking, Jane Davies, Liz Sturges, Dom & Ros Sweetman, John Elenor.

Apologies from: Robina and Alan Pye, Georgina Winkley.

1. The minutes of the last meeting were amended as follows: apologies for absence were also received from Alan Pye.
  - 4.3 The Coxes had merely suggested that a volunteer might be found this way; they had not agreed to do it.
  - 7.1 In the first sentence the word 'temporarily' was replaced by the word 'permanently'.The amended minutes were then approved.
  
2. Matters arising
  - 2.1 Publications Group. It was agreed that the Core Group would adopt the minutes of the Pub Gp meeting held immediately prior to the Core Group meeting.
  - 2.3 Press advertising (ref: 3.5) Sarah had sent the proposed ad. to The Times, who were not prepared to print it until they received some literature about EO and a reference from 'a solicitor to whom we are known.' Agreed that Sarah should supply same.
  - 2.4 Legal position of treasurer (ref:5.1) John reported that in an organisation of this sort, all members were held equally responsible for debts incurred (though a creditor would sue whoever he could get hold of!) The question was asked should we register our name with the appropriate official body? Dick agreed to consult a solicitor on this.
  - 2.5 Revised questionnaire (ref:9.3) The revision was generally applauded, and after a few amendments the document was approved; it will be sent out with the June newsletter.
  - 2.6 Harrison Family Support Fund (ref:10) The fund stands at about £370; it was agreed that, if it transpired that the Harrisons did not need all of the fund, it should be converted into a general Support Fund in case of similar instances of need. A trust committee would be needed to ensure corporate decisions on the use of funds; Dick will think about suitable ways of organising this.
  - 2.7 Resources list. Sheila reported that she envisages two parts to this. She has already started on the first, which consists of resources among members; it was agreed that this would be done in the first instance as a card index, from which an abbreviated list could be compiled for duplication for anyone who needs it. The card index will be added to continually, and the list updated twice yearly. The second part would be a list of public resources; it was agreed that this would be done by areas - Sheila for South London, Stephanie for North London, and local contacts for their own areas.

It was further agreed that the two London lists should eventually be collated into one list.

- 2.8 Enquiries Secretary (ref:4.3) There was a long discussion on the possible duties of an Enquiries Secretary and likely personnel for the job, but no firm decision was reached. Dick agreed to continue his policy of farming out enquiries where he could. Dom & Ros agreed to investigate the cost and efficiency of a box number for the official address (which would have the advantage of remaining constant however frequently the Enquiries Sec. changed).
- 2.9 Public Relations. It was agreed that one person was needed to take responsibility for dealing with the communications media. The name of Brian Guthrie was suggested.
3. Charitable status It was agreed that since it appeared to be excessively difficult and expensive to obtain charitable status, the matter should be dropped for the present.
4. Accounts It was agreed that the accounts should be prepared annually in January, and published in the March Newsletter.
5. AOB
  - 5.1 It was agreed that, as a matter of policy, we should accept a member without subscription in a case of hardship.
  - 5.2 Any member who has not renewed their subscription by March of any year will receive a reminder instead of the March newsletter; the Newsletter will be sent as soon as they renew. Courtenay agreed to draft the renewal reminder.
  - 5.3 It was agreed that we need a compilation of all published accounts of inefficiency and incompetence in state education, as stick with which to belabour awkward authorities. Bruce agreed to compile the dossier, and to circulate an edited selection to all interested parties.
  - 5.4 Local co-ordinators list: Sarah agreed to update it for the March NL.
  - 5.5 It was agreed that instead of asking for money from famous people (who might have been unhappy at school) we should invite them to join, with a strong hint that a large donation would be welcome. If you know anyone suitable, send the name to Sarah.
  - 5.6 New Education Act: Dick reported that he is scrutinising it for any effect it might have on EO.
  - 5.7 Legal case-list: Dick will continue to compile this.

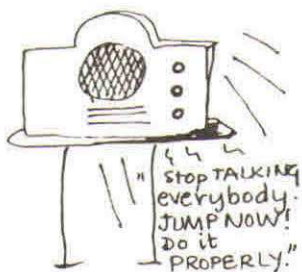
Date of next meeting: Saturday 26th April; Publications 11-1, Core 2-5. Newsletter editorial group will meet next day, starting 9.30. Meetings are held at Dom & Ros Sweetman's home; 69 Leathwaite Road, London SW11. Any member may attend, but please ring first to say you're coming (01-223-1890). We can help with travelling expenses, and overnight accommodation.

Items for the Core Group agenda should be sent to: Bruce Cox, Park Lodge, Tilton Lane, Billesdon, Leicester LE7 9DS. Items for the Pub. Group should be sent to: Sheila Stocking, 91 Shakespeare Road, London SE24; in both cases before 4th April.

# EDUCATING ARCHIE



BY SEG



# PUBLICATIONS GROUP

Minutes of the EO publications group: 26th Jan 1980: Dom Sweetman.

Chairperson: Stephanie Leland.

Present: Ros Sweetman, Helen Fletcher, Sarah Guthrie, Dick Kitto, Dominic Sweetman, Joan Hoare, Sheila Stocking, Dianne Cox, Jane Davies.

1. Collective editing of the Newsletter was reported to have gone quite well. Not too much load went onto the producers (Dom & Ros Sweetman). However, no one person was clearly responsible for encouraging contributions; Dick agreed to do a bit this time, and Sheila (who is collecting resources) to write to anyone who she comes across who might have a story to tell. Other London members are willing to help with production if necessary. We still felt that we'd like to involve more people in the editing.
2. Proposed Booklet: "How to present a Curriculum to the LEA." It was felt that this overlapped with with functions of "First Steps to EO" (see item 4). It was agreed that a section on this subject would be included in the new "First Steps"
3. Presentation of Core Group minutes in the NL: Were they too space-consuming? We decided that it was better to give the members the whole truth, and continue to publish the minutes in full.
4. Producing policy documents: There has been some concern (see last minutes) that it has taken a very long time to finalise the statement on the law and EO which is to go into "First Steps", and to re-write the new members' letter. We decided that it would improve matters to delegate responsibility for detailed discussion of our documents to smaller groups. In particular, a group of four (Helen, Dick, Sheila and Dianne) will meet for a weekend (9-10th Feb) to try to produce a new "First Steps"; it will consist of the legal statement plus a section on satisfying the LEA.
5. Booklist(s): Jane Davies (who is doing a teacher-training course) volunteered to produce a booklist for EO. It was felt that the best way was to prepare a long list under various headings, which could either be used when writing lists for specific documents, or circulated in whole to interested members. Jane, Stephanie and Sheila felt that they had common interests in the area of resources and will sort out some details and report back.
6. Stationery: There has been a little confusion, but Stephanie and Dom will get paste-ups made and get some letterhead and compliments slips printed.
7. Brief legal statement: The legal statement has grown to over four pages. At the last meeting we agreed that Dom should try to summarise the legal position in about one page; he had done this, but too late to circulate it. It was checked over later in the weekend and will be used in the new introductory letter.
8. "Early Years": Ros has re-printed enough copies of this to last for six months or so; Sarah is collecting comments and will re-draft it in time to consider at the next meeting.

9. Curriculum: Some members would like EO to produce an outline curriculum, to satisfy the LEA and also to help the less confident parents get started on EO. Jane agreed to look into the possibility of writing such an outline for us.
10. New introductory letter: Sarah has been slogging away at this for some time but is having trouble making it satisfactory to all parties. We decided that a small group (Joan, Dick and Diane all expressed interest) should assemble it out of: a new circular letter, the one-page legal summary and our aims and objectives.
11. Duplicating: Ros & Dom Sweetman have been doing this but their facilities are likely to be closed down, and in any case they can't manage to do so much. Stephanie volunteered to take on some duplication, and will seek facilities in North London.

For date of next meeting and arrangements, see below Core Group minutes.

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#### OTHERWISE IN BIRMINGHAM: Anthea Barnes

Chris is 16 in June and has been out of school since the middle of his first term at comprehensive school. The Local Education Department were at first obstructive and harassed us quite a bit, and the welfare officer they sent was unhelpful. Their attitude did, however, become less hostile and more tolerant with the passage of time. They were visiting us once a term but this has slackened a bit now.

For the first two years we worked fairly strictly to a timetable which we submitted to the LEA and I worked with him at home. The LEA inspectors were not totally satisfied with this arrangement so we purchased correspondence courses from Wolsey Hall, Oxford; physics, which Chris has discontinued through loss of interest, I feel engendered by lack of practical facilities (although he might have lost interest anyway); maths, which he has since had to take up at adult education evening classes because of difficulty in understanding many of the correspondence course lessons. There was no one to ask questions of on the spot, and his Dad and I were not equipped to cope - neither of us are trained teachers, nor do we have any educational qualifications. He is continuing to use the Wolsey Hall English Language and Geography courses.

He had planned to take Maths, English and Geography 'O'-levels when he was 17, but although he is extremely interested in Geography, I have a feeling that when the time comes he won't want to take the exam, and that we may have to 'push' him a bit to get him to take exams at all. The trouble is, although there is no actual quarrel over it, his Dad and I are a bit divided in our opinions on the matter of exams, and indeed of education in general, although we both share disillusionment and concern over the present system and its advocates.

Chris has been carrying on with history, biology and a fairly liberal general studies programme without resorting to either correspondence or college assistance, but is now rather losing interest as many school children of his age do; in a few months he will be 16 and getting (he hopes) a job, and what relevance do these non-examination subjects have to life in the 'real' world? He grows impatient to be unshackled and enter adult life and sometimes it becomes difficult to stimulate him. I do understand how he feels, and sometimes feel that I am only pressing him to continue to produce 'evidence of work' to keep the LEA off our backs, which isn't the purpose of education. On the whole though, provided we can ride this latter problem for a few more months, I am much happier about Chris' chances in the 'real' world than I was two and a half years ago.

The first year out of school was a very difficult one. Chris' confidence had been greatly undermined and his health was low. He felt he had failed and was afraid and embarrassed to meet any of his friends and contemporaries from school. He completely isolated himself, and refused to go out or have his friends in as he was afraid of being teased for opting out, but he absolutely refused to go back to his old school or have anything to do with any other. Any suggestion which came from the LEA was immediately suspect by virtue of its source, regardless of its validity.

It seemed to us that he suddenly changed and began to become a 'social animal' again, but I'm sure this was only the outward appearance, and that the healing process within himself had been a gradual one. I think two things took place: 1) He discovered through chance meetings that in-school friends were extremely envious of his new freedom from school and rather than wanting to taunt him they thought it was a victory, and 2) it took him some time to really believe that it mightn't all be a dream and any minute now he might be whisked back. Finding we were solidly behind him (although suspected of not understanding because we were adults - another species?) did wonders for his morale.

Though he may have missed out academically in some respects, he has broadened his horizons and become extremely mature and adult in the last 6-9 months. He now has lots of friends - a few close ones, who seem to be forever drinking coffee, playing records etc. in our house. We have long sessions talking about school and education otherwise and the system and I find these young people all very articulate and quite passionate in their feelings that the school is not geared to their needs but is a servant of the political and economic machine, into which they are all to be thrown as obedient (?) cogs. His friends are mostly between 16 and 19; some of them have left school and are suffering the bitter pangs of unemployment. I find these youngsters very practical and philosophical and very much more aware than we were in my generation. They deserve more than we are giving them.

Roland Meighan has been a constant source of help and support and we are grateful to him.

Chris - not long ago - rose at 4am and went off down the wholesale vegetable market and 'asked' until he got himself a part-time job, which starts at 5am. He has taken up ice skating quite seriously, gets out and plays table tennis and swims, joined a cricket team in the summer, is not much of a footballer, is an avid and intelligent reader and articulate in company and, I feel, quite as balanced and able a personality as I would have wished him to be. He still retains his phobia about school and clams up when the LEA inspectors appear, causing them still to say "he seems introverted, isolated and withdrawn", and they worry for his future when it comes to finding a job and coping in the 'real' world. We've tried to explain to them that Chris copes very ably and that it is their presence with all its reminders, its scent of old fears, that has closed him up, but they are not really convinced.

I have thought about this: in school children are taught to do as they are told, to accept discipline from outside themselves. Chris' discipline has had to come from inside himself. We have taught him that this has to be so, and he has grown in maturity. This schooling in discipline that we normally receive in school does nothing to strengthen self-discipline. It only restrains just as corsets hold the tummy in - but do nothing to strengthen the 'natural corset', the abdominal muscles - only exercise of those muscles will do that. The outside discipline is just another instance of preparing the child to fall obediently into his place in the social hierarchy. Again the pandering to the economic and political machine - rather than to the individual needs of the child. On this note I will close - having rambled on more than I had intended.

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#### SUSSEX MEETING: Helen Holland

This venture was an entirely selfish one. I wanted to find more people in Sussex who would be sympathetic to EO and might become members, so that I would not feel entirely isolated when I set about educating my own children at home.

I had already embarked on this course by finding people to teach some subjects that I wasn't much good at, and coercing friends and friend's friends to join in. We now have a music class (appreciation, singing and sight reading), a drama workshop, a maths class and a French/sewing morning (an odd combination, but I felt it was important to learn the language only orally at this stage, so we needed something to do at the same time).

The crunch came when Eliza's contemporaries began to don school uniform and could no longer attend morning sessions. We moved the music and drama (which were popular) to late afternoons; the maths and French continued with fewer members. Hence the meeting.

I really wanted to know what had made Dick found EO, so I invited myself to a Core Group meeting and asked him to come down and talk if I produced an audience. We fixed a date and then I set about

hiring a hall, contacting local EO people and spreading the word. A friend designed a poster and my husband Mark, who is a publisher, persuaded one of his printers to run off several dozen copies; these were distributed to anyone who could be persuaded to take one. I asked Gillian Drake and Lorna Biccichi to come and talk after Dick, explaining their attitudes and how they actually put EO into practice.

I heard of a girl who had once run a nursery school and who sometimes wrote for the local paper, and invited myself round to coffee. She was extraordinarily kind and promptly sat down at her typewriter to run a few words off, and then rang the editor to tell him I was on the way. This banal "mother-of-three.." little piece got onto the front page and straightaway the telephone calls started. Mark, thus inspired, ran off some dramatic press releases which we sent to all the local papers in Sussex; several must have printed something because I had some telephone calls from further away. Then the Brighton Evening Argus rang; their features reporter was particularly sympathetic to our cause and did us proud with a double-page spread featuring Gillian Drake with Sara, and another family (not yet EO members, but home educators of long standing).

As a result of all this publicity (even Southern Television rang, but I drew the line at going down to Portsmouth to be interviewed) I realised that we would need a hall larger than the small Council Chamber I had booked. Fortunately, the larger hall downstairs would be free only half-an-hour after the time we had advertised.

This kind of minor panic, and Mark's departure that very afternoon for Australia (hunting for socks and passports, mentally rehearsing my smooth introduction - "Mr Kick Ditto has kindly...") all added to the feeling that I had taken on more than I could handle. By the time I'd met Dick at the station, put all three children to bed, answered the telephone seven times and collected the babysitter I was quite convinced of it. However, kind friends rallied round and we got to the village hall in plenty of time to send the expectant audience off to the local pubs for a quick snifter until the talk began - and by now I was calm and confident enough to assume they would all come back. I was pleased and surprised to see lots of new faces - they weren't all Rabbit's friends and relations.

Dick spoke for half an hour or so, about some of the experiences that had led him to found EO, referring to the Harrison case. It was a fascinating account and well received. Gillian and Lorna gave excellent accounts of their reasons for educating at home, and a day in the life of their children.

Then we invited questions and comments, which came thick and fast. Dick dealt with these very well and Lorna and Gillian both had plenty more to say. It was heartening to see that most of the audience were very sympathetic. We had a table with literature by the door and I passed round a book for those who were interested in maintaining contact to sign. We asked people to donate something towards the expenses of the evening, but some of them were rather

mean in this respect. The local paper sent a reporter, who wrote a good account.

Eventually, with the hall caretaker padding suggestively around, we had to come to a halt; but clearly the occasion had been a success. About sixty or seventy people turned up, which wasn't bad for a cold January evening.

Since then there has been plenty more interest shown, including yet another reporter from the local paper (with a photographer) for a "woman's page" (!) feature. I hope to be able to form a strong local group which will encourage others in Sussex to do likewise; certainly the steady flow of letters and telephone calls suggests there are many people who would like to educate their children themselves. My next move is to get hold of a film John Holt mentions, about the New Little School in Denmark. But this time I shall charge people to get in!

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#### A PLEA FOR LATE READING: Jackie Fearnley

Rose is six and a half and has not been to school. Quite often people ask me if we sit down and have any lessons, and how do I manage with two other children? (Lillah three and three-quarters and Felix just one) Rose is also quite often asked if she can read. I suppose the nearest we get to having lessons is when a game of schools is played. However it often doesn't progress beyond the finding of suitably uniform-like clothes, packing satchels, pretending to go on the bus, taking the register and dinner money and singing a hymn. It has sometimes struck me that meanwhile, in numerous schools, there are children pretending to cook or go shopping, post a letter or answer the telephone.

Much of Rose's time is spent in what most people would regard as playing - often with her brother and sister in all kinds of imaginative situations, or doing a little puppet show or circus or making a house. She has tried her hand at various times at such crafts as spinning, dyeing, sewing, crochet, clay modelling and basket making - either with one of us or a friend. This observation of others at work - 'catching' the feeling of what they do - must form the basis for many skills.

We do make sure of setting time aside at least at the end of the day for stories. Because of the younger ones much time has to be spent in activities suitable for all - going for walks, singing and making music, painting and drawing, gardening and other household tasks such as cleaning, mending, ironing, breadmaking and other cooking - which jobs they all join in with varying degrees of skill.

Dividing up our activities in this way means I have missed out the most important and constant one - that of talking to each other. During a day conversations might cover practical information about where things come from, how they are made, what is a star? what is

a planet? Where is Iceland? Why shouldn't you swear? Where did we come from? Who made God? How many aunts have I got? Do we come to life again? What is 9999 + 9999? Why is so and so smaller than daddy when he's older? Why do we knead bread or mix cakes to let the air in but wedge clay to let the air out? Every mother knows how one thing can lead to another....

Our approach to bringing up our children has been the result of a large number of influences, together with a desire to review constantly what we are doing - trying to understand by observing their behaviour and ours. We hope that in this way we manage to do the right thing at the right time - though so often we realise how easily we become complacent and self-indulgent, or critical of others who are in a different situation.

Back to Rose: Because she did not show great or sustained interest in writing or reading until fairly recently we did not put pressure on her to begin learning. In fact we very much took the approach of Rudolf Steiner who said that until the seventh year, around the time of starting to lose the first teeth, the child's powers should be flowing into physical growth and particularly into the forming of the will (Not easy to explain in one sentence!)

At first she wanted to write all our names and various useful, important words - MUM DAD ROSE LILLAH FELIX JACKIE JAMES LOVE FROM. She only wanted to write things that seemed necessary - shopping lists, tags for presents, birthday cards, important messages such as "I LOVE YOU DAN AND MAN" (her grandparents). These were always written in capitals as they had more straight lines and I never bothered about it being small, neat or on the line; though in fact several people have commented on how well-formed her letters are.

She gradually became aware that there is an alphabet and that letters could be upper or lower case. We filled in any letters she didn't know and she liked to relate them to known objects (eg 'Y' is the clothes prop, 'V' is a valley). Grasping the fact that letters make certain sounds and that these can vary probably took up about 10 minutes during one particular week.

She has an alphabetical book similar to an address book and she sometimes spends a comparatively long period (eg half an hour during a week) getting me to spell out (not write down - for one thing I can still be changing a nappy or whatever) words she feels have particular meaning for her (SUNFLOWER BOOT DINOSAUR HOMESTEAD VAN GUINEA PIG SARAH JO ALICE BRIAN etc).

The only reading is when she tries to decipher something I have spat out that I don't wish her to hear! Very occasionally we have sat down with a simple book such as "Ant and Bee" and learnt some of the words but she is far more interested in writing. Feelings of enthusiasm and satisfaction can soon be replaced by tiredness and irritability if these sessions are prolonged after the real impetus has passed. It's easy to forget how tiring such an unaccustomed activity can be for children.

When I feel that rather a long time has gone by without something like this happening I am often tempted to provide an occasion - for example, "Let's write down all the people who phoned for daddy!" Rose: "You can do it." Or, "What about writing Thank you for the Honey to my aunt?" Rose: "I don't feel like writing at the moment." Or, "Let's write down all the things we saw at the museum..." Even as I say it my voice trails away as I realise that Rose's memory is far better than mine and there is no need for her to write things down in case she forgets them.

On the other hand there are occasions when writing is really exciting to Rose - putting birthdays on the calendar, making cards, doing a whole address on an envelope. The intensity of these experiences cannot be measured in terms of time spent in writing.

I am reminded of a lovely passage from "Hugo and Josephine" (Maria Gripe), a favourite book with Rose:

"Don't you bother your poor head ever teaching me to read, Miss" Hugo says consolingly, "That's something one has to teach oneself. There'll be time for that too... No" he says. "There's no sense in it. What, just to teach us to read what's in books?" Over the weekend Hugo does teach himself to read: "I stared hard at these little letters. The same way I search in the woods for little bits of wood to make things out of. And then I saw how they crept together, these little letters, just like little creatures on the ground. It all happened by itself. It wasn't so hard, just a bit tricky."

It is likely that a large proportion of children in our society could learn to read and write in this natural way at around the age of seven. I'm sure many teachers themselves feel that there would be no harm in being patient and exerting less pressure on children.

What is taught in schools and the way it is taught must be a reflection of society. I suppose that we value people so much in terms of the job they do that we are anxious not to give our children a handicap in the competition. If reading and writing are viewed as the basic skills and the gateway to all else, then people think the sooner they are learnt the better. I don't deny that literacy is a useful skill and one which can lead to a person's being less narrow and more open to all sorts of thoughts and ideas. I don't agree that for everyone it is the necessary preliminary to all other activity, nor that being able to read corresponds with being able to think. I sometimes wonder what sort of society we would have if it were based instead on, for example, the three Cs - Carpentry, Child care and Cookery?

I suppose the idea is that we can read about how to do these things. But my feeling is that our society is too much based on experience at second hand - reading about how others live, what they have done or thought, listening to music, learning Art as a separate subject at school and seeing as a special group people who are creative. We watch sport, prepare convenience foods, read newspapers, watch television, look at beautiful or useful objects in art galleries or museums, take Open University courses on child

development. So much of the time we are passive and content to leave huge chunks of life to the experts.

In spite of all our technological advances, sophistication and material prosperity we probably know correspondingly less about why we are here and where we are going, how we are related to the forces of Nature, how to take care of our own bodies, how to make or repair basic things we need, how to look after our children, how to get on with each other and how to look after our earth.

"Nothing less than this arbitrary separation of scientific research from the reality of the human personality could have allowed the creation of such monstrosities as the atomic bomb and the hydrogen bomb." (Robert Jungk in "Brighter than a Thousand Suns")

It would be impossible to measure scientifically (the only sort of proof our intellectual/mechanical/materialistic society seems to accept) the damage done to children by concentrating their energies at a very early age on such relatively narrow concerns as writing and reading. One thing that must happen is that those who don't learn between 5 and 7 feel themselves to be failures - or their parents do.

But an aspect less easy to pin down and which worries me is the underlying assumption that children do not have anything of their own to contribute in terms of their own particular experience, imagination or personality. The idea seems to be that the child is in school to be fed with information and/or (more liberal approach) to find out answers that are already known.

I suspect that children have other ways of experiencing and communicating that we only dimly understand if we're aware of them at all. We don't know what damage is done to these developing powers if all activity is first channelled through reading and writing.

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#### CARTWHEEL: Gina Rannie

Cartwheel started last year with a request for ideas on forming a large-scale alternative community in Britain. A compilation of these ideas was made and followed up by a meeting in Wales. A core group of about 20 people have regular meetings now and we are formulating a manifesto for a cooperative community which is designed ultimately to involve about 200 people.

This year we intend to raise funds to purchase the farmland and houses which will be cooperatively 'owned'. We aim to share all our income and capital, be able to produce all our own food and energy and, ultimately, to base all our work within the village community. We want to show that real cooperation and communality can provide a practical alternative to the way the majority of people live now and enable people to take control over their own lives in a way that does not exploit others. We hope for an open

community incorporating maximum diversity of age and background and to include those in most need of an alternative such as people labelled by society as delinquents, problem families, ex-prisoners, orphans etc. We envisage households varying from large communal groups, through families, to individuals living alone. People will be linked through working together, collective child-care and provision of communal facilities for eating, laundry, education, cultural activities and so on.

The general views on education within the core group of Cartwheel are that children should not be sent to school but that they should participate as equal members of the community to the extent that they wish to and that we should provide adequate workshops and educational facilities on site for adults and children to work and learn alongside each other. Some of us already have experience of living communally and having our children at home and have found that a community situation can provide a free, exciting and fulfilling environment for young people to grow up in. To send our children to school would be to belie the morality by which we live and expose them to a set of standards we all know to be inhibiting, competitive and destructive.

We would like to hear from EO people who are interested in Cartwheel and would welcome your attendance at our meetings. Also I would like to hold a weekend gathering of people interested in communal living and de-schooling at Wheatstone sometime this spring, provisional date May 17th-18th. Wheatstone is a commune of twelve people living on a smallholding of seven acres. We have plenty of space for camping and adequate indoor space if it rains. I hope for a weekend with lots of kids and sunshine.

Please contact me if either Cartwheel or the Wheatstone weekend inspires you. Gina, Wheatstone, Leintwardine, Near Craven Arms, Salop. Telephone Leintwardine 662.

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#### TALKING ABOUT SCHOOL

"Education is regarded as the written page in this country... if you make a pair of boots or a camera, you are downgraded in the educational system" (Hugh Casson, BBC1 10th Jan).

"Exams are so bloomin' restricting, aren't they? They [the children] keep having to pull back... Tomorrow we are going to be a totally different kind of society and I think education ought to be preparing people for the difference..." (Angela Blakely on Woman's Hour, BBC Radio 4 7th Dec).

"We don't need no education  
We don't need no thought control  
No dark sarcasm in the classroom  
Teacher leave them kids alone.  
... All in all you're just another brick in the Wall."  
(Pink Floyd's recent record)

"It is usually said that Beethoven had very little schooling and that is true. But think what he learned by doing!" (American school text book "People and Music")

"I never used to go to school... I used to say goodbye to me Mam and then go to the swimming baths... I got caught. The priest... beat me with a "ruler", a whalebone encased in leather. ...Children should be brought up in a world of love." (Jimmy Tarbuck, BBC1 19th Dec)

Actor Denham Elliott said that school ruined his life. He held a grudge against it until his psychiatrist's fees equalled his school fees (BBC Radio 4, January).

A computer-written letter was sent to out to the parents of a 108-year old woman, asking why she was not at school (BBC Radio 4 18th Dec).

Children at a primary school in East Anglia had an external music "adviser" brought in to take over their recorder lessons during the headmistress' absence. Unfortunately, he made them learn the wrong fingering. Later, it all had to be unlearned - which proved too much for one little girl, who had simply to give up.

\* \* \* \* \*

## REVIEWS

"Radical Education - a Critique of Freeschooling and Deschooling" by Robin Barrow; published Martin Robertson (paperback). I think many EO members will find this book somewhat disconcerting but it should be read nonetheless for it will provoke argument and interest and may sort out some woolly thought! The blurb says: "The author argues that, despite a number of important insights, radical educationalists since the time of Rousseau have increasingly confused and distorted an already vulnerable thesis and the radical message is fundamentally conservative and irresponsible." Actually, I have it on very good evidence that Robin Barrow set out to be really damning of these writers (Neill, Goodman, Illich etc) but found himself being gradually swayed by some of their arguments - not that he lets on in the book! He does not get as far as Holt, but I can imagine he would not have dealt particularly kindly with his ideas either.

"Teaching Thinking" by Edward de Bono; Pelican. Perhaps if Rousseau et al had digested this carefully Robin Barrow would not have been able to lay into them so freely. I haven't yet finished reading it, but should be interested to learn of any EO members who have set out to teach thinking, with or without the aid of this book. How have they got on?

"Mindstorms: Children, Computers, Powerful Ideas" by Seymour Papert; Harvester Press.

The author believes that children can spontaneously and creatively make use of computers in a far more developmental and imaginative way than adults - with all their built-in traditional methods and attitudes towards education - can begin to achieve. He talks about why children dislike maths and how irrelevant much school maths is. He says there should be a renaissance in education and that it should be taken out of schools and put back in the hands of parents!

I, who am virtually innumerate, found the book absolutely riveting and can hardly wait for the price of computers to come down to the level where I can rush out and buy one.

I have managed to wangle a 25% pre-publication discount (for the book, not the computer) for EO members, so if you are interested please send me a sae as soon as possible; to Helen Holland, Horsgate Farm, Cuckfield, Sussex, RH17 5AZ.

\* \* \* \* \*

## LETTERS

Dear Editorial Person!

I was interested in Chris Stokes' article on Examinations. He mentions "There are no age restrictions".

My 15 year old daughter studied out of school for three 'O'-levels, and we duly applied for her to sit these as an external student. Back came a shock. As Sarah was not 16 before the 1st Sept 1979, the board required a certificate from "the Principal" of her school or place of "full time education" to say that it was educationally desirable that she sit these exams. (Her 16th birthday fell on the 8th Sept - one week late).

We did manage to get round it, but only because the headmaster of the school where Sarah was to sit the exam was a personal friend who agreed to write on her behalf.

I now have my 14 year old son out of school, hoping to take two 'O'-levels next summer. I no longer have my personal contact, so, any suggestions as to how to get round the problem? I think all boards have the same ruling.

In case it is of interest, Sarah was out of school because she was totally depressed by her comprehensive school life. She rid herself of three 'O'-levels in a few months of study at home, and we moved to Letchworth where she is taking six more in this year. She goes to St Christopher School where teaching and caring are inseparable, and both of the highest quality, and Sarah is very happy. It is sad that the price of caring and compassion is so high.

Julie Waite, 27 William Way, Letchworth.

## EO - SOMEWHERE TO DO IT

We live in a row of four stone-built cottages just outside Eyemouth, a small but expanding town on the south-east coast of Scotland (just over the Border, about nine miles north of Berwick-upon-Tweed). These cottages have just [January] been put on the market. They are not large, but we, as a young family of (now) four, have been happy in one of them for nearly four years.

The cottages are not expensive, by general standards, and we are seriously considering the possibility of buying the one which we now rent. However, we should be much happier if we were able to live with neighbours who share a similar outlook to (or at least one compatible with) ours, especially with regard to education of our kids. Ideally we are interested in contacting two or three families with children of similar ages to our two girls (just 4, and nearly 2).

Cottages 1 & 2 (we live in number 2) are separate self-contained units consisting of two rooms downstairs and one room and an attic upstairs, plus kitchen, bathroom etc. Numbers 3 & 4, although built on the same pattern, have had a downstairs dividing wall knocked down to make them into a single unit of twice the size. There is a fairly large area of land at the end of the row, known as the paddock.

The asking price for the cottages is: No.1 - £8000, No.2 - £6000, Nos.3&4 together - £12000. I'm not yet quite sure how the paddock fits in - whether or not it's being sold separately. It has to be emphasised that these are the asking prices - we feel pretty sure that they could be obtained for considerably less, especially if they were to be bought collectively (not necessarily owned collectively, but all bought in one deal).

Our general thinking is that the row could be ideal for a collective, consisting of three or four families, with children of similar ages, all sharing in common a determination to educate them otherwise. The arrangement of the buildings allows a fair degree of flexibility in the way such a collective could operate. Assuming that it can be easily obtained (and we think this is the case) the "paddock" offers considerable scope for cultivation. It has been used for training horses for many years, so it should be pretty fertile! And of course, chickens, goats etc.

Anyone who is at all interested, please write to us urgently (there is no knowing when one of the cottages might be sold), with a view to coming up to see the place and talking about it. We are of course able to put people up fairly comfortably - although cramped - for a night or two for viewing and discussion.

Nick & Leonora Godwin, 2 Mill Cottages, Eyemouth, Berwickshire, Scotland, TD14 5RE.

[The following is extracted from a letter to Dick Kitto]

... Any doubts we ever had about home education have certainly disappeared. As our children get older we can see that it was the right decision. They have no hangups about any subject and are never daunted (it's "mother" who gets scared at some of their projects!) and are certainly individuals with their own ideas. As for socialising, ...there aren't enough days in the week. It will be seven years in March since we de-schooled but it really doesn't seem that long at all, and in less than that time they'll probably both be away from home.

I hope you get a good response to the [Harrison] appeal, we feel it is important.

Paula Theobald, 34 Church View Road, Desborough, Northants.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dear Eds,

May I defend myself? Audrey Hannan's claim that children plodded thru' my "look, listen, say and hear" method is unfounded. I have never promulgated a "method". I was stating, as irrefutable, that such was the mental process by which children learn. Any psychologist, or even brain surgeon would agree. Her children's samples - or any samples - are inconclusive. I could read at four. So could my daughter, "untaught". I could also play the piano and so could my daughter, "untaught", at the age of four. My son could not read till he was eight and at ten had a reading age(!??) of fourteen.

My daughter has used phonetics successfully in a four-to-one situation. How could she fail!?? What neither my daughter nor Audrey know, and possibly would not accept (God knows why) is that the teaching, as opposed to the learning, of the exact definitions of reading, writing and maths, in an unimaginative and unemotional way destroys the imagination and prevents the child from fulfilling its intellectual potential. Since the end product of their teaching will only be measurable at around twenty-five I, at sixty-six, have the experience to judge the results of such teaching. They haven't. Being an ex-teacher my daughter, while using INSTANT MUSIC and considering it marvellous, neither knows nor wishes to know its psychological/educational value in depth. Indeed most people, especially teachers, are most subjective toward "teaching". There is little point in EO if it to be subjective, uninformed surrogate schooling. Such is merely the substitute of the frying pan for the fire.

The ability to spell is dependant on BRAIN FORMATION not on any method of learning. Dislexia is an example. Music is an intrinsic trait of humanity. A musically deprived child is a deprived child. As a nation we are neurotic about reading achievement. Modestly I admit I DO know what I am talking about. Most EO parents admit they don't. And you, Audrey????

Esme Howard, 5 New Brotton, Saltburn, Cleveland.

## NOTICES

1. First Steps: I have taken on the task of re-editing this booklet and would be extremely grateful if members could help me. I would like to know the first questions you thought of about the possibility of educating your children 'otherwise', especially those other than the legal problems; and if possible how you resolved these questions. This will allow me to assess which problems are most common and to decide how best we can advise others. Please write (before the end of March) to: Dianne Cox, Park Lodge, Tilton Lane, Billesdon, Leicester.
2. Newsletter: articles, reviews, letters are always welcome. Please send any contributions to the Editorial Group, 69 Leathwaite Road, London SW11; by April 26th to be in time for the editorial meeting.
3. Books, toys, art materials, teaching equipment. I am a representative for Abbatt and ESA (toys and educational materials) and "Books for Young Children" of Haxey, near Doncaster (a wide range of fiction and non-fiction for ages 0-17). Items ordered through me will mean commission of 5-20% to EO funds; alternatively, up to 20% discount on Abbatt and ESA items. I am also willing to take details of second-hand equipment, for sale/wanted/exchange, to be published in the newsletter. For details send sae to: Christine Parker, 19 Windsor Road, Godmanchester, Huntingdon, Cambs; or phone Huntingdon (0480) 52450.
4. EO Booklist: Jane Davies is compiling a comprehensive booklist. Anyone who wishes to suggest books for the list should send details and a short description to: Jane Davies, 48 Fisherbeck Park, Ambleside.
5. Resources list: Sheila Stocking is organising a list of resources among EO members. If resources which you offered in the past (through application form, questionnaire or letter) are now not available, or if you have something new to offer, please write to Sheila at: 91 Shakespeare Road, London SE24.
6. Local fundraising: Have you considered holding an EO fundraising event? Jumble sales, raffles, sponsored walks etc not only raise money for EO but also spread information about it. Local newspapers and radio stations will often cover this sort of event if you tell them in advance. If you do hold such an event do write and tell us all about it; an account of your problems and experiences might encourage other members to do the same!

7. Wheatstone Community Project: Rural commune of twelve people on seven acres wants people with de-schooled kids to come and live and work with us. We have two children out of school (aged 5 and 7) and they badly need other children to live with. (A brief description of the Cartwheel project, based at Wheatstone, appears in this NL). For more details contact: Wheatstone, Leintwardine, Nr Craven Arms, Salop; tel Leintwardine 662.
  
8. EO Correspondence: Membership queries should be addressed to the membership secretaries, Dom and Ros Sweetman, 69 Leathwaite Road, London SW11.  
Queries about subscriptions or money should be made to the Treasurer, John Elenor, 18 Eynham Road, London W12.  
Legal difficulties and problems of that sort may still be addressed to Dick Kitto. But there is nothing like personal contacts and personal communication and families with problems are advised first of all to get in touch with their local co-ordinator or others on the contact list.
  
9. Meeting in London: There will be a public meeting organised by the A.S.Neill Trust Association, on "Practical aspects of education otherwise". It will take place at the Inter-Action Community Centre, Kentish Town (Chalk Farm tube station) at 7.30 on March 28th. We hope that some EO parents will manage to attend. Details about the meeting from Bob White, c/o Corner Bookshop, Endell Street, Covent Garden, London WC2.
  
10. Suzuki Piano lessons in London: Stephanie Leland is setting up a group based at her home in North London for weekly one-hour lessons, with a trained Suzuki teacher. These are attended by children together with their parent. It is possible a South London group will also be set up soon. Please contact Stephanie for more details at 82 Lady Margaret Road, London N19. (01-609-2303).

PRICE 40p.