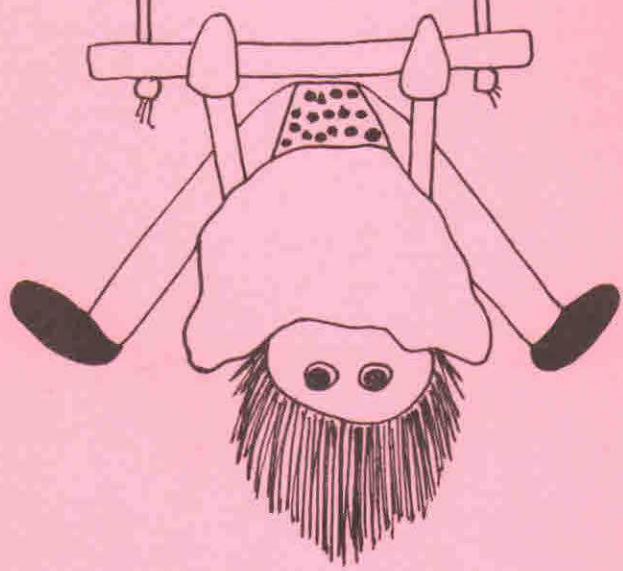


PL 8 6-2003

9. Distance Learning
Directions
32 Computers.



education otherwise

NEWSLETTER

no. 35

June 1984

Contents

Editorial	1
EO thro' the Press	2
Dyslexia: myth or reality?	4
Education is only the icing on the cake!	7
Thoughts on children	9
More on 'distance learning'	9
Educating Archie	11
'Too much maths'	12
Deschooling and a one-parent family	13
Deschooling in a commune	15
The Encyclopaedia Britannica story	16
Reviews	17
Suggestions please	20
Out takes	21
EO in literature	21
Notices	23
Letters	25
News from the regions	35
Extract from a letter home	40

Cover illustration based on a drawing by Kathleen Downie

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the editor or Education Otherwise as a whole.

The Editor for the August Newsletter will be Pauline Thomasson
49 Glaister Lane
Bolton
Lancs. BL2 5BS.

Contributions should be sent to this address by 1st July and clearly marked "For Publication".

EDITORIAL — Lesley & Roger Downie

Having boldly volunteered, it was not without some trepidation that we embarked on editing the stream of correspondence which came through our door. I thought that May was going to be a good month to do the newsletter but it has instead been very hectic with visitors, an interview, a soot fall, a party and a camp landing unpredictably on us on top of our expected activities of planting vegetables, running Woodcraft Folk, attending meetings, EOing, houseworking etc. However despite all this, here it is!

Roger and I would like to see the newsletter being supportive, helpful and informative to all our members. We are all growing and changing, and most of us go through sticky patches from time to time. What works one month may not work the next, and although what suits our family may not suit yours, it helps to read about the different ways that people have solved their problems and to try out new approaches.

Thank you to Brenda Holliday and Lynne Alexander who did the typing, and to all those who contributed to the wealth of material. We have had to exercise scissors and pen a lot in order to include as many contributions as possible and feel it would be helpful to future editors if articles and letters are concise and either typed or written legibly.

Finally, an idea for future newsletters, part of each newsletter could have a previously announced theme, such as LEA problems, or learning languages, or computers ... This approach could help give the newsletter coherence, and might encourage more people to write, by giving them something definite to write about.



Kathleen's Editorial

My name is Kathleen Downie. I will be 8 on the 15th of August. I have never been to school. I like drawing and writing and climbing hills in the country. I live in the city but I have a small garden inside in a tray, a window box outside and a patch at one of our allotments. I also like dancing and baking bread. And that is all I want to say except for 30 Hillhead Street, Glasgow, G12 8PZ which is my address.



Ewan's Editorial

I went to school for one year and 2 months when I was 6. Some things I liked and some things I didn't. I especially didn't like the unsupervised playground. Now I am 9½ I like reading, making potions with things I find, experimenting with fire and I'm interested in ants and am going to make a formicarium. I like EO but I think it's boring when reporters come round. They take so long to take pictures and ask silly questions when I'd rather be reading.

EO thro' the Press

"We're not all champagne-swilling Hooray Henries - most of us are ordinary folk like you." (Oxford undergraduates in an appeal to attract more 6th formers from comprehensive schools to study at the university. TELEGRAPH 13.3.84.)

"It is nonsense to say that the staff have been on 8 months' holiday doing nothing the nine teachers have been working very hard organising courses and drawing up timetables." (Chairman of Liverpool Education Committee defending the policy which kept staff on in an empty residential school despite the fact that it officially closed to children 9 months ago. TELEGRAPH 3.3.84.)

"Parents ... put pressure on the secondary schools to concentrate on achieving exam successes at the expense of other skills and qualities. These facts distort the significance which should be attached to examinations and discourage schools from giving proper attention to the development of proper skills and personal qualities at all levels of pupil ability." (Sir Keith Joseph, in a letter to employers asking them to let him know exactly what they expect from school leavers. TELEGRAPH 20.3.84.)

"Children start school "docile, keen and bright-eyed" yet often leave "with eyes dim and motivation blunted." (Keith Joseph, calling for improvements in primary school education. TELEGRAPH 30.3.84.)

"Sir Keith ... now attempts to give a short lesson on the curriculum in almost every speech he makes" (John Izbicki, Education Correspondent of the TELEGRAPH March 84.)

"Secondary schools currently meet the daunting challenges which our society presents in a way which is a major success story, not a catalogue of failures." (Barry Taylor, Chief Education Officer for Somerset, Education GUARDIAN 9.4.84.)

"God should never have been expelled from America's classrooms." (President Reagan, in a presidential election speech calling for the re-institution of prayers in American schools after a constitutional ban. TELEGRAPH 7.3.84.)

"George was a perpetual truant who wouldn't come to school and who wouldn't work when we got him there ... he was weird ... he did not want to work. I took the decision to expel him." (Boy George's old headmaster, Eltham Green comprehensive SUNDAY TIMES 15.4.84.)

"Comprehensive schools closely resemble prisons and concentration camps in their organisational style, according to a study by a management consultant. The inmates' work routine is disrupted every 40 minutes; they change their places of work and supervisors constantly; they have no place they can call their own; and they are often forbidden to communicate or co-operate with each other." (SUNDAY TIMES)

"Going to school can be a worrying experience but it can be fun if your child has already started to read and count. LEARNING BOX is a series of 8 computer programmes based on traditional stories. Designed for 3 to 8 year olds, ... With the very clear Parents Guide we can help your child get on at school." (Advertisement in the MAIL ON SUNDAY magazine, March 84).

"Unless the computer has grown up in the world as we have ... in no way can its intelligence be related to the intelligence of the human being ... Therefore in a learning situation it cannot help the child to understand how to work things out for himself(sic), for example, or how to understand the nuances of his natural language, let alone a foreign language. Even the subtleties of mathematics need careful explanation by a fellow human being. To see the computer perform calculations doesn't give the child insight into how it all came about." (Ken Waddilove, lecturer in computing at Filton Technical College, Bristol, EDUCATION GUARDIAN, March 84)

"A great mythology surrounds the educational value of a programme like SESAME STREET but research has shown that children do not, in fact, learn anything from it." (Cedric Cullingford author of a new study of children and television. TELEGRAPH 29.3.84.)

"Too much tv is bad for the children because the most important thing is to create." (The cellist Paul Tortelier speaking on Radio 4, March 84)

"Our six year old daughter decided she would write a book. She dictated it, I wrote it down. She copied it out. It took us hours, but it was worth it." (Mother of 4 talking of the 'wonderful' benefits they'd had from switching off TV for a month, part of a town-wide resolution in Connecticut USA. TELEGRAPH Jan 84)

"If you can read this thank a teacher" (car sticker produced by the N.U.T.)

"(Teaching styles) tend to promote passive dependency and resourcelessness, rather than autonomy, independence, inter-dependence and resourcefulness." (A report from the Secondary Heads Association on the 12 key areas where schools need to do better. TIMES EDUCATIONAL SUPPLEMENT, 27.1.84.)

"I don't mind admitting I've been assaulted more times than I can count - four or five times." (Schoolteacher discussing violence in schools on YOU and YOURS, Radio 4, reprinted in THE LISTENER, April 5th 1984)

"Most kids lose their curiosity early at school. It's killed because learning is made to seem like work, and work is undesirable. That's the great thing about EO, they don't learn that learning is bad." (Bruce Wallace, EO parent, in a feature about their family, SUNDAY TIMES 18.3.84.)

"Are we introducing them to a real, competitive world? My childhood, when we lived in the country during the war relying on our family resources, was more real than the more remote world of boarding school." (Anthony Brown, father of three boys educated at home in Scotland, interviewed in SUNDAY TELEGRAPH 4.3.84.)

"He should get some praise for doing something useful in his life. I think he has had all the education he can at school." (The father of a 15 year old truant who built up an £11,000 a year firewood business at home and was subsequently fined by Berkshire L.E.A. TELEGRAPH 21.3.84.)

news*news*news*news*news*news*news*news*news*news

The government has guaranteed that pupils confidential school files will be immune from police seizure (TELEGRAPH 18.1.84)*** There is to be more emphasis on vocational training for Russian school-children, while the school entry is to be lowered from 7 to 6 (TELEGRAPH 5.1.84.)***40% of three and four year olds now go to school (TIMES EDUCATION SUPPLEMENT April 84)***Experiments at the National Institute of Mental Health indicate that children's caring response depends on the way their parents behave (DAILY MAIL 8.3.84.)*****



Edited by Sarah Guthrie with contributions from Janice Owens, Janet Everdell, Lorna Biccichi.

Dyslexia myth or reality?

'Dyslexia' is frequently in the news. 'The Guardian' recently reported on a forthcoming "test-case" of children's rights to an efficient education, involving two children in Essex. Both have been diagnosed as dyslexic. The parents demanded that the children receive an education that would develop their full potential. Essex lacks a facility for language learning problems and claimed the nearest place was a private school in Kent, with fees of £3,800 per year. When Essex refused to pay for the children to go there (this could set a precedent opening a floodgate of requests), the parents withdrew them from school. They are attempting to devise a learning programme, but are having problems "It isn't easy to think up lessons for a 9-year-old boy who can hardly write his own name." Essex has taken the parents to court for non-attendance, and the next step is a hearing to determine whether the children should be 'taken into care'.

The family has been told that "dyslexia affects one in five school children", but does it exist, or is it a convenient label for a wide range of learning problems specifically associated with schools? We offer two contrasting articles on this problem.

The Ghost of Dyslexia

by Juan Campos

The April issue contains another letter by an E.O. parent who seems to believe the dominant educational jargon on 'Dyslexia'. 'Dyslexia' is a pseudo-medical term applied to children who don't read or write as correctly as the adults in their lives - parents, teachers, psychologists - would wish them to. It is one of the many labels with a medical flavour which are being increasingly manufactured by the psycho-educational establishment and imposed on the behaviour and achievement of children who are thus invalidated and deprived of intentionality. 'Hyperactivity', 'School-phobia', 'Minimal brain disfunction' are common ones. Their function is to prevent genuine searches for the meaning of the 'symptom' at stake, to absolve parents or teachers from their role in creating the child's impasse, to provide pseudo-remedies (drugs, boring and empty efforts at reeducation, rewards and punishments or forms of psychotherapy which confuse and remove the child even further from the truth of the anger, fear or longing which the behaviour expresses.)

Veronica Gibbs believes her child suffers from poor visual short-term memory; after all that is what the experts had pronounced. Even at the risk of generalising and being speculative, since I've never met the child, I would deny such diagnosis; how come she can read then above her age level? Is she not able to decode T.V. programmes, facial gestures from people around her; does she forget what her toys look like when she turns her face away from the, or whether it is raining or not if she closes her eyes? What mysterious 'illness' is this visual memory handicap that applies to words only and not to the million other visual stimuli which bombard her waking hours? Even within the realm of words, it's obvious that short-term memory is also involved in her reading and not handicapping her in that skill. As a trained psychologist I regard with contempt the spurious, pseudo-scientific claims of most of what goes by as reliable knowledge in that field, and it worries me the number of E.O. parents taken in by it. The only critical article I can recall was by A.M. Nimmo in the April, 83 newsletter. Yet it gave a too simple account of the causes of poor reading by putting the blame on inadequate teaching only. The fact is that there can be an almost infinite number of existential, interpersonal and emotional reasons why a child is unable to write. I recommend 'On learning to read' by Bruno Bettelheim, a book which includes a criticism of teaching methods, primers used and teacher's responses to misreadings, while looking at the whole person of the child and the possibility that reading and writing difficulties can result from and express their hatred, suspicion, insecurity and rebellion towards the most significant adults in their lives and hence towards themselves. Veronica Gibbs unwittingly recognises these emotions in her daughter when she talks about 'hatred of writing'. Where does that hatred come from and where does it point to? Are they the result of her handicap or could it be the other way around: a learning block fed by an emotional source whose roots only the parents and the child concerned can unearth?

A lot of special reading and writing methods boil down to a simplification of the task, an impoverishment of the texts and a concentration of the child's attention on the task imposed by the educator. Nothing could be more removed from the spirit of E.O. - as I understand it - and its (I'm uneasy about that 'its') concern for the child's wishes and feelings. Such methods can increase the resentment of the child and remove her/him from her authentic wishes, undermining her sense of self-respect and capacity to explore the world. If they appear to be successful at times this can be due to a sort of placebo effect: the child having internalised and assumed the medicalised diagnosis of her condition is prepared to believe that the educational 'remedy' will cure it and therefore acts as if it had indeed been overcome. The fundamental objection to this state of affairs is that it relies for its 'success' in a complete mystification of the nature of the human problem at stake, the collusions and delusions involved and the degree of existential truth allowed to the subjects in it. It is a collective interpersonal and intrapersonal deception.

Why a particular child will translate a particular emotional situation in one symptom rather than another, why some children become stupid, rather than dyslexic; hyperactive rather than neurotic and so on can't be answered in abstract, without personal involvement with the family attitudes, the school, the society and its picture of life inside which the child grows up.

It may be that there is a very small number of hard neurological cases of dyslexic malfunction; yet everything we know militates against the extension and blurring of the boundaries to an increasingly larger number of children with learning difficulties, where the postulation of a neurological cause is only arrived at through dubious behavioural similarities.

Dyslexia - a parent's experience

In John Holt's book "Teach Your Own" he dismisses the whole concept of 'Dyslexia' as unhelpful nonsense. When our son went to secondary school his 'writing age' was said to be 7 years. He struggled through five years ending up with four 'O' levels, not including English, and three C.S.E.'s. Having gone to further education college to do art, he continued to study and have great difficulty with English. The College said he really needed to have his own teacher one to one, but they could not provide this. So we got in touch with the Watford Dyslexia Unit, and they put us in touch with a qualified Dyslexia teacher who "diagnosed" his 'writing age' as 12 years. She explained this in terms of his being left-handed and predominantly right-eyed, and told us that this would have caused him very great difficulty in learning what other children would learn with ease. She said he deserved great credit for having solved so many difficult problems on his own without any special help.

I felt then, and still feel that any difficulties he has had, have been due to great stress at home, and consequent unhappiness at school, which proved unable to help with personal problems. However, this good lady told us not to blame ourselves or the school, and dwelling on the past could do no good. Over the following months she gave him weekly lessons at her home, in which she built up confidence in himself, and also our confidence in his abilities. He refused to be interviewed by an educational psychologist, which would have allowed him the official label "dyslexic" (giving extra time in the English 'O' level exam). He still does not have 'O' level English but his 'writing age' is now 14 years and 8 months. To show us all exactly what this means, he gave us all the test which proves it. It consists of 100 words, starting with easy ones and ending with difficult ones. If you can spell every one perfectly, your 'writing age' is 15. For each mistake you make, one month is knocked off your age; I made one mistake, so my 'writing age' is 14 years and 11 months! An English 'O' level is not necessary for the next stage in his career, and he has an A for his art 'A' level, which gets him a grant and a place at an Art Foundation Course. He also got an award from his further education college for 'the development and refinement of his style'. In addition to this, the college gave him lots of time to rest and to follow his own interests.

I conclude from our experience that a diagnosis of 'dyslexia' has by no means resulted in our son being branded for life as an incurable 'dyslexic'. It has enabled him to overcome an embarrassing problem by learning what he should have been taught or somehow learned, ten years previously. Parents can help if they feel in tune with the child, but where the relationship is undermined by the child not reaching the parents' expectations, it is sometimes best for someone outside the family to help.

Education Is Only The Icing On The Cake!

Veronica Wallace

Perhaps our anxiety to succeed - and prove to our LEA that we can succeed - in educating our children blinds us to more basic needs.

It is not the child (or children) who are most important, but the group - in our case, the family unit, which definitely includes us! Teachers may cope with more children at a time, but only for 6 or seven hours a day, 5 days a week, for about two-thirds of the year. They even get time off when they are sick. We don't. Therefore we must take care of our own physical and emotional health, or risk enduring too great a burden of responsibility, anxiety and stress and perhaps suffering depressive illness or a nervous breakdown. An over-anxious or unhappy parent is as much a family problem as an unhappy child, so we must structure the family unit to provide family care for all.

How? By making family affection all-important and sharing the responsibility for caring for each other with our children. We have to let them know how much we need and appreciate their affection - and their occasional absence. We all need a degree of privacy, time to be ourselves - and so do they. We have to let them know what we most like about them, as well as the faults we hope they'll mend. Everybody needs to know that they make the world a better place and other people happier just by being there - or else they will try to prove their ability to influence events in a disruptive or destructive way. We have to let the children share some of the chores of family life, so we all have time to share the fun. We have to let our children know that adults are only human - they get tired, make mistakes and sometimes are less able to do something than a child would be. We must not only tolerate their errors and imperfections, we have to teach them to tolerate those of other people - especially us. Never be afraid to make mistakes, shout, or even burst into tears in front of the family, so long as there is a chance later to apologise and explain how and why it happened. Children have to cope with tiredness and frustration. They have to see how we cope with it, and how they can help both us and each other. This will help them to develop into caring and well-balanced people.

Get the family priorities right. Chores, routines, regular learning sessions are important - but not more so than happiness. We are all individuals, at least a little different from one another, with different needs, going through different stages. Individuality matters, it should be encouraged and respected. There has to be a degree of spontaneity in our lives, so that we can satisfy our individual needs as they arise. They may be postponed, of course, but never entirely ignored. When each of us has room to be wholly and happily ourselves, the family is stronger, more stable and more exciting.

It's not enough, however. The family is only the base from which our children travel out into the world. As parents, we may have had quite enough of the world outside and be content with family life. Our children however, still need to experience life outside and, as adults, independence. They will be preparing themselves for this as they grow. They have an urgent need to meet new people, explore new situations and relationships. We can measure our success as parents by the degree of confidence they have in their ability to cope with new surroundings and challenges. As we know, unhappy experience of schools may already have damaged some of our children, made them unwilling to trust the world beyond the family or their ability to cope with it. We have to help them overcome this. We can join clubs and societies as a family - swimming, rambling, folk singing, chess or anything available - to provide an opportunity for our children to develop new relationships with other people, of any and every age. We can explain to friends and colleagues that our children need to learn to make friends. We have to ensure that visitors to our home make time to befriend our children, as well as talk to us. The fewer people our children meet and learn to relate to, the more impoverished their environment.

They may be lonely, insecure, unable to relate to others all their lives ... if we let them. But don't please, assume that it might be better after all if they went back to school! There are generally too many children, too little adult supervision, too much opportunity for mob rule and tyranny. Relationships develop better in small groups and interesting situations.

If we can get the basis of our children's and family life right, education is much easier. A happy, confident child is better able to settle even to monotonous tasks than a lonely and frustrated child. A happy, caring family group makes even the most difficult tasks easier for us all. We should all feel that we are capable and valued members of our family group. We should hope our children will learn as they mature to be capable and valued members of a larger group - the local community, or, indeed, the family of man world-wide and the planetary ecology. If we cannot help our children to cope better with our world than we are doing, what happens to progress? And even if we aren't idealists, happiness is important.

Thoughts on children

'The grammar of a child is made of questions and exclamations, it has no full stops, not even a comma.
A child is dynamism reincarnate.'

from "The Child", a prose poem by the Gujarati writer, Gijubhai, published in English translation in 'Resurgence' 91, March/April 1982.

More on 'Distance learning'

Roger Downie

In Newsletter 30 (August '83), Roy Gilbert reported on 'distance learning' courses produced by Colleges of Further Education. We recently had a useful talk with one of the authors of a Scottish Directory of such courses (Peter Gartside of the Scottish Council for Educational Technology - SCET for short) and feel it's worth taking some of Roy Gilbert's points further.

Education is always buzzing with new jargon, and one of the latest phrases is 'Open Learning'. To quote from Gartside's Directory, "Open Learning describes courses flexibly designed to meet individual circumstances. You should be able to study what you want, where you want, when you want, at a speed suitable to yourself, without the necessity to join a group of a specific size." Open Learning courses have been designed because people may be unable to attend a centre (because of distance, disablement or other commitments), or because there are too few students to warrant a class, or because people prefer to study alone in their own time and at their own pace.

Some Open Learning courses involve occasional attendance at a Centre for tutorial support ('flexi-study'); others are solely by correspondence ('distance learning').

Since the availability of these courses is increasing all the time, there is a problem in finding out what there is, where, and at what cost. Fortunately, Directories are becoming available:

"The Open Learning Directory" (1983) is published by Great Ouse Press (with Nelson and Colne College): it lists about 500 courses, UK wide, and costs £4.95.

"A Directory of Open Learning Opportunities in Scotland" (5th - 1984 - edition available from February) is free to addresses in Scotland from Peter Gartside, SCET, 74 Victoria Crescent Road, Glasgow, G12 9JN. It lists over 200 courses in Scotland.

Open Learning courses cover a huge range of subjects - some ending in bits of paper ('O' levels etc.), others not. They are put together by FE Colleges, Universities, professional bodies and publishers. Courses from FE Colleges are supposed to be for school leavers (i.e. 16+ years) but there is no harm in asking a College whether under 16 EOers could enrol in a particular course.

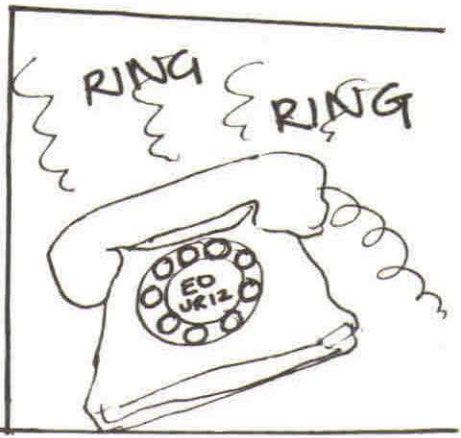
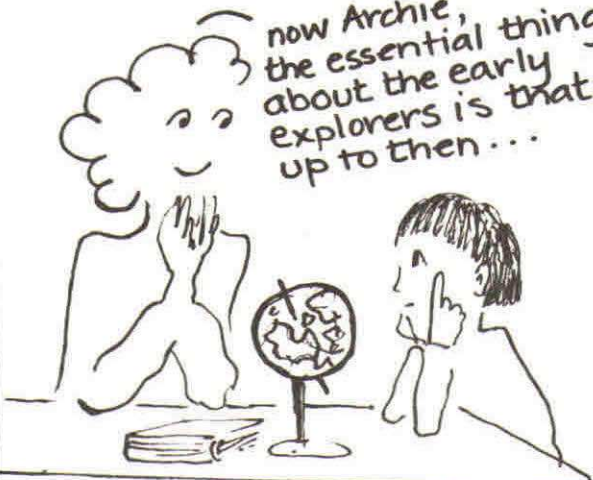
Peter Gartside emphasises that the Directories do not assess course quality. "As with all new developments there is a period in which providers have to learn the skills and some courses on offer may profit from a little more monitoring and refinement." So it is worth the time and trouble to check on which is the best of the courses available. Peter recommends especially the well-tested materials put out by the National Extension College (18 Brooklands Avenue, Cambridge, CB2 2HN for their extensive catalogue) and especially their short courses on 'Learning Skills'. For an EOer, used to unstructured, informal learning, but wishing to embark on the stormy voyage to paper qualifications, these hints on 'How to write essays' etc. could be invaluable. Don't do 'Learning Skills' in isolation though: they need to be integrated into the general learning process.

Other developments: this may come as a shock, but schools are beginning to look at open learning. A Leverhulme Trust-funded project is testing National Extension College courses in Hertfordshire schools. Given the shortage of funds for specialist teachers, and the obvious advantages of open learning, this could be the start of a revolution in the way schools are run ... well, it's nice to be optimistic at the start of a new year!

And Philip Waterhouse of the Council for Educational Technology (CET, 3 Devonshire Street, London, W1N 2BA) is interested in putting Illich's idea of learning exchanges/learning contracts into practice. See his "Managing the Learning Process".

Peter Gartside feels that EO families are undoubtedly developing their own learning skills and resources - many of which could be of interest to the "professionals". But for anyone who would like some help in improving their tutoring skills, he recommends "Tutoring", free from the Publications Despatch Centre, DES, Honeypot Lane, Canons Park, Stanmore, Middlesex, HA7 1AZ.

now Archie,
the essential thing
about the early
explorers is that
up to then...



— YES it
is PERFECTLY
legal etc etc
your rights
etc phobic
etc



40 mins later—

.. people had
believed that
the world was
FLAT, or at least—



no -no
encyclopedias
thank
you...



Blue Peter's
on now



and next week
we'll do
the
TUDORS



EDUCATING ARCHIE BY SEG

$$\int_2^{\infty} f(x) + \frac{3}{2} \frac{1}{x} dx$$

'too much maths'

$$\sqrt[3]{46} = 3.6 \text{?}$$

~~24~~! 24+3+? 7?

What were you doing 15 months ago? Imagine that those past 15 months have been spent doing nothing but learning mathematics - eight hours every day, five days a week - and you have some idea of the amount of time a typical child spends in mathematics lessons in primary and secondary schools up to the age of 16. Is it worth it? Do most of us need such a massive dose of mathematics? To judge from the reactions of most of the adult population we are wasting an awful lot of pupils' and teachers' time.

An inquiry into the use of mathematics by adults in daily life by the Advisory Council for Adult and Continuing Education concluded: "Many people ... were inhibited about using mathematics. The mathematical needs of adults in daily life cannot be easily defined."

Her Majesty's Inspectorate has said "... at the extreme utilitarian end of the range of reasons for teaching mathematics, each person needs to know enough arithmetic to make simple purchases, count change, check wages and understand a popular newspaper."

The Cockcroft report concluded: "... there is hardly any piece of mathematics which everyone uses ... we would include among the mathematical needs of adult life the ability to read numbers and to count, to tell the time, to pay for purchases and to give change, to weigh and to measure, to understand straightforward timetables and simple graphs and charts."

Do we need the equivalent of 15 months non-stop mathematics for every child to achieve such modest skills?

Most children leave primary school at the age of 11 already knowing enough mathematics to satisfy the needs of everyday life. It is sometimes sad to see a pupil at the age of 16 who appears to know less mathematics than he/she knew at 11 and who approaches the subject with increased trepidation. By trying to teach too much mathematics our secondary schools are shattering the mathematical confidence of a majority of children and accentuating the adult fear of things mathematical.

Are there not better things to do with pupils than spend hour after hour on work which is meaningless, abstract and divorced from real life? Should not the position of secondary mathematics as an automatic "five period a week" subject be challenged?

by Michael Cornelius, senior lecturer in education, University of Durham (extracted from the 'Times Education Supplement' with the kind permission of the editor)

Deschooling and a one-parent family

I thought that it might be worthwhile to write a piece about my experiences as a single-parent with children out of school in case any others are wondering if they should try this.

We first decided to deschool after I separated from my husband four years ago and at the time I didn't have the confidence to take sole responsibility for Josephine and Luke's well-being, so we joined a rural community where there were other deschooled children. A year later we were again living as a one-parent nuclear family in Sussex with the children back at school. After the freedom from institutional life, the return to a school-oriented existence was claustrophobic and depressing to us all. It still seemed as if some kind of community would be the only suitable environment for us if we were going to deschool again. The image of us incestuously closeted together day after day in a small town house, in an area where all the other kids were at school just didn't seem feasible. And I had little idea what I'd 'do' with them on my own. But we did know that school wasn't right. Jos was feeling oppressed by the heavy secondary work load that left no time for her own interests and was very unhappy with school social life. Luke was uninspired by his primary school and developing so many fears about the petty regulations, the non-observance of which was a heinous crime.

So we wrote away to and visited various groups and in the summer of 1982 moved up to the West Coast of Scotland to join a community in the making where there were other deschooled children. Our existence was extremely basic, living in a caravan in this remote spot, without running water or electricity. It was a physical, outdoor life, except for times when the winter gales blew for days on end. It wasn't a situation conducive to formal working, though Luke kept his hand in at Maths and Jos started to work sporadically on 3 Wolsey Hall 'O' Level courses. We read lots of books aloud to pass the long winter evenings and enjoyed the beautiful countryside. The children made camps and tree-houses, looked after the animals and started badminton, dancing and music classes. It had become clear that we weren't going to settle there though and had to look for yet another home. We moved the caravan to a much more sheltered and accessible site on the land of another EO family in the area, the Springthorpes, and spent last spring and summer happily and more comfortably (with the miraculous benefit of running water laid on by Phil S.). However, we wanted to avoid another caravan winter and, failing to find a cheap enough house in Argyll, we arrived at our present address in the Borders last August.

Here we were, finally, in the situation that I'd been running from for several years - just the children and myself in a house on our own, out of school, and in a totally unfamiliar part of the world into the bargain. And it's actually fine and all my previous doubts seem unfounded. In our small neighbourhood community there are four other families all with children at school or due to go but it isn't a problem at all. We've been completely accepted. We had a small trauma in the autumn when the LEA, after a short visit, wrote to say that they were not satisfied with the education being given. This has since been resolved after we explained in detail what we were doing and our reasons for it and I emphasised our shared commitment to carrying on with E.O. They are not very used to home-educated children in this traditional region and also doubted, I think,

whether I'd be able to 'keep going' as a single parent for the necessary five years until Luke is 16. They were also sceptical about how we could tackle science subjects to secondary standard and whether they would be deprived of computing experience. I assured them that if either of the children wanted to pursue the sciences academically we could do that with the help of correspondence courses. We got a Spectrum computer and Luke's already taught himself from books a great deal more, I think, than he would have learned at school, where access to computers is very limited for his age-group (Jos is totally uninterested in computers).

This challenge to our whole way of life was shattering but it did concentrate our minds and we've had a productive time since. We've adopted a much more definite structure with approximate school days and hours, doing regular Maths, French and projects and Jos working hard on her 'O' level correspondence courses, as well as a lot of music and crafts. We still debate how far we should be influenced by Society's exam-mania, as we are quite strongly at present, reinforced by the LEA's pressure on us to prove ourselves at least equal to school-provision. We've had a sense of achievement at finding that we are quite capable of doing school-type work efficiently and enjoyably but there's still a strong sense of *deja-vu* about the old school subjects. Learning French verbs doesn't have much to do with speaking to French people and you wonder just when knowing how to manipulate an inverse matrix is going to matter. But the marvellous thing about home-education is the freedom to respond to these kind of doubts and experiment with shifts in approach in a flexible way. In any event, there's no doubt that Jos and Luke are infinitely happier and livelier than they were at school.

My fears of being very isolated and having no personal freedom haven't been borne out at all. We have made some very good friends of other Borders E.O. families and, because there's no rigid school time-table, have the time and energy to go out a lot. Jos' and Lukes' ages (14 and 11) must help and a single parent with younger children might need the support of reliable friends to make it possible to go out alone regularly. The older they get, the less they are dependants and the more good companions who share jobs, problems and laughs.

Earning money is obviously difficult for the E.O. single-parent. We live on Supplementary Benefit and so far have managed. Swapping work and help with friends in an informal way has helped enormously and is much nicer than buying services. I hope to fit in a few hours paid work too, soon.

So I've now been a single-parent both with children at school and out of school and without question find the latter best. More than anything I appreciate the relationships between the three of us being so much fuller and more relaxed than when Jos and Luke were at school. Their personalities then seemed to be subdued and shrouded in fears and tensions that I could only dimly understand. School does seem to drive a wedge into family relationships and when this is removed life can flow so much more easily and naturally.

Wendy Razzell

De-schooling in a commune - one woman's experience

Gina, Wheatstone Community Project

When I opted to make a radical change in my lifestyle and joined a rural commune, seven years ago, inevitably I chose a lifestyle for my two children as well.

Then, at the ages of 2 and 4, they visibly blossomed alongside me as we came to experience closer contact with the earth, with our survival, and to share our lives with other people.

It was a startling contrast when my eldest son at 5 started attending the local school. Suddenly the spontaneity, freedom and excitement in his life were grabbed from him and over a few months his enthusiasm for life was replaced with insecurity, fear and sickness. He was ostracised and bullied because his home was different from the others and massive dilemmas built up for him, and for me, as the values he was gaining from his home contrasted so starkly with those taught at school. At home he was involved with people trying to overcome their conditioned sexist, racist, ageist, role-playing, competitive, consumerist, authoritarian and subordinate attitudes and at school he was being pressurised into accepting these values as the norm.

We are fortunate in this country that school is not compulsory and eventually we agreed that children living in this commune should not have to attend school. I believe in communal living as a viable alternative lifestyle but I see it lasting as such over generations only if people are allowed to grow up free to develop confident, radical, self-disciplined and individual personalities. Without these qualities true communality is impossible and people, whose schooling and upbringing has put fear, inhibitions and dishonesty into their hearts and minds, will have to struggle to live cooperatively.

In the communal environment children are free to develop close relationships without being de-valued as individuals. They can learn, teach, communicate, cooperate and exchange knowledge and skills with people of all ages. They integrate their learning into their lives without having to categorise their activities into what is 'educational' and what 'subject' is being learned. They make their own choices as to how and at what pace they learn. They learn what it is necessary to do to be happy and to survive where the distinction between work and play becomes unclear and irrelevant. They set the standard of their skills and the rate of learning by their own self-respect and judgement. They are not subjected to tests based on other people's standards.

Living on the land, children pick up many skills associated with working the land and caring for animals and plants. Living with people concerned with self-reliance there is always a choice of things to do. Boredom is a choice. They are never limited to one room or one space. The children can go where they will within the limits of their own experience, safety and survival.

For parents wishing to give their children the chance to learn at home, a community can provide an excellent alternative. There is a lot of pressure on the parent/child relationship when the child is not at school. Being in a supportive communal group relieves this pressure and allows both parent and child freedom to expand relationships and benefit from shared responsibilities. Relatives have a chance to become friends, rather than dependents.

De-schoolers are often faced with a lack of resources and this can be a problem in a community. Just like schools, communes offer limited resources and skills so communities and people learning outside schools should cooperate to pool their resources. Unfortunately very few communities have been committed to freeing their children from state institutions but they are increasing and more links are developing between communities.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica story

As editors, we were rather hoping this story had died but several long letters have come in and we feel it's necessary to include some of the points they make. Readers will recall that the row stemmed from Joyce Ewens' giving Encyclopaedia Britannica the EO contact list, in order that EB could circulate members with advertising about EB3, including a glowing letter from Mrs. Ewens herself. All then received a letter signed by four members - regular Core Group attenders - regretting this use of the Contact List. The April Newsletter carried two pages on the affair - apologies from EB, an explanation from John Elenor of what went wrong, and a suggestion that the way to inform EO members of resources like EB3 is through articles and letters, not through advertising techniques.

The Ewens family has written to justify their action. We do not feel it will help to publish their letter in full - they have clearly suffered considerable personal abuse and are bitter as a result. But they do make some important points on how EO is run.

On anonymity and advertising they write

"Those who wanted anonymity didn't put their names on the contact list. The list therefore is a means to contact, to promote, aid and influence people to educate their children otherwise. The list has been used by some to promote books and aids, from which individuals are making a profit - does this make it wrong? EO Newsletter is used to advertise and draw attention to various institutions, books and companies - is this wrong?"

And they raise the question of who makes decisions in EO.

"We had 10 letters and 8 phone calls. More than half were abusive, offensive and unjustifiably so. This abuse came at the behest of four people who consider themselves elite and the custodians of others privacy. Is EO on the brink of dictatorship, forming a little empire, becoming a system outside the system?"

The rest of the letter offers a stout defence of EB3 as a learning aid, while emphasising that the family has used many other resources in the pursuit of educational excellence. The Ewens also defend EB as a company - "with well-dressed, polite, informative and pleasant salesmen, using the opposite of high pressure salesmanship".

Here, perhaps, we should quote from Chris Maginn who writes:

"I have been an encyclopaedia salesperson. It is a horrible job. It entails a short period of "training" where you get filled with yards of claptrap about softselling and the benefits of working for commission only. Then you learn a set piece and how to deliver it for maximum hard selling effect.

When the EB salesperson knocks on your door, give him - almost certainly a him - a cuppa and chat about the awfulness of his job. Don't let him do his routine - he'll appear eager, but really he hates it - so don't let him. He will appreciate the sympathy and the tea and might even feel strong enough to chuck in his job for a better life."

That's about it. As John Elenor wrote last time, let's end the personal side of this affair and see, in the future, some debate on the educational value of aids like EB3.

Roger & Lesley Downie

reviews

Exploration Science, books 1-5

by Ken Hutchinson

published by Evans, Montague House, Russell Square, London, WC1B 5BX.
£1.90 each.

Reviewer: Jennifer Linsell

We've recently discovered these exciting books. Each one deals with a different aspect of science. MACHINES covers pulleys, levers, gears, cranes and wheels. The book aptly conveys the message that 'a machine can be a very simple piece of equipment which makes work easier'. LIGHT & COLOUR, another in the series, gives clear instructions on making a Pin-hole camera, periscope and a microscope that will magnify up to 30 times. There are many illustrations, which make these books a real pleasure to use. Many of the experiments can be done using domestic equipment.

The five books are:

1. Light & Colour
2. Magnetism & Electricity
3. Water
4. Air & Sound
5. Machines

Ladybird books in French

Peggy Thomas writes to warn that the standard of French in these translated books is disappointingly poor, and that she has complained of this to the publishers.

"The Ostrich Position - sex schooling and mystification"
by Carol Lee. Writers and Readers Publishing Co-op.

Joseph O'Connor highly recommends this witty and provocative book, which describes the author's experiences as a 'lecturer on sex education' to schools. Sexual ignorance can have painful and devastating consequences and the author shows that teenagers generally know too little, not too much about sex. Schools and parents together are largely to blame for this. The author gives a comic, and sad, account of her attempt to produce a film on menstruation for secondary schools. She gave up when the local Health Education Panel forbade use of the words 'penis' and 'vagina' and treatment of the process of fertilisation. For Carol Lee, sex education is about exploring feelings and must therefore deal openly with such topics as rape, violence, fear, hypocrisy, authority, attitudes to women and respect for people. The hierarchical structure of schools, and their compartmentalisation of 'subjects' makes such a broad-ranging treatment well-nigh impossible.

Bobby was a little boy who liked to explore. He wanted to press every button, regardless of the effect, and to ride around on the New York subway. At the time he was four years old and autistic.

His parents had reached the point where all the openings to the outside world were controlled for his own good.

Dr. Rachel Pinney's new book, 'Bobby', is the account by herself, her helpers and the parents, of the journey that all of them undertook once they decided to dismantle those external barriers in an attempt to reach through to the internal ones that constituted Bobby's world. This was done over a period of time, through process of Creative Listening and allowing Bobby 'special times' when the only boundaries adhered to were those necessary for either his well-being or the protection of those around him; otherwise he was free to go wherever his wont took him in order to satisfy whatever he seemed to want to escape from or to seek.

Barriers and boundaries are familiar things to us all in living creatively with children, and this book, although it is specifically about working with an autistic child extended my insight into how I choose to be with my own children.

One of the characteristics of autism is the idea that the child treats other people as objects to be used, manipulated and ignored, but in reading about Rachel's caring of Bobby during the course of many 'Childrens Hours', in which she listened and affirmed every single desire and action, I began to realise to what extent I still treated my own children as objects. I became aware of a kind of blindness that I was still living through. By concentrating so totally on what happens with the child and putting aside for a while any thoughts or desires of one's own, brings about a very special clarity and respect.

The idea that every child has a biological need to be free and at one with its physical environment is something that our social and cultural boundaries give little allowance for. The courage to 'put the child first' and to contend with the personal emotional and social barriers that are encountered by doing so is portrayed continuously.

There are many journeys portrayed in the book but the one that I can only barely intimate at best is the journey when Rachel and Bobby crossed paths somewhere between in there and out here, to the situation where Bobby is now able to copy fairly adequately with our 'normal' world.

On October 14th I had the opportunity to give 'special time' to a couple of children myself with the supervision and advice of Rachel. We (six E.O. families plus a few friends) invited her and two helpers Madge Bray and Meg Robinson, to share a morning workshop with us. For such a short time, the content of the work together was extremely varied. At one point Rachel was giving 'special time' to the eldest boy, whilst he was engaged in a pillow fight and game of tig; one of the helpers gave time to the youngest who was 14 months, and another time when Rachel spontaneously focused on a little boy who wanted her to give him her crutches so she could play ball with him which of course she did.

For anyone who is not familiar with Creative Listening there is a booklet available for 90p from Dr. Rachel Pinney, 28 Wallace House, Caledonian Estate, London, N7.

Di Moran

The Wallaces' Top Ten (or so)

It has always been important to us to actually enjoy the children's books we read aloud - we don't read books we don't like. (The abominations that turn up from the children's section of the library van are read once and not again!). Many picture story books have lovely illustrations and abysmal words: it seems a rare book that does combine the two.

Over the last 9 years we've got together a varied collection that manage to combine attractive illustrations, matching the text, with a flowing, stimulating storyline. Here's a list of our choicest enjoyed by the kids from about 2 years up. There's no guarantee these are still in print!

In Picture Puffins:-

Maurice Sendak "Where the Wild Things Are" and "In the Night Kitchen". The second was bought for us - we would not have chosen it but it grew on us and Kirsty insisted!

Raymond Briggs "Jim and the Beanstalk". Not in usual Briggs cartoon style so easy to read with a delightful sense of humour.

Margaret Mahy illus. Brian Loud. "The Man whose Mother was a Pirate". Lovely evocative descriptions especially of the sea.

In Picture Lions:-

Ruth Orbach "Acorns and Stew" and "Apple Pigs". Rhyming stories that really swing along.

Tomie de Paola "Michael Bird Boy". A lovely anti-pollution story with a gentle, concerned boy and Boss-Lady!

Shirley Hughes "Moving Molly", "Dogger", "Helpers", "Alfie Gets in First". Homely stories that really ring true.

Ruth Craft illus. Irene Haas. "Carrie Hepple's Garden". Just remember Hepple rhymes with steeple and you're away!

Ruth Craft illus. Erik Blegvad "The Winter Bear". Another beauty. Rhyming words again and beautiful wintery country pictures.

Erik Blegvad "Burnie's Hill". Lovely soft illustrations to the traditional "question and answer" rhyme.

Terry Furchgott and Linda Dawson "Phoebe and the Hot Water Bottles". Well, wouldn't the idea of having 157 hot water bottles appeal to you!

Out of several hundred children's picture books we have, these bore the most repetition, (yes, we can still quote some of them all the way through!) gave enjoyment to us all, and highest accolade of all, perhaps, still get asked for, taken to bed, and, the rhyming ones especially, quoted out loud when we're in the mood.

It would be fun to hear what gems other people have found, so how about writing in with your "Top Ten".

Christine Wallace

'Fun with Music'

We recently discovered the "Fun with Music" series issued by EMI. All the stories are narrated by Ann Rachlin with original music. There are ten records in the series (also cassette) and we have found that the four we have collected so far have been very successful in introducing the children to Tchaikovsky's Sleeping Beauty, Falla's Nights in the Gardens of Spain, Smetana's The Moldau, Sibelius's Valse Triste, Kodaly's Hary Janos Suite Prokofiev's Love for Three Oranges Suite and the most favourite of our children Rimsky-Korsakov's Scherzerazade told by Ann Rachlin as the story of Sinbad and the Wizard Eagle.

Carole Lee

For a holistic approach to biology, Lorna Handel recommends: "Man and Mammals . . . A biology of form" by Wolfgang Schad, ISBN 0 914614 10X. A large book, 309 pages and beautifully illustrated, it is somewhat expensive but we borrowed a copy via the inter-libraries scheme. Although my daughter is 15 and able to read it herself, I feel I could have read it and taught a small child from my own understanding of the contents.

Based on the work of Goethe and Rudolph Steiner the book examines the relationship of the mammals to man and then reveals the delicate relationships between mineral, plant, animal and human kingdoms leading to the feeling of a world inspired by wisdom and impregnated with deep meaning in which each species plays its unique role in forming a harmonious whole. I will not spoil it for anyone by a review as it contains many delights; but if anyone would be interested to know what constitutes the lungs or heart or limbs of the globe and which mammals live in this areas, in turn relating to the heart, lungs and limbs of man, this is where the answer may be found. Likewise, if you would like to see reason for the diversity of form, know why some mammals sprout horns or why the giraffe has such a long neck, and especially if you would enjoy reassurance on the nature of the relationship between carnivore and prey, that this relationship is not so cruel as we tend to believe, this book will be invaluable. No need for experiments as the biology of form begins with keen observation - learning to read the living alphabet of the world in nature around us. "The greatest achievement would be to understand that everything factual is already its own theory. Do not look beyond the phenomena; they are themselves the teaching" Goethe 1829 (Quote from the Book).

suggestions please Sue Stephenson

We live in a village where all the children are known by sight and everyone knows where children ought to be between 9 and 3.30. We don't want to have to keep ours out of sight between school hours of course but I am afraid I am going to feel furtive about them not being at school in the face of the inevitable curiosity and candid comments we will at first encounter. Has anyone any experience of how to overcome the awkwardness, and perhaps a few snappy answers to counter the comments - suitable for use by the children and ourselves!

Out Takes

'I am told he cannot be school phobic as he is not yet eight years old despite such things as forcing fingers down his throat to make himself sick so he cannot go to school.'

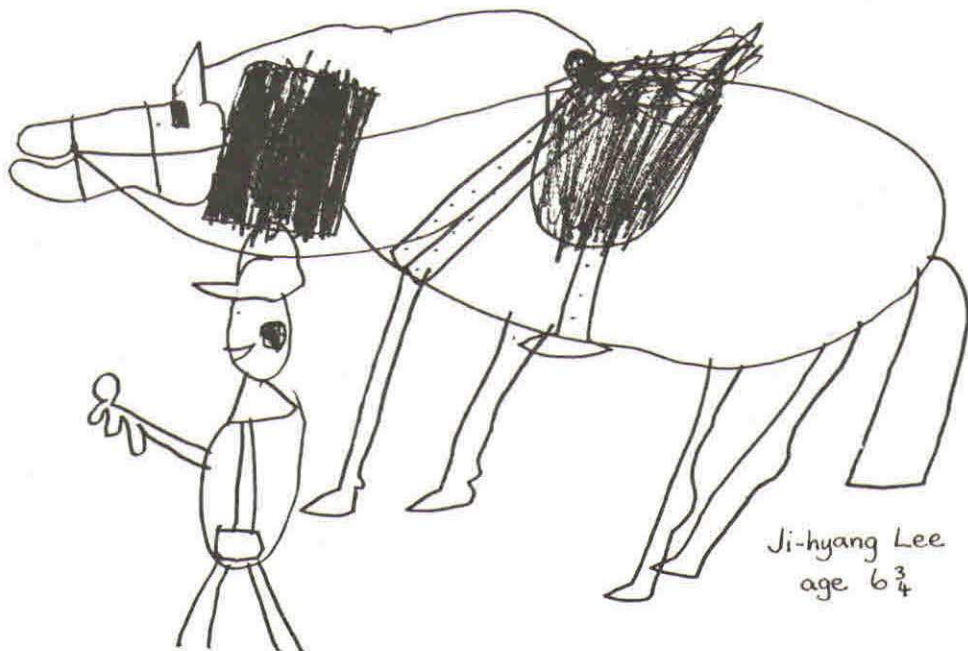
'Can E.O. help me? My six year old daughter has been diagnosed as psychologically damaged by school and my fourteen year old daughter will only be able to keep going to school with the help of tranquillizers.'

'He's too quiet, too willing, too non-aggressive and too gentle.'
(School report on a seven year old)

'You can't teach a child from a book' (A Chief Education Officer)

'My brother is paying £5,000 a year to have his son bullied.'

'Thank goodness you (E.O.) exist.'



Ji-hyang Lee
age 6 $\frac{3}{4}$

EO in literature ... From Josephine Razzell

"Cordelia might represent a difficulty. All teachers liked her, and that was ominous. Mary and I did not dislike school but we knew it was the opposite of the world outside, it was the grown-ups error of errors, they imagined they prepared children for life by shutting them up in a place where nothing happened as it did anywhere else. It might be hard for Cordelia to find her feet, but Mary and I would be all right."

From "The Fountain Overflows" by Rebecca West.

Wolsey Hall



OXFORD OX2 6PR

Telephone: Oxford (0865) 54231 (24 hours). Telex 83539

Founded in 1894 by J.W. Knipe

Principal The Hon. F. F. Fisher, CBE, MC, MA

Dear Parent,

WE EDUCATE OTHERWISE - We have been doing so for 88 years.

WOLSEY HALL is a Correspondence College. We provide courses and a tutorial service for people of all ages. Our youngest students are 14. Our oldest - who took O Level last year is 95.

Our students cannot or do not wish to attend formal educational establishments. Instead they work at home on our carefully prepared courses which take them step by step towards their target. They are helped by our tutors who correct and mark their work. Some prefer "self-tuition" and buy the whole course and work through it on their own or with the help of a friend or parent.

We can provide:

PRELIMINARY COURSES (Pre - O Level Standard)

in	Bookkeeping	Latin
	English	Mathematics
	French	Music
	German	Russian
	Italian	Spanish

O LEVEL AND A LEVEL COURSES in practically all subjects for seven Boards.

CAN WE HELP YOU TO EDUCATE YOUR CHILD?

Yours sincerely,

Principal.

Please write for free prospectus to:

The Principal, The Hon. Frank Fisher, CBE, MC, MA,
Dept. DT2, Wolsey Hall, Oxford, OX2 6PR.
or telephone 0865 54231 (24 hours) Dept. DT2.

NOTICES

WANTED: French Language Records or tapes suitable for teaching very keen eight year old. Also simple books needed. Please send details to Ms. B. Wharton, 44 Montague Road, Erdington, Birmingham B24 8EG.

CONTACT LIST: The code 'H' indicates experience of Home Education.

RENEWAL REMINDERS: The printer was apparently not aware that reminders are individually addressed, and did not match them against the corresponding labels. Apologies to all who received reminders addressed to another member. (However, your subscription is due...)

THANK YOU: Fiz Thomson and family, Burntisland, Fife, pass on their thanks to all who have written and encouraged them during the de-schooling of their children.

'A VILLAGE': Although the Taunton ideas haven't come to fruition so far, there are still five families living in the area.

Another grouping of families are currently setting up a housing co-operative in the Penzance area and other families from the group are preparing to move to the South West.

For more details about meetings, impromptu camps, and latest developments please write to 'A Village' 45 Balater Road, Brixton, London SW2, enclosing fl to cover three mailings.

LEGAL ASPECTS OF E.O: I have been asked by the Core Group to produce a booklet on the legal aspects of E.O., which will supplement the new S.I.N.C. being prepared by Bruce Cox. This booklet will consist principally of:

1. the appropriate sections of the various education acts and regulations since 1944
2. comments on these sections from the "New Law of Education", 1984 edition, which is the standard legal textbook on education law
3. further comments arising from

the experience of E.O. members in their dealings with LEAs

4. any further comments I am able to extract from lawyers, the D.E.S., local authorities and others.

I would be very grateful if any members who have had dealings with LEAs or the law, details of which might be useful, would write to me..

Dick Kitto, 27a Sydney Street, Brightlingsea, Essex CO7 0BG

THE CANAAN: A magazine on natural alternatives, published quarterly by the Centre for Advice on Natural Alternatives (CANA), at £4 per annum. Contact Mrs. I. Wilton-Jones, Tyddyn y Mynydd, Llanelly Hill, Gwent. The summer issue of 'Canaan' includes an article on EO by John Elenor.

ANTI-SEXIST ALTERNATIVES TO SCHOOL:

A group of women have been meeting in London for several months now to discuss alternatives to state schooling that would be anti-sexist and also confront the issues of race and class; so on the weekend of June 17th and 18th, a group is going to the New Forest to get to know each other better, to talk ideas through and have a good time.

Any feminist women interested in coming to join in either on the outing or the ongoing discussion meetings are welcome with or without children. Please contact Anna Brave, 59 Holmesdale Road, London N6, phone 340-9137. Anna would also like to hear from any women, especially with girls around 8-9 years old who have left school or are contemplating doing so, particularly if they live in North London.

HOLIDAY EXCHANGE: Is there a London member with a 14 year old daughter who would be interested in holiday exchanges. Rickey would dearly love to have a holiday in London. In return, we can offer a country holiday reasonably near the sea. Contact Patricia Knox, Pen Llywenan, Bodedern, Holyhead, Gwynedd.

MORE NOTICES NEXT PAGE

NOTICES

FOR SALE: 3 Bedroomed terraced cottage in small hamlet in rural NW Leicestershire. Solid fuel Rayburn central heating, garage, two allotments and garden. Woods and stream nearby; lovely walks and countryside; easy access to major towns. £16,500. Phone: Victor and Sally Wilkins, Burton-on-Trent 761907.

GIFTED CHILDREN: Pullen Publications, Caxtons, Knebworth, Herts SG3 6PF produce a lot of material for use with "gifted" children, e.g. on maths, thinking skills, music, North Sea Oil (!?). Write to them for a catalogue.

ALTERNATIVES: COLLEGE OF HEALTH, 18 Victoria Park Square, Bethnal Green, London E2 9PF. Membership £10 a year includes sub to Self-Health quarterly magazine.

CHRISTIANITY without religion. Details from Senor Hugh de Cruz, Templo de la Luz-7, La Atalaya S.B., Gran Canaria, Spain.

THE HUMAN CURRICULUM for a holistic childhood experience published by Bob White, 26 Clifton Gardens, London W9 1AU.

LOWER SHAW FARM: SUMMER EVENTS '84.
22-24 JUNE: Cycling Weekend. Easy-going cycling in the Wilts countryside.

13-15 JULY: Perceiving Nature. Experience a summer weekend through seeing, smelling, tasting, hearing and feeling.

21-28 JULY: Art and Craft Week. Annual event for people of all ages.

3-10 AUGUST: Introducing Alternatives. Wholefoods, health, organic growing, non-violence, communities.

20-27 AUGUST: Stretching Out. Massage, voice, drama, dance, yoga...

14-16 SEPT: Fungus Weekend. Some of 2,000 different fungus to discover and enjoy.

28-30 SEPT: Permaculture. A new approach to self-sufficiency. Introduction to permanent agriculture.

Wholefood meals. Children welcome. Low cost-concessions available. For details send SAE to LOWER SHAW FARM, SHAW, NR. SWINDON, WILTS. O793 771080.

PENPALS: I like to talk about horses and horsey things but the trouble is, my family are getting a bit fed up of my one-track mind. So I wonder if there is any other horsey EOer who would like to exchange letters. I am 14 - but not fussy about that. My name is Laura Holliday and I live at "Lorraine" 10 Chalton Road, Bridge of Allan, Stirling FK9 4DX.

AMERICAN FAMILY: visiting Edinburgh mid-July to late September wishes to meet home schoolers. "We" are Allen (home-maker), Peggy (medical student studying pathology at Western General Hospital, Edinburgh), Eben (5½. first family home schooler) and Justus (5½ months, next family home schooler). Please get in touch if you would like to meet us. Allen C. Myers
13 Sachem Village, W. Lebanon, N.H. 03784, U.S.A.

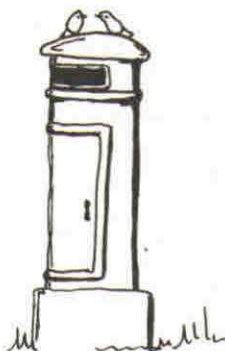
FREE (or almost!): 1 set of SMP Maths books - A to H, X,Y,Z, plus teachers manuals available for the cost of postage. Phone 0443-204263.

HEART DISORDER: Our eight month baby daughter, In-Ju, has a complex congenital heart disorder. I wonder if there are any other members with a child with similar problems. We would like to hear from you if you have. Carole Lee, 1 Westbank Quadrant, Glasgow, G12 8NT.

ACCOMMODATION WANTED: Has anyone cheap family accommodation for the week 1st-7th July in the Lake District? Please contact Carole Lee, 1 Westbank Quadrant, Glasgow, G12 8NT.

NOTICES

GLASGOW GATHERING: The Downie family at 30 Hillhead Street, Glasgow, will have an open house for EO families on Saturday 9th June from about 11 am until 5 pm. We would especially like members living in Strathclyde to take this opportunity of getting together. Snacks will be provided but contributions towards a communal lunch will be welcome. Please telephone 041 339 6914 if you need directions.



LETTERS

Relax, Peter Jones, and have mercy on those less confident than yourself. Even you have to use the word "let" - "let them learn what they want" - although doubtless you would claim your usage is untainted.

Home schooling parents would not belong to E.O. if they did not want to help their children learn in the best possible way, but this must vary from family to family and we have no right to dictate to each other. The newsletter will always, I hope, contain conflicting views and it is up to individuals to choose the suggestions they think will suit them.

I sent in Miss Macleod's letter because so many people to whom I had shown it had found it helpful and interesting. Certainly the letters and conversations I have had following its publication justified my doing so. It no more imposes a syllabus than a map imposes a certain route. You might set off on your cycling holidays mapless but must you insist on others doing likewise? "Eng. lit." (the title was a joke and meant to emphasise how far removed from a syllabus the outline was) is a map to help us avoid the dreary suburbs of workbooks. If one wants to linger in the Welsh hills, fine, but it's good to know that other places exist too.

So please other, gentler readers, send in your maps.

Helen Holland

Inholms Farm,
Plumpton Green,
Sussex.

Dear Editor,

We are a family of two adults and 2 children 10 and 9, the children are still attending school but we plan to take the elder at least out at the end of his primary schooling. He is really keen to work on his own at home-work in the broadest sense; his sister is not quite so convinced of the advantages. We have waited till this stage in their schooling for many reasons but chiefly we needed the children to be able to realise the implications and responsibilities attached to being out of school, and then we had to be ready ourselves to cope with the same - it seems to me that deciding to de-school children is almost as big a step as deciding to have children in the first place!

Some thoughts on newsletter items (a) the newsletter itself: I think the newsletter ought to be for the members and not for impressing L.E.A.s, thus a 'professional' look is not important and can actually be unhelpful: giving people a "them & us" feeling. Some of the most exciting newsletters (from all sorts of organisations) have been those stapled-together-faded-duplicating-on-cheap-recycled-paper ones. They make you feel good, and involved.

(b) The production of the newsletter - an article on the stages in its production might enable people who's gut reaction is "I couldn't do that" to see that its not quite the overwhelming task they imagine it to be, and thus be encouraged to try editing it themselves.

(c) Renewals (or lack of them) - don't you think that many people find their temperament, or circumstances, don't match their ideals. Having followed their ideals and subscribed initially, they find they can't live up to them and subscribe no longer to avoid the pain of seeing how others, stronger, luckier, have done it.

Yours sincerely,

Sue Stephenson

1 College Road,
Barrow-on-Humber,
South Humberside.

Dear Members,

Regarding the note on de-registration by Ted and Mary Carter in the April newsletter, the advice given in the recent addendum to S.I.N.C. is to write to the school at the beginning of the school holidays "We have made arrangements for our son/daughter to be educated privately from the beginning of next term, and we therefore wish to withdraw him/her from school from the end of last term.

"It is much better to do this during the school holidays rather than in termtime. There is no need to explain your plans and it is probably better not to do so."

This differs only slightly from the Carters' suggested wording ("that the child is receiving an alternative education"). Which is better is hard to say, but since the aim is to avoid doing anything to provoke or alert the LEA I prefer "private" with its suggestion of Etonian respectability to "alternative", a word which immediately conjures up visions of hippies, anarchists, revolutionaries and threats to the stability of the established order.

Where I am perhaps a bit less confident than Ted and Mary is when they say "... the authorities have no choice, de-registration must be granted." The wording of the regulations here is very unclear and not all legal people I have talked to would agree with this interpretation.

It is important to get this and other gray areas in the law sorted out as best we can and I'd be grateful if anyone who has had problems with the authorities would write to me about them (see notices on page 23).

Yours sincerely,

Dick Kitto

Hello,

3, rue Dupont de l'Eure,
75020 Paris.

After giving the purpose of this article, I will try to introduce us.

Laurent aged 13½ (28.09.70) would like to spend the next school year in England and we would receive an English boy or girl the following year in Paris.

We are a family of 5 persons:

- Gérard who belonged to a collective of printers and who is now going to look after teenagers in difficulties and to teach them printing.

- Myself (Marie Laure), I teach French and Spanish in an "otherwise" school, of which I will talk in a moment.

- Besides Laurent (28.09.70), we also have two boys: Yoann (8.05.79) and Damien (29.11.81.).

We have always worried about the danger there was in teaching done in traditional schools (heavy timetables, homework after 8 hours classes, injustices, castration of the imagination, denial of factual experience, denial of the child himself, etc.).

In France, the educational system is organised as follows:

- Primary school (from 6 to 10)
- the "collège" (from 11 to 14)
- the "lycée" (from 15 to 18) where the child is to take the Baccalauréat at this end. But this schedule is for the best of cases, that is when the child does not repeat a year and when he can carry on with his studies.

When Laurent was 6 years old, he went to a school called "L'école Vitruve" which is a school in Paris where children learn in connection with daily life; for instance if a group decides to prepare a meal, the children have to count in order to ask for the money to the bank of the school, to write posters in order to invite some people, to divide in order to set the table, to weigh to prepare the dishes, etc. and every act of learning is thus done.

When Laurent was 11 years old, as there was not a different "collège" yet, he went to a traditional one. He found it amusing during the first month, but after a while he grew fed up with the ritual (stand up - sit down - Do this - Do that - stand up - sit down) to be done in silence during 8 hours every day - Laurent was becoming more and more disgusted with this school. However, he spent two years there (from 11 to 13) and he was to go in "4^{ème}" (i.e. the equivalent of your 3rd form) when he left.

This year (i.e. last September) some friends- teachers, students and parents and myself, we set up a different "Collège" and we hoped that the Ministry of Education would help us. Therefore Laurent spent this year, i.e. his "4^{ème}" in our otherwise school.

But contrary to our first expectations, the Ministry of Education is unwilling to help us, we will not continue next year for want of financial means.

In Paris, there is a different "lycée" which has been already running for a few years and where Laurent will go when he is 15.

But for the next school year, he does not want to go to a traditional "collège". On the other hand, he would like to live something different with different people; he would like to become English for a year.

The following school year, he would come back to Paris with his English friend and they both could attend school at the "Lycée Autogéré".

We are also thinking that Laurent could come to England without an exchange but on condition that it would not be too expensive; Laurent has always been in free schools and we cannot afford heavy expenses.

If you are interested in this idea, we wish we could meet and know one another better; it is also essential that the children meet as soon as possible and live together for a while before the next school year in order to know if they can get on together.

As to our family life, we have a rather peaceful life; we like going out (cinema, theatre, walks and weekends in the countryside). We often have friends who stay at home for some days.

Gérard and I belong to different groups of activities in our neighbourhood and also to groups connected to the schools of our children. Besides, I continue my studies at the University.

Life at home harmonises with the rhythm of everyone without forgetting to respect one another.

I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Marie Laure Luque

Hello,

I am Laurent. I would like to live in England for one year in order to see something different and to learn English among English people.

I like the sixties, swimming and tennis (but I don't play very well). I often do roller skating and often ride my bicycle. I like skiing very much: it is my favourite sport.

I play the violin since I was 7 years old (Canadian method Letourneau). I went to Canada alone for a month for a musical stay. I very much liked the Canadians (Quebec) who are very kind and warm and who have a funny accent.

I do not like jelly but I love tea and pudding and everything else. I also like reading and many other things.

I am looking forward to hearing from you and to seeing you.

Laurent

21, Woodyard Close,
Mulbarton,
Norwich,
Norfolk.

THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN

We are two experienced teachers with three young children. We intend, in conjunction with other parents and teachers, to set up a school for young children aged five to thirteen, to cover the primary and middle years of schooling.

We see clearly that there is a need for an approach to education that is essentially different in a world that is becoming increasingly more complex and fragmented. The aim of this approach would be to educate the child in a sane, balanced manner, with emphasis on both the physical and mental well being of the child.

To achieve this an environment would have to be created where the child would feel totally secure and free from fear. Certain conditions would have to be fulfilled:-

1. No setting up of authority, particularly the subtle superiority of adult over child.
2. No competition or comparison, especially of individual children.
3. A development of awareness of the destructive nature of self-centred activity.
4. An understanding of the individual's relationship with the world, other children, adults, animals, the natural world etc.
5. A good, varied academic curriculum free from the pressures of structured attainment levels.

We also feel that the school should be vegetarian, based in the countryside and be mainly a day school with some facility for boarding. It should cater for a small number of children and include full parental involvement. As far as a suitable location is concerned, this is very much governed by the level of interest, suitable premises, the existence of appropriate secondary schools etc.

These points are put forward as areas for discussion as we are looking for people who might be interested in working in co-operation with us. We have no wish to create a vehicle for our own ideas, nor do we have specific connections with any groups or systems of education.

The project is very much in its infancy and a great deal of work has to be done to get it off the ground, not least the gathering of funds. We would, therefore, be very pleased to hear from anyone who might be interested in developing this project.

Andrew and Maggie Alexander

June La Trobe,
197 Canterbury Rd.,
Eddington,
Herne Bay, Kent.

Dear EO,

How timely was your April newsletter dropping on my mat! It is some months since first I contacted E.O. after reading of you in a magazine article.

My problem is Piers, who is now 13 years old and has a proven high I.Q. - so high as to be "off the scale" - quote - is the despair of teachers. Piers is desperately unhappy in his learning environment (through bullying and misunderstandings). He cannot understand why he must yawn through all the heavy technical bit for which he has nil ability and even less interest; when there is the permanent excitement of literature, the arts etc. Amazingly, his teachers tell me he is withdrawn and does not mix. In turn I told them of my nightmare situation with this lovely boy who every Monday, vomits, has diarrhoea, headaches etc. all very genuine and obviously caused by stress at school.

The meeting I asked for with his year Head and one other member of staff could have been straight out of a Peter Sellars farce. The year Head had only ever spoken to Piers for 10 minutes. The other member of staff admitted only seeing my son at registration.

When Piers added sleepwalking to his growing list of ailments I took my son to see the local G.P. who has arranged that Piers and I and his 2 brothers be seen by the local "educational shrink". (I will keep you posted).

It is interesting to note that at the weekend Piers returns to the fold once more as a happy, communicative family member. He is a natural student - thirsts for knowledge - has entered the Local Libraries Junior Mastermind Competition; the chosen author being Tolkein. His weekends are spent writing (a novel and poetry) walking with the family, sketching, painting, playing chess, listening to music - but "they" tell me he is not "normal" because a normal 13 year old is not quiet, sensitive, absorbed by books, books, books. Now to earn the "Grand normal" title you must fight swear, wear the gear etc. etc. I was advised to get Piers into a small caring grammar school by the psychologist. Then came the reality, Catch 22, there is only one place at one grammar school available, and, you've guessed, it just happens to be the biggest school, over 1,000 pupils.

Sadly as a very poor one parent family, I cannot afford for this talented boy to attend a Steiner School. This would have been my first choice, but Steiner save their bursaries for younger children of families already in their schools.

Yes I know I could, and might have Piers at home, but I have fears because his intelligence is beyond mine (and that of most of his teachers, but only one had the grace to admit this in front of him!). So what do I do for this bright frustrated child who loathes the "System", but who loves to learn?

Thanks EO for listening. Piers and I feel bruised and battered and so abused, and you at least are there.

P.S. Dominic who is now 6 and thriving in a small C. of E. primary will definitely NOT go through the secondary system. When he gets to 11 I shall preserve his happiness and my sanity and educate him otherwise!

25 Diabaig,
Achnasheen,
Ross-shire.

Dear Peter Jones,

I'm writing to protest about your letter in the April E.O. newsletter.

I feel that we probably come within your definition of radical families. Our kids spend a large part of their day making things, looking after animals (sheep, lambs, cows, calves etc. etc.) and generally following their own ways forward. However I do not feel that I should be so intolerant as to condemn other people's ways and values out of hand! What is right and good for myself and my family is not necessarily right for others. Why should E.O. be so exclusive as to shut out other people, who have the good of their children at heart, just because they're not "Radical" enough. If that ever becomes policy you can count us out of the job of Membership Secretaries, and out of E.O. too!

As to the aims of E.O. Looking at the back of the N/L it seems that, if anything, they are MORE plainly stated, and meant, now than when we joined 3½ years ago.

By having articles in the N/L like Helen Holland's I feel we're helping less confident people attain a more radical stance. Taking children out of school is quite a radical move anyway.

Your comments on teachers gall somewhat too. We've good friends who are teachers, many of whom went into teaching in the hope of making changes from within (e.g. J. Holt). Should their care, love and desperation be condemned just because they try from within?

As to 'Teach Your Own', I feel that you mistake the spirit altogether and make out of it an elitest, exclusive and indeed narrow way instead of John Holt's fine tolerant and broadminded attitude.

I'm sending a copy of this to the newsletter editor, in the hope that it will get printed.

Yours sincerely,

Bruce Wallace

Dear EO,

The Slade,
Peterchurch,
Herefordshire.

1. Pity the poor teachers

I'm a teacher who's finally had enough - enough of teaching (?) children what they don't want to learn, imposing draconian discipline when they exercise their right to switch off, struggling against indifference, insolence, disruption and the like. I'm tired of seeing that the 'best' children are so often the ones who've had all the enterprise and originality knocked out of them; that they're the ones who do what they're told, but can't think for themselves. I'm tired of a system which mutilates the ones that don't fit - to make them fit, and dresses it all up in self-justifying jargon to disguise the reality. So I'm getting out.

But please - EO - give a thought to the teachers. Most of them are struggling against impossible odds. They really do care, and they work frighteningly hard. Teaching is a profession that wrings every last drop of value from its members, and then casts them aside without a second thought. There is no adult stimulus, little in-service training, no way of refilling the exhausted reservoirs after months of giving out with seldom any return. Perhaps it takes a good deal more courage to stay in than to drop out.

We've always educated our children at home - for religious reasons - and the prospect of having more time to spend with them, of working together as a family, is very exciting. The decision to resign made me realise that 8 years as Head of a Music Department had brought me to the point where I no longer enjoyed music. Again, the prospect of rediscovering music, of learning to play again, is really exciting. I should add here that our Authority - Hereford and Worcester - of which many EO members will have heard, has always been most understanding and even helpful. We've always tried to work with them - after all, they have their job to do - but perhaps even so being a teacher has been of some help.

2. EO computer network?

But to the point of this letter. I have already begun to market Computer tapes, and my greatest interest is in Educational Software. The vast majority of it is absolutely appalling, and not worth the tape on which it is recorded. There is a great need for good stuff written by people who have some experience of education - real education, I mean - such as EO members have. Also, there is no logical reason why ANY child should have to go to a centralised institution in order to learn, when systems like MICRONET are readily available. To the uninitiated, this is a system whereby computer owners can communicate, machine to machine, via the telephone.

Perhaps by now some of those isolated members are beginning to prick up their ears. What is to prevent us setting up our own computer network, writing our own programmes, sharing them with one another, and marketing them commercially to finance the whole thing, or just to make ourselves all rich? The simple answer is nothing!

I envisage a network to which an annual subscription might be paid to cover basic running costs, and then perhaps a very small charge made for the use of programs, payable to their authors. This would really be no more than a little carrot to encourage people to write their own programmes. Programmes can of course be exchanged directly via the telephone - no postage involved. The benefit from sharing ideas, from testing each other's programmes and so on, would be enormous, and some very excellent commercially sellable products would undoubtedly emerge, if that is an extra inducement. At any rate, we all have to make a living somehow! It might put EO, and more importantly EO's ideas, on the map in a way nothing else can.

Another point is that this sort of thing is coming anyway, very soon, whether we like it or not. Let's get in on the ground floor. In case anyone thinks that they have no aptitude for this sort of thing, I can assure them that Computer programming is really not that difficult - they even teach it in schools! I had not even seen a Computer 12 months ago. But in any case there must be members who would be prepared to help, and even run courses - I would.

The hardware would be an initial cost to any family, of course, and for simplicity might need to be standardised. The Spectrum and BBC both take MICRONET and Dragon will very shortly. Despite its excellence and low cost, I would rule out the Spectrum. It has no proper keyboard, uses its own special version of BASIC (a programming language), and is less powerful than the other two. The Dragon is a superb machine (I'm biased - I've got one), and can be bought for around £125 these days in the 32K version, which is more than adequate for this purpose. However, the new Sinclair QL would be ideal, if it does all that is claimed for it - though it is £399, but that includes built in Disk drives and a host of other features which would be extremely useful.

If I was organising such a thing I would in fact plan to have several computers here in order to accommodate as many users as possible. I shall in any case be buying another machine as soon as my latest game (if, I should say), takes off.

Now who out there is interested? If there were enough of us, we might even be able to get good terms from Sinclair, or even Acorn (BBC), much as schools do now. It seems to me that such a network would be of enormous help to many of us, and there's no need to ask most of our children what they'd think - the biggest worry would be the phone bill!

Yours etc,

Ian Murray-Watson

P.S. Definition: a Computer is an extremely stupid machine that will do exactly what you tell it (very different from children).

Dear E.O. friends,

There is one thing that I find very sad about our education system. It has to do with fighting and playfulness.

When little children get together they often want to play like puppies and kittens do. They chase each other creating a lot of fun and noise. I've never seen anyone stop young animals from enjoying themselves in such a harmless fashion - on the contrary many people delight in watching them. On my own I've watched various infants play like this and they never hurt each other. After a while they get bored with it and move on to other activities. But as soon as there is another mother present - she stops their fun right away.

Wrestling is a very good way to increase physical coordination and mental awareness. Up to the age of five all children will join in such games spontaneously - bar the most timid. After that the effect of multiple telling off begins to show: The children become wary. Fighting is a sin and school amplifies this. What happens? If a slightly freer child initiates a harmless wrestling match the other child will either hit back unnecessarily hard ('you've got to learn not to fight') or it'll go to the parent/teacher and tell on the unfortunate urchin.

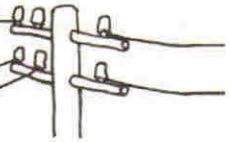
We've all got an urge to fight in a harmless, fun-loving way - but most of us have been discouraged too often (especially women) so that we can't see the trees for the wood. Physical and mental fighting is fun. It helps us to find our limits and to keep us on our toes - like any game will. Ideally we should each find an equal match in another person and then we can go on to play these games ad infinitum.

When discussing it with other people they say that it ends in playing with bombs, gaschambers etc. I'd say that these boys were not allowed to exercise all their aggressive powers in a friendly, harmless way.

Another point I like to consider is sports. Mothers who are against fighting in the house often think highly of sports and hope that their children will do well in competitive sports and discussion groups. I can't see the reasoning behind such a fragmenting world. The house should be the place where you try out everything first so why not arguing and fighting? Why confine your fighting spirits to two hours per week when ten minutes a day would suit you (the child) much better?

My daughter is eight. When she was under five she used to hit older children quite often. I always told them to hit her back, but they didn't believe me - only the under-fives did. Eventually she noticed from their reactions that fighting wasn't the done thing and she gave them hearty cuddles instead. I noticed that they didn't like that much either, as our society is mainly anti-touch. So I don't know what she'll be doing with them in the future. At least she can wrestle, argue and cuddle with her parents. I feel sorry for her friends though. And I wonder how other EO people think about this subject.

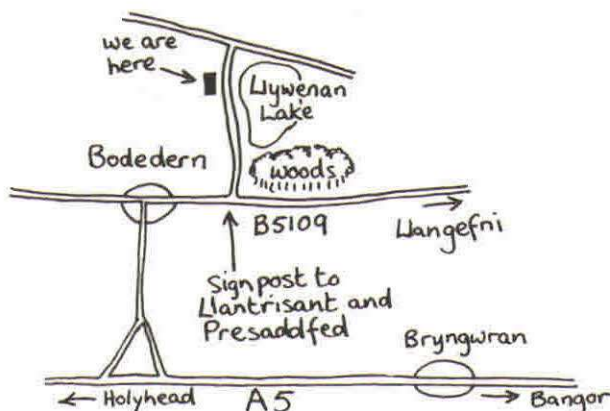
Yours truly, Sigrun Macgilchrist
35 Mayfield Ave.
Stranraer.



Kathleen Downie
age 7 ³/₄

ANGLESEY

On Saturday, July 21st we invite you to Pen Llywenan. Please come and bring picnic lunch and tea. Let us know if you need collecting from Holyhead or Valley station. The postal address is Pen Llywenan, Bodedern, Holyhead. Contact Patricia Knox.



CAMBRIDGESHIRE

- JUNE 24TH. Old Warden Aerodrome. The Shuttleworth Collection. Close to A1 West of Biggleswade.
- JULY 8TH. Wimpole Hall, New Wimpole. On A603 10 miles SW of Cambridge. Nature walk through park to folly.
- JULY 22ND. Rutland Park Farm, Oakham, Leics. On A6003.
- AUG 5TH. Wandlebury Rings in Gog Magog Hills. Native fortress 4 miles SE Cambridge on A1307.

ALL MEMBERS WELCOME.

Gather in car park at 12.30 for 1.00 picnic (bring your own) unless otherwise stated. These are not organised outings or programmes, just a calendar of places for EOers to get together. Please try to wear some form of identification.

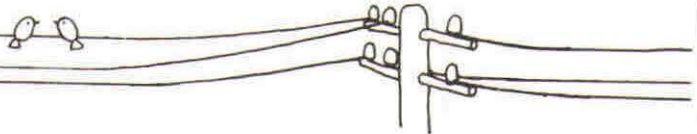
Weekday Swimming

Tuesdays at noon, Parkside Pool, Cambridge: 19th June, 3rd July, 17th July, 31st July, 14th August.

Wednesdays at noon, Regional Pool, Fengate, Peterborough. 27th June, 11th July, 25th July, 8th August.

HERTFORDSHIRE

Trevor and Elizabeth Sturges are having an informal gathering at their house from 12 until 6 on SUNDAY 1st JULY. All members welcome. Bring your own picnic lunch, and we'll supply tea, coffee and fruit juice. The address is 80 Fairview Road, Stevenage (phone Stevenage 352645). Just turn up on the day, or ring if you need directions.



HUMBERSIDE

Humberside area members for the first time say hello to all EO members and friends. We are well, happy and flourishing.

We have had a few small get togethers in the past, but this time made a real effort to meet and invite any that might be interested, mainly by phone and personal contact. Invitation was for Wednesday April 18 from 10am to 4 pm; we thought that as it was the schools' Easter holiday more families with children still at school would come. Final count: 12 families (18 adults) 30 children ages 1 - 15, 6 de-schooled (their ages 6 - 15).

Ann and Colin kindly opened their home at Hull; it's about central for our area which extends from Bridlington down to Hull, then over the Humber into South Humberside - a couple of families arrived from there, which was grand.

What do you do with nearly 50 individuals? There were a few options laid on. A spinning demonstration, making bubbles, clay modeling and science experiments you can do at home (two brave members). By the end of the day Megan with her spinning wheel had given us a demonstration on how to become self sufficient in knitting wool (not so easy as it looks - from one who had a go..)

Bob and Ann had involved most of the children in bubble making. What's the biggest bubble you can make? Let EO mag. know, together with any secret tips.

The older children had a musical session (violins and piano), played draughts and endless games of pool, while the younger ones were happy to run about in the garden with only a couple of tearful faces to wipe.

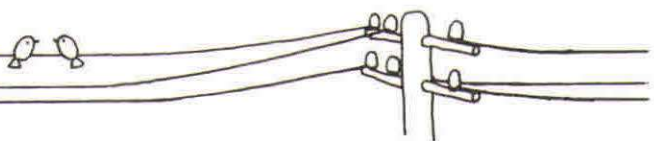
Mums and Dads chattered non-stop, drank endless cups of tea and coffee, and we all enjoyed a buffet style lunch. Would we do it again? YES! A very happy day.

LONDON

SOUTH LONDON EO members get together Sunday 10th June 1 - 6 pm. Come along and meet each other at Margaret and Mike Gilbert's, 45 Burntwood Lane, SW17 0JY. Refreshments, badge making, educational jumble and more!

MIDLANDS

WEST MIDLANDS REGION. There we were, all nine of us, supping beer and fruit juice in the hot April sun on the Jeff's lawn, fending off the enthusiastic attentions of the dogs and wooing the cat - and wondering what had happened to all the other West Midlands (and neighbouring) members who'd said they'd like a meeting, and hadn't turned up. Was it the back end of the Easter holidays, or unseasonal coughs and colds, or transport problems? Anyway, those of us who were there had a good play and a chance to compare notes on the latest communications from and to the LEA. We thought we'd arrange another meeting at the Jeffs (16 St. Bernards Road, Solihull, phone 021 706 6460) on Saturday 9th June from 2.30 on - bring a little something to eat or drink for a co-operative tea. If the time and venue are very unsuitable for some members, perhaps they could give me a ring and suggest alternatives for the August meeting - all suggestions gladly received.



SCOTLAND

Gathering of the clan? ON March 17th a get together of EO families in Central Scotland took place. It was hosted by the Holliday family at their home in Bridge of Allan. This was the second time that people from the whole of Scotland have had a meeting. As EOers here are scattered far and wide, they are more than usually isolated, so it was especially heartening to meet and be able to share ideas, experiences and problems. People had travelled from as far afield as Perthshire, Dundee, the Borders and Glasgow. Thirty-four adults and children came along and, facilitated by a seemingly continuous supply of tea, coffee and refreshments provided by Brenda and John, the adults talked all day while the children mostly disappeared outside to play football, go for walks or played computer games indoors.

The majority of families already had their children out of school, but a few with under fives had come to find out more about EO., and, hopefully, were encouraged by being able to talk over their doubts and by hearing how others work it. Experiences of dealings with LEA's were exchanged, and it seems that in general these had not been too difficult, the Scottish authorities tending not to be actively obstructive, though not particularly encouraging towards EO either. As always, it was stimulating to learn about the different lifestyles of EO families and the varied personal reasons for opting out of the school system. It seemed that the common thread was the wish to foster the 'specialness' of each child and to avoid the strait-jacketing effects of school.

Everyone was dearly grateful for this opportunity to establish links with the Scottish EO network, and we left agreeing that we must have more meetings in the future.

Wendy Razzell

A 'Sunday Times' article in March about the Wallaces gave EO good publicity throughout the country, but especially in Scotland with three spin-off interviews we know about, the Wallaces on Grampian TV, the Downies on Radio Scotland, and Bruce Cox on Women's Hour.

GRAMPIAN

News of good relations with the LEA here. My first contact with them went well, as did the visit to an educational psychologist (see Newsletter 29), where he bent over backwards to make allowances for the children. Since then we've had a visit from our school's adviser, which we all hated. This was because of her role rather than her person, and I suspect it was my reaction to feeling tested.

Not long ago, she sent me a copy of the report she wrote on her visit to us. It was very reasonable and accepting of the fact we have no syllabus or timetable. Her covering letter contained considerable information about which books and equipment might be suitable for areas I'd expressed interest in. With her letter she sent a large bundle of books, many of them activity oriented science and art books. She feels it unlikely she will have time to visit us again before we move abroad next March or April!

In all dealings with the LEA I've avoided criticism of the education system and schools, as I feel this must antagonise people whose work is to promote these things. Instead, I've prepared many areas that I could ask for advice on, as I feel this helps them feel useful and less critical.

Priscilla Park-Weir



SIDMOUTH

Julie Webb recommends SIDMOUTH INTERNATIONAL FOLK FESTIVAL, 3rd - 10th August. A week of varied activities, many of them free! There's a smashing selection of things for children to do, from Morris Minors (children's Morris workshop) to song sessions where children can perform or just join in. For families to go together, there's an almost overwhelming choice: excellent folk music, jugglers, fire-eaters, dancers from abroad, and a chance to extend your own playing and dancing. A combined camping and season ticket is available. More details from: The Festival Office, The Knowle, Sidmouth, Devon EX10 8HL.

If any EOer would like to join Julie for a picnic on the beach during the Festival, contact her at The Thatches, 28 Churchway, Haddenburn, Bucks.

SUSSEX

It was all thanks to Maxine Toff, and her husband Stuart and son Zachary, that the February General Meeting went so well. Families turned up from all over Britain at the Y.M.C.A. in Hove and found a variety of well organized activities to entertain them. There was plenty of time and space just to sit and chat too, and the lack of overnight accommodation meant that Sussex host families had a pleasant opportunity to meet others from outside the region.

The next Big Event in Sussex will be our summer weekend on June 30th and July 1st - lots to do plus a family barn dance (which was a huge success last year). If you'd like to know more about this and other meetings please send me a SAE for our latest local newsletter.

Helen Holland, Inholms Farm, Plumpton Green, Sussex.

WEST YORKS.


In describing 'tempus's' ability to fugit, as the intellectuals would say, an acquaintance of mine once said, "Time blobs on!" Well, time seems to do more than it's fair share of blobbing around about dead-line time for the newsletter. Hence, no news from this region for quite some 'tempus'!

We have regular parents' meetings, about once a month, and these are held in each other's homes. This way, even our out-lying members can usually manage to attend once in a while. Also on a regular basis, we have weekly gym classes for the children. We are lucky enough to have a philanthropic gym teacher as a member and can have the use of school facilities.

I have managed three local radio interviews in the last 12 months, one of which included a phone-in after the show (16 phone-calls were received) and another with a phone-in on the air. All the interviews generated a lot of interest and we plan to advertise ourselves more widely this year.

At a meeting in March, we were fortunate enough to have a talk on education law from Ivan Geffen. It was extremely interesting and informative, and I have a cassette tape of the evening if any other branch would like to borrow it (stamped, addressed Jiffy bag, please!)

In the first week of opening, some of us attempted to visit the new Yorvik Viking Centre in York. However, a two hour queue headed us off to the Castle Museum instead! We hope to manage a party booking in July, though (pre-booked parties are allowed to queue jump!)



Another of our ex-teacher members, who has studied curriculum planning, has produced for us a core curriculum for 'Home Education for the Middle and Secondary age child.' It is, as yet, untried against the LEA's around here, but two families who are using it are de-schooling their children this Easter and we shall see what its reception is. It certainly looks impressive to me! Again, I would be willing to send a copy on receipt of a large SAE and £1 towards photo-copying costs (it is a lengthy document).

Linda Cooper (Co-ordinator)

WILTSHIRE

We will have an EO stall at the Devizes Earthday on 4th August. This is a repeat of last year's community festival that promotes alternative ways of doing things, creativity, and offers a lot of original entertainment. We will have an 'unwanted gifts' stall, jumble and things the children have made: children's food in particular, e.g. fudge, lemonade, flap jacks, pop corn (freshly made) - all this together with EO literature. A recipe sheet of children's favourites could be produced cheaply and sold. If you can support this in any way please contact Victoria Charles, The Shambles, Lower Common, Uffington. Phone Uffington 619.

Extract from a letter home from an E.O. student attending a pre-university industrial training course

The course is very annoying at the moment - what we are studying is in essence what today's electronics is all about - you remember that little course I did in the summer and used my train set? It's that and much, much more, going right into the workings of computers - but I am appalled to find my interest dying by the day - Mr. Greenan (the sarcastic instructor who calls the students pillocks) is managing to destroy it with consummate ease - I thought I was mature enough not to let this happen! It's just like St. Ivo (secondary school) all over again. All this wouldn't worry me too much; but I am not 100 percent sure that my interest will recover when Mr. Greenan leaves - this is a challenge indeed to my strength of character and ability to learn! I am not really offended on a moral level - he does not affect me much at all in an 'emotional' way - what is so unpleasant is the destruction of interest. I told the other students about the train set thing today, contrasting the two situations; they just laughed, said 'of course we know you've done it all before etc.'; - completely misunderstood me as usual! All they can see is that they are bored - but see this as a natural state - they've always been bored with learning, so what's new? Electronics, a new subject to all four of them, turns out to be just as boring as all the other subjects they've studied. I can't get them off this; I say 'but this could be really interesting if we were just allowed to' Blank looks all round!

Treasurer

Alison Mafham
3 Park Road West
Curzon Park
Chester

Assistant Treasurer

(renewals)
Bob Emmett
8 Queensway
Liddell Park
Llandudno
Gwynedd
LL30 1YJ

General Secretary

John Elenor
31 Anson Road
London NW2

Co-ordinators Secretary

Andy Anderson
95 Derrington Avenue
Crewe
CW2 7JA
Tel. 664060

Membership secretaries

Bruce and Christine Wallace
25 Diabaig
Achnasheen
Ross-shire
Scotland
IV22 2HE
Tel. 044581 225

Enquiries Secretary

Janet Everdell
25 Common Lane
Hemingford Abbots
Cambs.
PE18 9AN
Tel. 0480 63130
(not after 9.30 p.m.)

Reviews Editor

(books for review to
this address)
Helen Holland
Inholme Farm
Plumpton Green
Nr. Lewes
Sussex

Where to get what

Members with enquiries should contact their local co-ordinator
in the first instance

Enquiries Secretary: Posters, digests, old Newsletters, handbills

Membership Secretaries: Current and old NLs, SINC, Early years,
Teach your own.

General Secretary: Envelope re-use labels £1 per 100.

Co-ordinators secretary: Stationery, introductory literature,
membership forms, membership secretaries
address labels.

EO is affiliated to: NCCL
Future Studies Centre
National Out of School Alliance

education otherwise

Education Otherwise is a membership organisation whose principal aim is to provide a support and information network for families whose children are being educated outside school, for those who are contemplating such a step and for those who wish to support the freedom of families to take proper responsibility for the education of children.

Our principal aims are as follows

To encourage the provision of alternative learning situations outside the school system.

To re-affirm that parents have the primary responsibility for their children's education and that they have the right to exercise this responsibility by educating them out of school.

To establish the primary right of children that full consideration, with due allowance for their age and understanding, shall be given to their wishes and feelings regarding their education.

For further information send a 9" x 4" s.a.e. to

25 Common Lane, Hemingford Abbots, Cambs. PE18 9AN