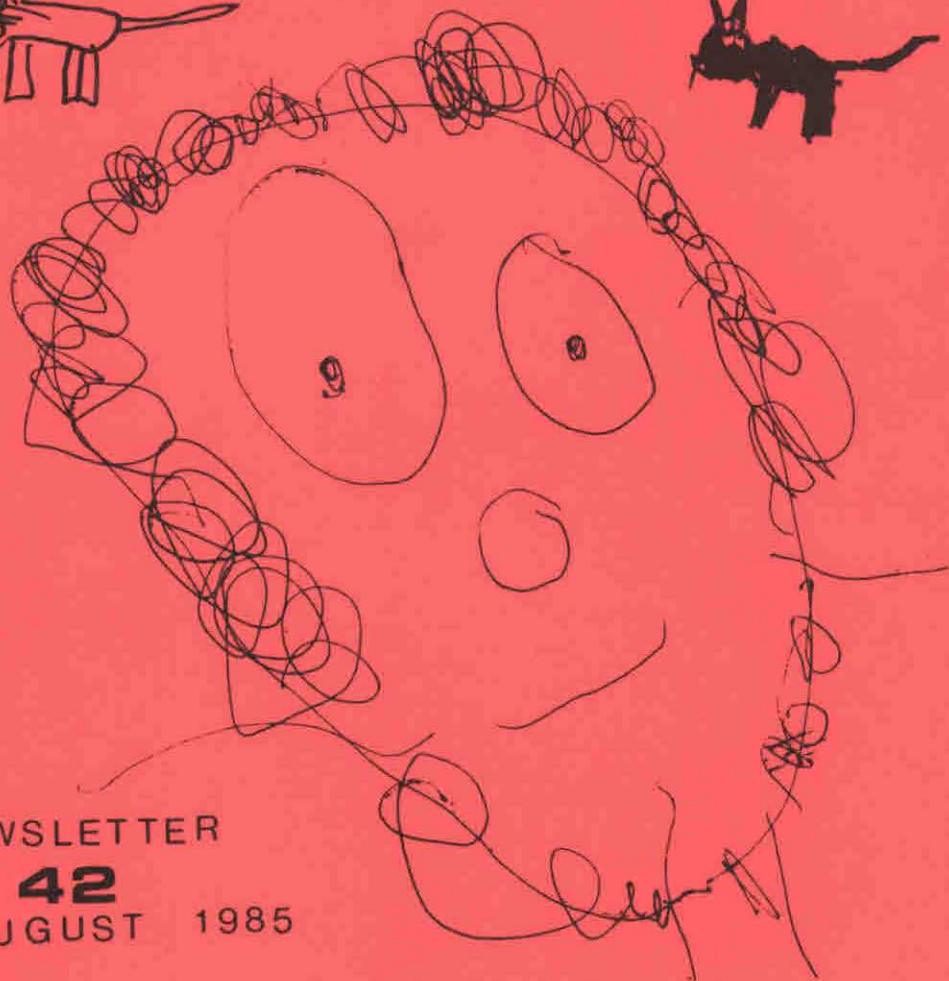


EDUCATION OTHERWISE



NEWSLETTER

42

AUGUST 1985

Di Hooley

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

NEXT EDITOR

THE EDITOR OF THE OCTOBER NEWSLETTER :
PAULINE THOMASSON
4 WAGGON ROAD BOLTON, BL2 5AB
LANCS

Contributions for the next edition should be sent to the Editor by 1st September 1985, and all material intended as such, should be clearly marked "For publication".

We have enjoyed editing this newsletter very much, and add heartfelt agreement to Jean Shepherd's letter describing this as hard but interesting work for about 2 weeks. Lara and Lauren spent a great deal of time designing the cover, and helped in many other ways.

It has been good to read letters and articles from members all over the country. Our apologies to all who have sent material that has not been included. The limited space cannot contain all our experiences. This newsletter also has 2 (!) sets of minutes and a number of other articles to do with the organisation of EO. We also thought it preferable not to cut letters or articles sent in, but to include them as they came to us. No apologies though for reprinting the Digby Anderson article from The Times on page 34. It is very good even though he treats children as passive consumers of education and not active learners of knowledge they find interesting and relevant.

The format of this newsletter is obviously an experiment. As we have a word processor and a printer it seemed a good idea to use it to produce the newsletter, if for no other reason than to save the treasurer an enormous expenses claim for Tippex!

We hope this format does not seem impersonal, or turn out more than usually difficult to read, or distract from the contents. Machines, whether operated by a microchip or mechanical lever are only means whereby people communicate with each other. If all is well, so much the better. If not, then it will have been an interesting experiment, and so useful in itself.

One nice thing about having an Editorial is that we can comment on any educational developments that seem interesting. At a time when schools are very much in the news, an article in the Sunday Times on the 12th May this year caught my eye. It reported how in May 7,500 children are taking exams in "Life Skills", covering such matters as insurance, wiring fuses and burglar prevention. Next year (Heaven help them), they will be able to answer questions on Health, Hygiene and safety. A draft syllabus has been issued which includes first aid, road safety, personal and food hygiene, and emotional well-being - coping with depression, loss and grief.

All this seems beyond reproach and yet I get a sensation of a creeping "educationalisation" of real life. The word is cumbersome, awkward, and artificial, just like what it describes. It turns on its head the idea that learning is part of life, and seeks to make life part of a contrived form of learning.

It is rather like firstly removing vitamins, minerals and bran from the flour, and then adding some back to the bread that the depleted flour has been used to produce, because otherwise it would be nutritionally inadequate.

This vitamin-enriched bread is only a good thing because something has been taken out in the first place, and if you can't

get the bread made with the genuine article.

The same applies here. Deprived of real life and a genuine opportunity to exercise skills in the daily business of living where their actions MATTER and have real effects on themselves and others, children have to learn it all at second hand. (What about a practical Life Skills exam ??!) It becomes another subject split from real life. (I am trying to imagine an exam question on how to cope with loss and grief). Perhaps children will treat it like they treat other subjects they are to be tested on - revise like mad the night before, and forget it all with a sigh of relief the next day.

Joseph and Jill O'Connor

And a woman who had held a babe against her bosom said,
 Speak to me of Children. And he said:
 Your children are not your children,
 They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
 They come through you but not from you,
 And though they are with you, they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts,
 For they have their own thoughts.
 You may house their bodies, but not their souls,
 For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,
 Which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.
 You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like
 you.
 For life goes not backwards nor tarries with yesterday.
 You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are
 sent forth.

The Archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite,
 And He bends you with his might that his arrows may go swift and
 far.
 Let your bending in the Archer's hand be for gladness.
 For even as He loves the arrow that flies, so He loves the bow
 that is stable.

Kahlil Gibran (1883 - 1931) THE PROPHET

Thanks to Pam Staples for sending in this extract from this
 wonderful book.

INFORMATION RESOURCE CENTRE

Tel: 0270 664060

Andy and Diane Anderson, 95 Derrington Avenue, Crewe, Cheshire,
CW2 7JA

AN INFORMATION/ORDER FORM LIST IS AVAILABLE: The list contains used and recommended books and materials and can be used as a guide to assist those seeking suitable educational material for children of all ages.

MEMBERS ARE OFFERED THE USE OF THE RESOURCE CENTRE - If anyone has any queries or problems with regard to what educational material etc. is available, please do not hesitate to contact us at any time, either by phone, letter or a visit. What we don't know, we will try to find out. Please feel free to use us.

As we get no funding from any source, would you please ALWAYS include SAE for reply.

WHEN RECOMMENDING ANYTHING - PLEASE GIVE AS MUCH INFORMATION AS POSSIBLE, and when recommending a book etc., please give title, author, publisher and price if known, and a rough idea of the age group it would be useful for.

infoinfoinfoinfoinfoinfoinfoinfoinfoinfoinfoinfoinfoinfoinfo

SCHOOL IS NOT COMPULSORY

Firstly an apology to all the people we have kept waiting for a copy (140 at 25th June). It has taken far longer to prepare for the printer than anyone guessed at. Hopefully by the time this newsletter comes out in August, all you folks will have had your copies.

The new, rewritten edition of SINC is available to all members. For your free copy, please send a SAE, (same size as for a newsletter), with 18p stamps to;

Bruce and Christine Wallace,

25 Diabaig, Achnasheen, Ross-shire, IV22 2HE

We will try to get them posted back by return, but it really depends just how swamped we are!

EDUCATION THROUGH THE PRESS

Edited by Sarah Guthrie, with contributions from Dick Kitto, Janice Owen, Angela Jackson, Joseph O'Connor.

CORPORAL PUNISHMENT : A six-year old who was slapped for helping another child with her work, will have her case brought before the European Commission of Human Rights. (TELEGRAPH 22.5.85) The Government is expected to introduce legislation allowing parents to choose whether they want their children beaten at school; this is in response to a judgement against British caning law made by the European Court of Human Rights.... Local Labour politicians are being urged to abolish corporal punishment, and thus forestall the Government's Bureaucratic nightmare, before the opting-out law comes into force. (GUARDIAN 21.5.85) Official returns show that there are nearly 250,000 officially recorded beatings per school year, or one every 19 seconds. (Advisory Centre for Education)

**TEACHERS: NOT ONLY:**

Sir Keith has rejected pleas from steiner teachers to be assessed as equal to state-trained teachers. State trained staff must now be employed in Steiner schools where Local Authority-funded pupils attend, despite the widely differing philosophy. (TELEGRAPH 28.5.85)

BUT ALSO: HMI's found teacher training standards "less than satisfactory" at Polytechnics visited last year and report "As these tutors are the models for future teachers, this high proportion of unsatisfactory teaching cannot be considered acceptable."..... 40% of Headteachers in Doncaster have applied for early retirement because of stress leading to illness. (TELEGRAPH 30.5.85) Heart attacks, ulcers, and nervous breakdowns are cited, plus the current "lunchtime laryngitis"..... Heads would like to get the school leaving age lowered to 14 to enable those who are "restless" to go on to work experience. (TELEGRAPH 27.5.85)



A.S. Neill's daughter Zoe Readhead is to take over the running of Summerhill school from September. She has no plans to change the philosophy of the school, but does want to get in contact with people who are interested. (Education Guardian 7.5.85)

Political indoctrination of school pupils as well as University and Polytechnic students has become so blatant and widespread that it should be banned by law, according to a report published today..." (TELEGRAPH 28.5.85) SCHOOL RULES WRITTEN BY CHILDREN

"Pupils at a junior school have been allowed to write their own set of school rules at the request of Mr. Louis Fidge, their headmaster. He has drawn up a 10 point code of conduct based entirely on suggestions from the 280 pupils aged between 7 and 11 at Someries Junior School, Luton, Beds.."(TELEGRAPH)

CLASSES: The Associated Examination Board is to introduce "basic skills" exams (apart from 'O' Levels) to test children's practical knowledge about work safety in the home, and next year, Health and Hygiene, which will cover diet, exercise and rest, as well as emotional well-being. The Exam has the backing of British industry, which claims that thousands of working hours are lost through food poisoning, which is often caused by lack of basic knowledge of hygiene..(SUNDAY TIMES 12.5.85)

HMIs say long division should no longer be taught to most children under 16, and logarithms are "obviously redundant". Pupils should learn more about the use of calculators and computers, and how to apply maths practically. They fear that too many children leave school with little idea about measurement and estimation.(TELEGRAPH 25.4.85)...Most children go through school without understanding decimals because of two misconceptions unnoticed up to now. Three years (!! Ed.) of detective work has shown one child in 5 goes wrong because they fail to see the decimal point at all. Another third believe the longer the decimal, the smaller the number....(TELEGRAPH reporting National Foundation for Educational Research) An "outstanding student" threw himself from Westminster bridge because he could not get a job.. (TELEGRAPH 4.5.85)... Hay fever can have such a bad effect on exam results that a third of all teachers would like pupils to sit summer exams earlier. (TELEGRAPH 2.5.85)

EO IN THE PRESS

Two EO families were featured in JUST SEVENTEEN (26.6.85) The Everdells and The Andersons. "What I remember doing is Rural Studies and having gravel chucked at me. Boys I didn't even know would hit me." said Nick Everdell. "There is no need for formal classes at all. Since you are in a place where there is conversation going on you make progress" said Diane Anderson.

Commented JUST SEVENTEEN's writer "Apart from its benefits to a few individuals (sic) the value of EO is to highlight the many and endlessly-repeated mistakes and failures of the present set-up and challenge them to change.".....The Jackson Family from Chelmsford were written about in the BRAINTREE AND WITHAM TIMES (16.5.85) Angela Jackson said she originally heard about

SOMERSET SPEAKS UP!

Dear all,

It's not very often that you hear from Somerset, (maybe due to the fact that there aren't many of us), but we are here: contrary to the new contact list 1985 which only lists the coordinators. PAULINE and RODNEY LOWRY, DANIELLE(2), WILLOW ROSE(1) JACQUI BEST MARTIN BEST(6) We all still live in Hardington marsh (see old contact list), and are always pleased to meet other EOers.

Martin is 6 now, and just about due for his second visit from our LEA officer. The last visit was the day after we had arrived here from Italy. February and freezing, he found us amid cases, and christmas cards, and huddled round the wood fire drinking tea from a thermos. It was surprises all round as I hadn't yet opened the letter announcing his arrival, and he hadn't expected to find us as we were! The meeting went well, Martin suitably impressed him with the five sentences in Italian, and two in French which were so fresh in his mind and then proceeded to explain that "Paris was an island before, you know, and this is the Eiffel Tower (model) I've been there and do you know last year I burnt my feet on a volcano AND we had an earthquake at Subbio where we live sometimes". Very patiently Tony Murray listened to the full story(ies) relating to each of these true statements, discussed with me the difference in culture, attitude, education etc. in mountainous regions of Italy, and my reasons, ideas, hopes and expectations of educating otherwise before realising he was due somewhere else. He left suggesting we keep a note of books read, and any projects or themes followed, so that we might notice more easily any gaps and be able to "fill in" at will.

I don't quite know what he's expecting this time, he certainly won't find much written work from Martin, but it's just possible he will find him building a shed, weeding the garden, up the tree, helping make hay or even all! Much nicer pastimes for a 6 year old I think.

I don't want to take up too much valuable space, but I do have a few "bits" to add. There are many of us out here who "mean to but never quite manage" writing to the mag, meeting other people, writing to the papers, radio, etc. but nonetheless, all is appreciated, those that do the good work, especially the editors who get the newsletter out - how many people would suffer from withdrawal symptoms (and maybe even consider a return to school) without not only the advice, contacts and news, but the knowledge that there are others out there doing what they feel is right for their children.

Very often we read of radio, TV and newspaper interviews about EO or EOers and their families. Only once have I been able to catch a copy of the relevant newspaper. Is it possible that someone has or could compile a collection of articles (radio interviews on tape) relating to this and lend them out

8 (photocopy?) to people interested? Most people we meet agree with EO for the early years, and would like some proof/evidence to show of older children coping out of school.

Final request - does anyone have any books or tapes we could buy/borrow (cheap please!) in Italian?

Hello to all we know, and look forward to meeting more of you at the Sidmouth Festival? Italy? A.G.M.? or all three if we can make it.

Love Jacqui and Martin Best

HERTFORDSHIRE

Herts members are planning to hold a one day "exchange of skills" meeting in the near future, the idea being that our children will be able to take advantage of parental skills and learn or experience something their own parents cannot provide. For example, I could offer a group drama session, another parent has offered a Maths workshop, another a "crafty" hour. In this way the children could spend an interesting day with different people, socialise, and learn something new. If you are interested and live in Herts or nearby, please write to me enclosing a SAE, stating what subject or hobby you would be willing to share with the children. Any subject (not just "school" subjects) is welcome. The more volunteers, the more enjoyable day for parents and children alike. Please write to me by August 21st, then "the day" can be arranged for early September, hopefully the first of many!

Jean Shepherd, 9 Cranbourne Gardens, Welwyn Garden City,
Herts. AL7 3NF

BEDFORDSHIRE

A gathering of EO families in Bedfordshire, with several families coming from Milton Keynes and Hertfordshire, took place at John and Marion Brindle's home near Shefford on Saturday 15th June. Most people were meeting each other for the first time. The weather was good. Everyone brought their own food, which was placed on a table in the garden to be shared.

The many children were able to play in the garden around the lawns, through the apple trees in the orchard, or in the recently planted maze at the back.

Following the success of this event, we are now planning another meeting for EO members, plus non-member friends, again at John and Marion's on July 27th, where we hope to have demonstrations of some of our skills, including bee-keeping, orchard husbandry, spinning, basketwork and first aid. Also a treasure hunt in the maze, plus a showing of a "Greenpeace" video. Many thanks to John and Marion for their very generous hospitality.

Rupert and Teresa Baines (Bedfordshire Coordinators)

also digests, but to a lesser degree. SINC is awaited, we hope in the near future. So far we owe approximately 50 copies to new members.

3.3 Treasurer: Alison reported that our financial position was sound and that we would be able to cover our regular costs for the remainder of the year. Further up to date details are to be found elsewhere in the newsletter. She agreed to investigate the benefits of covenanted payment.

3.4 Coordinators Secretary: Andy Anderson reported on visits to two members in legal difficulties. In each case the local authority representatives had been met, and the outcome had been successful. Andy's travel expenses in each instance had been paid by the families themselves. Delay over reprinting handbills had been a difficulty, but they had in the end been printed. Both of these matters illustrated some of the problems arising between Core Group meetings when money was needed. The procedure of going through the Steering Committee was cumbersome.

3.5 Publications Secretary: Caroline said that "Early Years" needed to be either reprinted or revised. It was agreed that a decision should be made in consultation with the editor, Sarah Guthrie. There was a need for handbills for Fairs etc. during the summer. It was agreed to print 5000.

3.6 Steering Committee: The resignation of Anne Moss from the Committee was announced. The Committee had not had much work to do since the last Core Group, and had nothing to report. As Steering Committee decisions frequently involve finance, and therefore discussion with the Treasurer, Alison agreed to replace Anne on the Committee. Everyone agreed this would be a good idea, as it would speed decision-making.

3.7 Legal Group: Fortunately this group has had little to do in recent weeks, Andy's help to two families has already been mentioned. Anne agreed to write an account of the role of the Legal Group for the newsletter.

3.8 Advertising Secretary: Jean sent in a report stating that the April and June newsletters brought in an income of £100 from advertisements.

4. DISCUSSION ON THE REORGANISATION OF SECRETARIAL WORK.

4.1 This discussion arose first because of the resignation of John Elenor as General Secretary, and secondly because of the increasing burden of work falling on the shoulders of Janet Everdell, our Enquiries Secretary. She is now having to devote around 15 hours each week to EO business. The need to split up jobs which have grown as EO has grown is one which we have often met in the past. We decided on this occasion, with the help of a detailed paper by Rob and Anne Wade to split these two roles up into four.

- 1) Secretary to the Core Group and General Secretary
- ii) Publicity Secretary
- iii) Public Relations Secretary
- iv) Enquiries Secretary

This means the work of the General Secretary is split into

two, and the role of Public Relations Secretary (dealing with approaches from the Media) is to be separated from that of Enquiries Secretary.

4.2 It was agreed that the new roles will be defined as follows:

i) Secretary to the Core Group: See the job description on p. 24 of newsletter 41

ii) Publicity Secretary: The role will be to promote EO at a national level in accordance with its general aims, determined by the Core Group. Publicity initiatives should be approved in advance by the Core Group, but the Publicity Secretary will be expected to respond quickly to news, features etc. in the Media, where speed of response is necessary.

iii) Public Relations Officer: The role will be to respond appropriately to enquiries from the Media by providing information, and finding suitable subjects for interview etc. It will involve close cooperation with the Enquiries Secretary.

John Elenor agreed to take on the role of Publicity Secretary. He will also for the time being remain as nominal General Secretary.

Joe O'Connor's offer to take on the role of Public Relations Secretary was gratefully accepted.

This left the vital post of Core Group Secretary unfilled. We agreed to advertise it in the newsletter (see no. 41).

5. DISCUSSION ON DECISION-MAKING PROCEDURE

This discussion was necessary because of delays between meetings. In particular, Andy had not been able to get handbills printed as quickly as they were needed. It was reaffirmed that routine matters which involved expenditure such as replacing existing stock need not go before the Steering Committee. We felt also that their decisions would be speedier now that Alison, as Treasurer, was on the Committee.

6. PROPOSAL THAT WE TAKE OUT MEMBERSHIP OF THE "Ys"

John explained that the "Ys" were a group of experimenting teachers, founded by Guy Claxton, and sympathetic to the ideas of John Holt. Guy Claxton will be writing an article for a newsletter to explain who they are, and what they do. We all agreed to the proposal. John will monitor their newsletter.

7. PROGRESS ON THE FAMILY SUPPORT FUND

Response so far to the appeal in the newsletter for funds has been very disappointing. We thought that a possible reason was the absence of a particular case of clear injustice to excite the sympathy of members. The trustees of the fund are to be Dick Kitto, James Fearnley and Andrew Jackson. Peter Gibbs will act as Treasurer. The Core Group agreed to transfer £250 to the fund provided that Alison, in consultation with our Auditor Christian Galvin could find no obstacles to doing so. We decided also that eventually, when new members join, information about the fund and bankers orders will be sent out. James agreed to

draft this.

8. REPORT ON "TEENAGE YEARS"

This booklet, which is being written by Bruce Cox, is near completion. Although an agreement to pay him for the work involved was made before we applied for charitable status, it now appears that such a payment would be incompatible with that status. The task of exploring this problem was passed on to Alison Mafham and Bruce Wallace.

9. DISCUSSION OF PLANS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS.

9.1 The next meeting is to be at Wick Court near Bristol. Arrangements are in the hands of Patricia Webb and Meg Robertson Shopper, at the last meeting we had decided not to give a subsidy. Joan thought this was unwise as we might be in danger of not using all the accommodation. She reported that in spite of fears that we might not fill Unstone Grange, a surge of late bookings had left us with a profit of over £100, but this might not happen at Wick Court. It was more expensive, and a new venue.

9.2 We therefore agreed to give a subsidy of £200. Some of this might be recovered through payments by day visitors. The subsidy was to be used as the organisers thought fit, but the Core Group favoured giving most of it to cover places for children. They also asked Pat and Meg to consider separating payment for food from that for accommodation. Bruce Cox was asked to communicate the substance of this discussion to them immediately.

9.3 There was a long discussion about future meeting places. It was readily agreed to book Unstone again for the May meeting, this time for the second bank holiday. The venue of the winter meeting was more of a problem. Transport can be difficult in winter, and the easiest place to get to is London, it is also the most expensive. The possibility of doing without a winter meeting was canvassed, as was having a business meeting without families and children, but neither gained much support. There was a strong current of support for a meeting in more remote parts, notably Scotland. As it was necessary to decide on somewhere before the next meeting, the task of finding a place, and the power to book it was left with Bruce Wallace.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS.

10.1 The Wallaces suggested that the large supply of publications which they hold should be insured, and it was agreed to do this.

10.2 Alison was asked to buy the screens used to print "Education Otherwise" on T-shirts, so that it could be used at future workshops.

ENDENDENDENDENDENDENDENDENDENDENDENDENDENDENDENDEND

ACCOUNT OF INCOME AND EXPENDITURE 19.1. 85 TO 16.5.85

Income	££££	
From subscriptions	3346.57	
From sale of publications	193.20	
From sale of T.Y.O.	384.25	
From subs to GWS	93.50	
From advertisements	60.00	
From meetings:		
London Feb 85	413.79	
Unstone Grange May 85	452.40	
From donations	5.00	
Interest	93.52	
unexplained credits	5.50	
 SUBTOTAL		5047.73
in hand 19.1. 85		7638.16
 TOTAL		12685.89
 Expenditure		
Recurrent Expenditure:		
Newsletter and Contact list	1882.98	
Other publications and stationary	137.47	
Purchase and distribution of GWS	248.15	
Coordinator's expenses	331.47	
Officer's expenses	720.10	
Legal Group expenses	62.21	
Meetings:		
London Feb 85	295.00	
Unstone Grange May 85	270.00	
Wick Court Oct 85	50.00	
Subscriptions (Justice for Children)	10.00	
Bank charges	102.00	
Insurances	50.00	
SUBTOTAL		4159.41
 Extraordinary Expenditure		
Purchase of printer	249.55	
Typing of SINC	88.64	
Expenses of registration as Ltd. Co. and Charitable Trust	353.00	
Research	1.04	
Interception of Enquiry Secretary's telephone line by British Telecom for six weeks August 84	41.40	
SUBTOTAL		733.63
 TOTAL OF ALL EXPENDITURE		4893.04
 IN HAND 16.5.85	£7792.85	

LETTERS

Dear Editors.

Busy as I am with EO work I just have to take the time to comment on Angela Montfort-Bebb's editorial and Helen Howlett's letter in the June newsletter. I feel both ladies need to rethink their arguments, and some of their thinking is positively sloppy.

For example, both claim - as many practising teachers often do - that poor parenting is to blame for school failure i.e. lack of interest and abysmal homes. They choose to ignore the fact that these miseducated parents are the result of our school system of education!! I could continue to pick large holes in their statements, but won't as they are too obvious for our more aware members.

I have been a member of EO since 1978, driven to it by necessity when all attempts to reason with the school failed, and my son was on the verge of a mental breakdown. For him there was no 'alternative' and I will remain eternally grateful for Dick Kitto's moral support when it was so badly needed in those dark days. It is why I now devote at least 10 hours a week as enquiries secretary. Not a week passes without a parent of a damaged child desperately needs our organisation's support. I am often moved to tears with them when they tell me their horrific experiences - Angela's brief mention of this 'of course there are bad teachers, and the result is damage to children'. She is fortunate indeed to be able to remain so detached.

I am convinced our school system of education based as it is on competition instead of cooperation, is wrong for all children. To Helen I say the world would be a better place without it. If a child 'needs what school provides' its parents should be very worried about the psychological dependency being created by schooling.

For many children being trapped in a classroom with a sick-minded adult is a nightmare, and one I personally experienced at 9 years of age. I used to go to bed at night hoping I would die in my sleep. My parents put me on bromide when liaising with the headmistress failed. The whole education system is iniquitous, and keeps reproducing teachers and adults with wounded souls. Only conceit makes people think their schooling did them no harm.

I'm well aware that many of our members have children in school, and my comments won't be popular. That's their problem. It's not a good enough reason to try and silence those members who, for well thought out reasons, are anti-school.

Janet Everdell

Brian and Ruth Skinner
 Vine lodge, 18 Colney Hatch Lane
 Muswell Hill London, NW10 1DU

Dear EO

Has anyone had my problem? And do they have any advice?

Darren is six and a half - he had problems at school and we eventually deschooled him. He has been at home for the past 9 months. 6 weeks ago he began attending a local school (who have been most sympathetic and supportive) on two mornings a week.

He enjoys going and likes the company, but does not want to "work". He will read and "create" things, but hates to write. He will do some writing with me at home if a) he is in the mood and b) I sit beside him - which he says he needs. The school are unable to provide a teacher to sit beside him and I would be unable to do the same on a long term basis. I have two smaller children at home (three and a half and nearly 2) and another at school (8).

I don't think I can come to terms with having him permanently out of school. but things are not possible the way they are.

Any suggestions?

Ruth Skinner - and Darren!

Dear EOers

My apologies to anyone that turned up at Unstone Grange with bikes, hoping to learn how to fix them. I did in fact get to Unstone myself, loaded with spares and tools, but alas, on the wrong bank holiday weekend! It was the first time in my life that I can remember when I've made such an idiotic mistake. All I can say is let's do it again at the next gathering at Wick House. How I missed my 4-monthly dose of EO friends, faces, sounds and arguments, not to mention our usual jam-session in the sitting-room. This was the first EO meeting I've missed for years - agony. My withdrawal symptoms on arrival were awful. So... see you all next time.

Very best wishes,
 Peter Jones

TEL BOURNEMOUTH 432913

50 Sunnyhill Road
 Southbourne, Bournemouth
 Dorset BH5 5HR

Dear Editor,

As a mature student at a teacher training college in Southampton, I am currently involved in an investigation into "home based" education, and am anxious to make contact with

families in the Southampton, Isle of Wight, and Bournemouth area who have experience in educating children at home, and who would be willing to assist in the project.

Assistance would entail a short meeting at the family's convenience, where various aspects of teaching children at home would be discussed. I would also be grateful for families who live outside the areas mentioned above, but would still be willing to offer their assistance by way of completing a questionnaire.

I thank you for your assistance, and look forward to hearing from families who can contact me at the above address and telephone number.

Yours Sincerely,
Neil Fearn

108 Sangley Road,
Catford, London, SE26 2JP

I would like to contact anyone who wrote to Emma Osbach after reading her item in the April Newsletter if, like me, they still agree with the basic idea, but found that they had slightly different ideas about aims or ideals or practicalities.

Yours Sincerely
Wendy Clark

Plough Royd Farm,
Addersgate Lane, Shibden
Halifax, HX3 7TD

Dear EO

My name is Maria Murphy aged 11. I get taught at home and have been for 3 years. I live on a farm of 12 acres. We have got sheep, pigs, donkeys, goats, hens, geese, dogs and cats. I would like a penfriend. Please will you put my letter in the EO book.

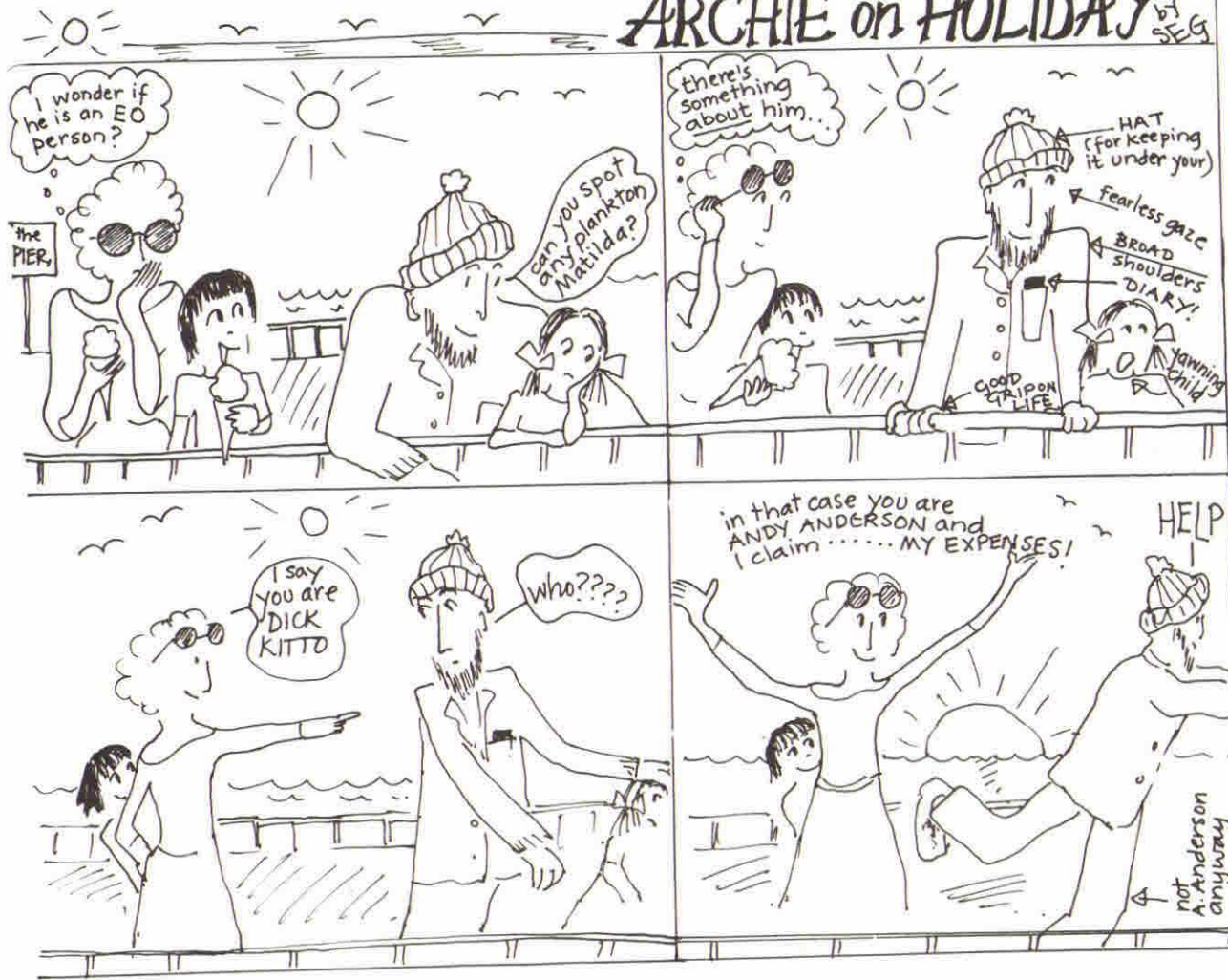
I like reading, and art and craft.

Lots of love from
Maria

Dear Editor,

I should like to thank Caroline Grant for all the hard work she has put in as Publications Secretary with responsibility for the EO newsletter and other EO publications. She has now passed on the "Newsletter" side to me, but she retains responsibility for the other EO publications. Despite having a different editor for every newsletter she has succeeded in producing and organising the distribution of the newsletter, arranging editors, liaising with the printer, AND managed to get

ARCHIE on HOLIDAY by SEG



RUDOLF STEINER BY CORRESPONDENCE

We would like to tell you about our first three months of teaching our two girls aged six and nine and a half since they came out of school at Christmas.

The eldest had been to two schools in Scotland and one in England due to our travels and had suffered from each of the three changing curricula and methods so much, so that I found her starting addition for the third time and being so bored with her homework that she didn't even have to think what she was doing. The youngest had just one term before Christmas.

It had been our intention to send them both to a Steiner school, but the travelling has been too difficult to date, so we hit on the idea of having a Steiner inspired home course which we discovered when we were in California last summer. The course provides a workbook for each year, we are currently using kindergarten and third grades, plus guides for us, audio and special project material, and an excellent sharing awareness with nature guidebook. It can be obtained from Oak Meadow School, P.O. Box G, Ojai, California, 93023 U.S.A. (TEL 805-646-4510) and costs about £45 per course plus postage etc.

The quality of the material makes teaching very clear, simple, a joy and literally integrates all learning activities into normal daily activities. Each grade covers Language arts, Mathematics, Social Studies, Science, Art, Music and Crafts providing three terms worth of material on each.

I have tried to think of ways of describing the quality of the courses, but felt that the course results would be the best measure, so I enclose a story made up by Shereena, the older one, to help the younger one Venika learn her letters, in this case "G". The theme is suggested by the course, but the actual story is purely hers. In addition, I have also included a poem, which resulted after a "blind walk" in a circle of elm trees at the back of our house, on the top of a hill.

Each of the children keeps a big loose-leaf folder divided into sections to keep all work together, exercise books are too inflexible for this purpose.

It really is difficult to convey more in a short note, so I invite anybody interested in the courses to contact us via the directory. Our address after 30th June will be:

5 Spenlows Road, Milton Keynes, Bucks.

(TEL 0908 75587)

Avvatar and Colin Smith (Shereena and Venika)

MOTHER GOOSE

Once upon a time there was a mother goose, and she wanted to teach her children the letter G but she could not find it. So one day she decided to go to her friend the Wizard, and ask him what to do. The Wizard said "You will have to go to the Witch of the West, and she will know". So the goose went to the witch of the West. "Witch of the West, can you tell me what to do because I need the letter G?" "No. But King Rolly will." So she went to King Rolly and he said "Turn back on yourself, and you will become the letter G. So that's what she did and her babies never forgot it.

by Shereena Smith

MY TREE



I went to the woods and I found a tree;
I made that tree my tree;
I kissed it and hugged it and made it my own;
I felt safe, I felt happy, I felt suddenly free,
What was in front of me - was me - YIPPEE.....

OCTOBER SUPPLEMENT-DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION

I shall be editing a supplement on the theme of development education for the next newsletter. Development education is about educating people about poverty and injustice throughout the world. Here are a few ideas for articles. How do you and your family learn about the lives of ordinary people in other countries? How do you feel about the (usually) negative images of Third World people that our children see on T.V. etc? What ideas do you have for countering racism in our own culture? Where do you find books that feature strong, resourceful girls and women? How do you help your children become aware of the links between the rich world and the poor world?

Contributions please to:

Sue Mansford

Old Beeches, Norman Court, West Tytheney, nr. Salisbury SP5 1NL
to reach me by 1st. September.

A CONCISE SUMMARY OF RULES GOVERNING ANNUAL GENERAL MEETINGS AND
CORE GROUP MEETINGS

Education Otherwise is a company limited by guarantee. The rules governing its administration are contained in the Memorandum of Association and Articles of Association. Copies of these are available from Bruce Cox for £1. (Send SAE to Grey Row, St. Margarets, S. Elmham, Harleston, Norfolk). Though the rules themselves are full of technical jargon, they are in no sense a straight-jacket and will allow us to work in a flexible and relaxed way.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETINGS: We are bound to have an AGM once each year. Twenty one days notice must be given.

PROCEEDINGS: Each AGM will include a consideration of the income and expenditure account and the balance sheet, the reports of the Core Group and the Auditors, the election of members of the Core Group in the place of those retiring, and the appointment of and fixing of remuneration of the Auditors.

A Quorum is 20 members.

Proxy votes are available. Information on them may be obtained from the secretary.

THE CORE GROUP: The Core Group has between 14 and 19 members. The business of Education Otherwise is managed by the Core Group.

At each AGM one third of the Core Group resigns from office.

One third of the Core Group constitutes a quorum.

EDITORS NEEDED

Editors are needed for the newsletter and for the supplements. Subjects still to be covered in supplements include Geography, one-parent families, Science, Art and Craft, Home Economics, etc.

Supplements are usually 4 or 8 pages. Newsletter editing is interesting though hard work, for a couple of weeks. The newsletter is for you and needs your contributions. If you want to know more about editing a newsletter, please contact Jean Shepherd.

ACCOMODATION REQUIRED FOR SEPTEMBER
ANYWHERE CONSIDERED, WINTER LET OR PERMANENT
CONTACT BRON AND DAN, 89, MARINE DRIVE, COLWYN BAY, CLWYD

DICK KITTO has moved to
55 Mint Road, The Mint, Liss,
Hants. GU33 7DQ

HOW EO WORKS (or HOW TO WORK FOR EO)

By Bruce Cox

I went along to my first Core Group meetings some years ago mainly because local membership was so thin that this seemed the best way to meet other families with children out of school. Everyone was welcoming, but I remember being perplexed for some time over how the organisation worked. I still admit to some confusion over organisational matters, for EO seems to grow like an organisation from within rather than as a result of plans or dictats from the "top" - which is as it should be.

EO has an amazingly high proportion of actively participating members, but as we grow it may become, or appear to become, more difficult to get involved, as everything seems to get more complicated.

This can make members more reluctant to come to meetings of the Core Group, for the group seems, from the outside, to have a lot of specialised knowledge. Instead of feeling that you are performing a service by coming to meetings and taking on commitments, it appears to be a kind of vanity to think you have anything to offer.

Members may then come to talk of EO as if it is something over and above them, rather than their own creation. EO becomes a vague THEM which is different from the particular US which we all know.

So I am writing this article to make it easier for members who want to do something to keep EO going. I am not at all concerned to persuade people to contribute more. No need to feel guilty about just paying your subscription and getting your newsletter. I simply want to be sure that members will not be deterred from offering their services to other members by ignorance of how to go about it, or by false modesty.

My view of EO is not the "official" one, for there is no "official" view. It is just a personal one, and inevitably it is a little mixed up with my notion of how I would like EO to be - but not too much I hope.

COMMUNICATION: What links EO members together is not any shared vision of what education should consist of, but a conviction that education is so important that parents have the right to take direct responsibility for it, and that they should be supported in attempting to exercise that right. EO is therefore primarily a communication network, a network through which ideas and feelings are shared, and the main task of the organisation is to maintain and strengthen that network. The skeleton of this network is the newsletter, the contact list, and our publications. If the organisation does little more than keep these going, it will be doing a good deal.

ORGANISATION: It might be possible at some stage to pay officials

to run EO. This is a route I hope we never take. Then there really would be a THEM and an US. EO should be run by its members however big it may become, for members are involved in a different way to officials who are paid, and see their work as part of a career.

But EO members are generally very busy people, so it is essential that all jobs are broken down into bits that are as small as possible. This is what has happened with only a few uneasy hiccoughs in the last few years. It is a strategy that has some formidable advantages:

i) It prevents so much work falling on a few people until at length they feel that work to be a burden.

ii) It enables many members to participate in running EO so that there is less likelihood of a division between "them" and "us".

iii) It makes it more possible for members educating their children at home (who therefore have less free time than those who do not) to participate in the running of EO.

iv) If many people are involved in running EO it is less likely that it will be run by a small clique.

v) It enables active members to withdraw, without EO falling apart.

This proliferation of jobs can of course create problems of communication and coordination when members are spread throughout the country. Therefore so long as the financial situation is not desperate, we allow officials, and anyone who wishes to come to Core Group meetings regularly to claim if they need to, minimal travel, telephone, and postal expenses, though if everyone who does anything on behalf of EO claimed all expenses, the treasury would soon be empty. We leave it to members discretion, and so far this has worked well enough.

Locally EO is organised in any way that members choose. Each area (there are about 70), has its own coordinator. The coordinator is a focus for local communication and support, but any member can initiate meetings or other ventures. There is a set of guidelines setting out what the job of coordinator might involve. This, and other literature for giving to local enquirers is available from the coordinators secretary who is a member of the Core Group. Originally coordinators were appointed from the centre - it was simply a question of trying to find anyone who would volunteer. Now the whole country is pretty well covered, local members are expected to find someone to be their coordinator when one resigns.

Nationally, the Core Group meets three times a year, each time if possible, in a different part of the country. Meetings take place at a weekend, and offer residential accomodation. This is an opportunity to come to meetings or just meet socially. Usually there is a general meeting on Saturday afternoon, and a

business meeting on Sunday morning. ALL CORE GROUP MEETINGS ARE OPEN TO ALL MEMBERS. The Sunday meetings are always too short to deal adequately with all the items on the Agenda, but we do the best we can and slowly improve. Any member can send in business for inclusion on the Agenda, even if they are unable to attend, though it is obviously better if they can at least brief someone who will be at the meeting, to speak on their behalf. Agenda items should be sent to the Core Group Secretary, whose name will always be at the back of the newsletter.

There are of course differences of opinion on the Core Group, (though generally we get on amicably!), but we try where possible to reach a consensus on all issues, and vote only with reluctance and under pressure of time.

For practical reasons we have during the last year become a Company limited by guarantee, and a Registered Charity. We took this step with some reluctance, but are determined that it shall not, in any fundamental way affect the manner in which we work. We therefore have a formal Constitution couched in the usual legal jargon. We hope that we will eventually be able to send out a concise summary of this to new members, though full copies will be available through the Membership Secretary. We are now bound to have an AGM once a year, and there is a formal procedure for the election of officers. This formal structure overlies the more relaxed structure that we have worked with in the past, but we have not as yet found it too restrictive.

How then can members contribute to EO?

1. By putting your name on the contact list together with a note of the resources and skills you can offer.
2. By contributing to the newsletter. (Reviews and accounts of personal experiences are always welcome).
3. By offering as an individual or family, or as part of a group, to edit a newsletter. Support and advice is available to help you do this.
4. By initiating local meetings or workshops if there is a demand for them.
5. By coming to meetings.
6. By offering to do jobs that are advertised in the newsletter, or that arise during meetings. There are always more good ideas than there are people to carry them out.
7. By contributing to the EO Family Support Fund, for people who have legal conflicts with their LEAs.

How might EO develop in the future? Well that is for us all to decide, but if more families join, the focus of all activity will become more and more local. Stable groups that meet regularly will become more common. Experiences may be shared through the newsletter. Another possible line of development will be over access to, and information on educational resources of all kinds.

LANGUAGE LEARNING AT HOME - A MODEST PROPOSAL

How can ordinary parents organise really effective language learning at home? As a [language teacher, I should like to offer a modest proposal for beginning to learn a language at home with your children. I hope it will prove useful.

Start by listening to a tourist tape. Any tape will do. It is probably useful to have a translation of the language which appears on the tape, but the important thing is to be able to hear the language spoken at all hours of the day and night. Listen passively in the early stages. Absorb the music of the language. Every child does this for months before he begins to use his mother tongue. It is because you went to school and the teacher wanted to achieve some sort of testable "learning" after only one lesson, that you expect to be able to speak, read, write and think in your chosen tongue after only a short time.

Most tourist language courses have plenty of common nouns in them. Start your active language learning by repeating the names of objects in your home, and as far as possible touching the things they stand for. When, and only when, you have a large store of nouns, start to practice saying "This is..." or "Here is a ..." with each noun. Then learn the question, "What's this?" Children can use this question if they have someone available who actually speaks the language, to build up a very large vocabulary of nouns which can be used at once to ask for things or to offer them to others. The aim of all this is to have a store of words which you can say easily, without thinking in English first, and which can be used to do something useful right from the start.

See how many useful conversations you can have just using your nouns and perhaps "yes" and "no" and "please".

It may sound like heresy, but I am quite certain that it is right to mingle English with the target language AS LONG AS YOU DO NOT TRANSLATE FROM ONE TO THE OTHER. For example let us suppose you are learning Hebrew: the following dialogue would be perfectly acceptable as good language practice:

Ha-sefer, bevakasha!.....You want the book?....Ken, ha-sefer!.....Right-ho, catch!....Todah (catches book) Lo not that one, ha-acher!.....Which one? Oh, Ken, ha-gadol..... That's right, the big one.

And so on. The chief thing about language is that it communicates connected thought. If in the early stages you do not have enough language code to transmit your thoughts, use another. Communication is all. Nothing else matters...standards, assessments, marks out of 10, homework and end of term reports are more than irrelevant, they are anti-educational obstacles to learning. The reason why school language fails - it does miserably, abjectly and often inexcusably - is because it surrounds an already stressful activity; that of trying to speak an unfamiliar language, with an extra layer of fear and loathing, by making every activity connected with it a test of the student's worth as a person. If you doubt the truth of that last

statement it may be a very long time since you learned a foreign language in school. I can assure you it is right.

The next step is to add some active expressions such as "give me.." and "I've got.." Practise them at your next meal, during your next play session or whatever. Don't go on to anything more complex until you have mastered what you are currently working on. Remember a baby may work for weeks on one or two phrases before he has really acquired them. Don't let school dangle the myth of "Progress" over you like the sword of Damocles. It is better to work on ten words until they flow as naturally as the mother tongue than to teach 100 words in such a way that using them is a major operation with no certainty of a successful outcome. Millions of schoolchildren have learned vocabulary under the pressure of an assessment test, but very few of them can construct a piece of useful language with it.

Use the language in the home whenever you can, but let the children use English whenever they like. Don't set aside special times for the language. Let it burst in unannounced. Confine your correcting of mistakes to simple repetition. Allow the child to speak and then, if he has made a mistake, say what he has said correctly.

Don't use a course as the core of your work. Courses can be useful, but one of their chief functions is to give teachers markable tasks to set the pupils. Buy one by all means, but do not respect it. There is no such thing as a "good course" or a "bad course". There is only good language and bad language. Good language is what you will hear in the country where it is spoken. Bad language is language which though it may be correct is not part of any normal person's conversation.

If you can, find and use some of the more common slang and colloquial language. There is nothing wrong with slang except the fact that it changes so fequently.

Don't waste time with long complete utterances. If a child can understand what is said to him and respond adequately with a single word, he is already capable of more communication than some 'O' Level candidates, and even some 'A' Level students. Few school language learners can understand a sentence of French spoken at normal speed. I couldn't when I was at school, and I got a grade A at 'O' Level!

There are a million other things that I could say by way of encouragement to learn languages, but I hope this will be enough for a starting point. If anyone would like to form an EO language group, it might be interesting for us to get together.

C.R.Shute

It's not too late to book for the AGM at Wick Court Centre
betwixt Bath and Bristol 11th - 13th October.

COST

Full board

both nights Adult £10 Child £7
per night Adult £ 5 Child £3.50
children under five are free

(single parent families or families living on Social Security
who would particularly like to come but are daunted by the
cost please let us know and we will try and arrange a
50% reduction.)

Camper vans

are the same cost as full board except children will be £2.50
If self-catering then there is a charge of £1 per night.

Day visitors

The centre makes a daily charge of £1 (all children may be
free - to be negotiated)
Saturday lunch bread and soup will be 50p per adult, 20p per child
Main Sunday lunch £1 per adult, 50p per child
Adult day visitors to send £1 with booking form. Food
and children payable on the day.

Please send SAE with all booking forms so that we can send
you further details and a map. We look forward to meeting
with you all. Don't forget to bring games and toys to share,
wellies for the mud, sleeping bags or top sheets and family
favourites for Saturday tea.

*
* THE NEXT ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF EDUCATION OTHERWISE LTD.*
* WILL BE HELD ON SATURDAY 12TH OCTOBER 1985 AT 3.00 PM.*
* AT THE WICK COURT CENTRE AVON *
*

Booking form

Name

Address

(please tick boxes where appropriate)

RESIDENTS

No of nights Friday Saturday

No of adults

No of children over 5 under5

Cot required

Willing to share room

Travelling by public transport and will require collecting

DAY VISITORS

Saturday lunch required

Sunday lunch required

Camper van self-catering

Please enclose money (cheques payable to Education Otherwise)
and completed form and send with SAE to:-
Meg Roberton, The Old Thatched House, Midford Lane, Limpley Stoke
Bath Avon BA3 6JP Tel: 022 122 3266

RUDOLF STEINER SCHOOL

Jackie Fearnley writes;

Some friends in EO might already know that since January we've been living in N. Yorkshire so that our children (or rather the oldest two) can try the Waldorf school at Botton village. Although we helped to start EO, we've always been interested in the educational principles suggested by Rudolf Steiner. Up till now we've felt home to be the best place for our children. They are Rose (nearly 12), Lillah - almost 9, Felix 6, and Hugo 3.

Without going into the whys and wherefores of Waldorf education, I would like to just share a few of our reactions in case any other people are trying to take similar decisions.

Firstly, perhaps I should say that the main impetus for our move came from a very difficult living and working situation. With 4 young children, all with different needs and living in a caravan, trying to make a house from some barns, there were very few hours left in the day for James to make pottery, on which we depend for our income. The girls in particular were making more requests for seeing friends or for learning more - which as I say was particularly difficult in our situation, especially as we lived in the country and I do not drive. However even then I don't think we would have contemplated sending them to any of the local schools.

When we came to Yorkshire it was very hard to persuade them to go to school, and all along they stoutly maintained they were much happier at home. It was during the worst of the winter and they were adjusting to a move away from everything and everyone familiar. They had several days off in the first term, and the teachers were very understanding of their need to get used to things gradually, and have generally been very helpful and friendly.

The first thing that struck them about school itself was the noise. This together with the fact that some children were disruptive in various ways meant that quite a lot of time was wasted when they felt they would like to be learning. I find it hard that they are to some extent taking on the more dominant attitudes - eg that certain lessons are boring - when I know they don't really feel that.

On the other hand, perhaps they needed to learn to be a bit naughty, which they can't be so easily when much time is spent entirely with their family. There is perhaps a certain need to distance themselves and not be too weighed down by parental expectations.

There are some lessons which they really don't like. Rose thought she would like games, but says it's too competitive, and you can't just enjoy it. I am also sorry that they don't like Eurhythmy, which they were looking forward to, possibly partly because it is not done to admit to liking it. Actually, their favourite part of the day is travelling on the minibus, they say.

But I think for Rose, especially at her age, being in a group is what she needs. She is more confident and energetic, and

less inclined to melancholy. However the price to be paid seems to be that she is less helpful and kind to the rest of the family. Of course she's at the age when sudden changes of mood and loudness and spells of withdrawal are to be expected, but we certainly feel less close to each other.

Lillah, being younger maybe doesn't need the group so much. She is more enigmatic anyway, but I have worried whether school is having a hardening effect on her. It was certainly a physical and mental strain to begin with as it's a long day and there is so much that is new. Now however she seems stronger, and like Rose more energetic. (That could be something to do with living half a mile down a track on the edge of the moors.)

Obviously, I think a lot about whether we could have gone on just being happy together as a family doing things at a slow pace and getting a lot of satisfaction from fulfilling each other's needs. I do miss having the girls around just to talk to, and to help look after the boys. Although I'm now more likely to be doing only 2 things at once instead of 4, I don't very often get those odd stretches of time when suddenly everyone is playing happily together. Although I couldn't always fulfil it, I did enjoy the challenge of finding things for everyone to do. On the other hand, it's also nice to hear accounts of what's been going on at Botton and one of my new roles seems to be that of listening to accounts of who are friends and who are not, and sometimes trying to put things in a different perspective.

There is good and bad in both situations, and it's tempting to remember only the good times of home education, and to hope that this experiment does not work out. And yet when all the class is playing Haydn on the recorder, or when the girls go off on a Friday, stay to supper at school, followed by country dancing - then I think - what could be better?

In some ways it's good to have more of a routine, though we can no longer go off for odd days or long weekends. The weekend is now for recovering and fitting in things which could not be done in the week, and yet this does make us value this time. I'm not responsible for getting them off in the morning, so do not feel so oppressed by the clock as I might otherwise be.

In the early days, Rose did often say "I just want to be free" and had an intuition that this would be the end of an era for her. I think that she was very aware that this would be a step forward into the world for her which would be difficult to retrace. Something has been made more conscious for her and she says now that she would be bored at home and would probably feel guilty. It is hard to know whether to interpret this as success or failure. But so far they are both much more keen to go every day this term.

In some ways Steiner schools are still schools, but in other ways very different. The education should be in tune with the child's spiritual development, and their aim is to encourage cooperation rather than competition. But in some degree or other you are bound to receive some impact from "mass culture". The

SOUTH YORKSHIRE EO GROUP

There will be a meeting on Saturday 21st September at Carol and Stephen Morris', 15 Davis Street, Clifton, Rotherham, from 10.30 am. Please bring something to share for lunch and ring Carol and Stephen beforehand if you intend to come on Rotherham 70925.

There is also a green fair on Sunday 15th September at Tintagel House, 2 Meadon Bank Road, Sheffield 11, organised by the Ecology Party, and EO will be having a stall there. I have already had one offer of help, but more offers would be welcome. The green fair should be an enjoyable event with lots of stalls, puppet shows, and dances etc., so it will be a good afternoon out as well as helping with the EO stall. If you can help, please contact me, Joan Hoare 25 Moor oaks Road, Broomhill, Sheffield S10 1BX (TEL 666605)

SURREY EO GROUP

Jill and Joseph O'Connor invite all Surrey members to "open house" from about 2.00 Sunday afternoon 22nd September. All members and friends welcome. Ring 01 942 0286 to let us know you are coming beforehand.

The La Leche League which offers help and information about breast-feeding to mothers, is holding its British Annual National Conference on Saturday 21st September in London. It has offered us space for a stall at the conference if we wish to advertise EO to its members. This seems like an ideal opportunity to publicise EO.

Unfortunately I am otherwise engaged that weekend, and therefore cannot attend. We can supply the literature, information, etc., for the stall, what we need are volunteers to run it. Any London/Home Counties members who would be willing to man (woman?) the stall would be appreciated. Please contact Jean Shepherd (Advertising Secretary) for further details.

COUPLE 30S. TWO CHILDREN. WISH TO SELL HOUSE IN OXON.
NEED TO FIND PERMANENT SITE FOR CARAVAN.
HAS ANYONE A SITE TO LET IN THE WEST COUNTRY OR WALES?
CONTACT DAVID EDGAR,

34 THE CEDARS, BENSON, OXFORD. 0491 34459

HOW SCHOOLS FAIL THE CONSUMER TEST
BY DIGBY ANDERSON

Last week the Labour Party granted pupils and parents a "Charter", a "Bill of Rights". The current teachers' dispute has focused attention on teachers' contracts. It is perhaps an appropriate moment to ask what contractual rights the CUSTOMERS of the state education system - parents, pupils and taxpayers have.

PARENT: I assume I am legally obliged to educate my child to a certain standard?

STATE SCHOOLING SPOKESPERSON: No; if you educate your child outside school, you must satisfy the Authorities that standards are achieved; if he attends school, the law does not care if he learns anything, nothing or knows less and is worse behaved when he leaves than when he started, as long as he attends.

P: So I have a choice. I can send my child to a state school, private school, or educate him at home. If I do either of the last two, pay for it and don't use the state system, may I have back the money I have paid the state system in taxes?

SSS: No, certainly not.

P: So unless I'm rich or ascetic I am forced to use the state system?

SSS: If you put it like that.

P: But I have a choice of state schools?

SSS: In theory yes, but if the consequence of parent's choices were to inconvenience the providers of education, if it meant vastly expanding popular, successful schools and closing unsuccessful schools, or even worse, sacking unsuccessful teachers, then we could not allow that choice. Indeed some authorities deliberately restrict the intake at popular, successful schools to keep unsuccessful ones full and in a job. Nor are your rights of appeal worth much. You will usually be allocated the nearest school. So you have a choice but you must choose the schools we choose to supply in the proportions and locations that we choose to supply them. We call it "efficient use of resources".

P: So there are good and bad schools. I've been told that in some authorities the best schools get four times more 'O' level and CSE grade 1 results on average per pupil than the worst school.

SSS: This can happen, but is due to factors outside the school: social class variations, that sort of thing.

P: I don't care what it is due to. I don't want my child at one of these bad schools. But, suppose he is at one, and I find that after say 4 years, he can't read, can I get compensation?

SSS: No.

P. After six years?

SSS: No.

P: If he still can't read after ten years?

SSS: No. We don't give any compensation. Customers of schools are not protected by laws such as the sale of goods act -

thank goodness, since nearly half our customers leave with no decent qualifications. You are compelled to send your child to us for 11 years - 15,000 hours - and you have no comeback at all if he learns nothing. However, we are keen that parents discuss their worries with the people who have failed to teach their children to read. We do stress partnership.

P: Suppose my child, thanks to good teachers gets on very well and learns by 12 more than most children learn by 16, may he leave?

SSS: No. I've explained already the law of the state is not interested in standards but attendance.

P: May one attend two schools simultaneously? Suppose the Maths teaching at another school is better than at my son's, may I withdraw him from Maths at his school and send him to the other?

SSS: Definitely not. Just think of the trouble that would cause for teachers and administrators.

P: Well, more mundane matters: my wife and I both work. Is there a school that fits our working hours?

SSS: School hours are not for the convenience of parents or pupils. We educationalists have special hours and holidays. We have always found them satisfactory. And, if I may be blunt, you seem to treat state education as something you have bought and ought to be able to pick and choose. We don't operate like a greengrocer's shop you know.

P: Would that you did! I don't want to be "involved" and sit on committees and governing bodies: they are dominated by the most articulate parents and political activists. I want elementary and simple rights, to reject a product I'm dissatisfied with, and choose another, compensation for shoddy goods, my money back at least - the wasted years cannot be returned - and no compulsion to use and pay for something I don't find satisfactory.

Welfare claimants have rights, lots of them. We are now told that rats in laboratories have rights. And consumer organizations wax indignant about the rights of baked bean buyers. The 1980s are flowing with rights. But little is said about the contractual rights of parents/pupils in the state schooling system. What seems a long time ago, Sir Keith Joseph was "intellectually" interested in them. Now he pursues a policy of centralised state direction, justified like that of the teacher unions, by what he "knows" parents need.

Labour is worse, its new charter "advances" parent's rights by threatening to close down their only means of escape - private schools - and by throwing £200m of taxpayer's money at state schools irrespective of quality. Educational bureaucrats are even less likely than politicians to support "inconvenient" parent's rights.

As for teachers, the denial of parent's rights is not their fault (although the less competent benefit from it at the expense of the more able): there is little they could do even if they wished. The teacher unions, with the possible exception of the Professional Association of Teachers, dogmatically oppose parental

rights. The lesson of recent years is that parents will have to organise their own consumer lobby to ensure that they have the same minimal rights when buying education as when buying baked beans.

(THE TIMES 15th May 1985)

Manchester Coordinator Peter Jones has moved to:
7 Millgate Lane, Didsbury, Manchester, M20 8SD
TEL 061 445 7709

He is leaving Manchester within 3 - 4 months and would like to hear from anyone who would like to take over the job of coordinator.

DAY CONFERENCE ON THE EDUCATION ACT 1981 & CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

I have just received notice of this conference to be held at Sheffield City Polytechnic on Thursday 26th September 1985:- The Education Act 1981, making it work - Integration and other issues. "The day will include extensive background information on the Act, and will look at issues in special education now, particularly integration in ordinary schools, strategies for representation...." It is organised by the children's Legal Centre, and the Centre for Studies on Integration in Education, which is run by the Spastics Society.

If you think you might be interested in going, please contact me Joan Hoare, and I will send you further details, plus a booking form to send to the Spastics Society. If you need accomodation in Sheffield on Wednesday and Thursday nights, then I will be able to put you up. JOAN HOARE 25 MOOR OAKS ROAD, BROOMHILL, SHEFFIELD S10 1BX

HOW I STUDY NATURE
By Joseph Deimel

When I was in school I was a casual birdwatcher, mainly because I didn't have time to do anything that serious. But as soon as I left I bought a birdbath with money I had saved. Watching the birds splashing round in the water stimulated me to put up a birdtable and a couple of nest boxes in our tiny garden even though it is in Inner London. I have attracted blue butterflies to it and kestrels, goldfinches and grey squirrels are common in the area. I then joined the Young Ornithologist's Club, and went on outings further afield watching birds. It was

these outings that made me interested in other aspects of Natural History, and soon I was interested in a few other subjects; mainly insects, wildflowers and terrestrial vertebrates (animals with a backbone - vertebrae hence vertebrates).

I did some work on desertification, and this made me realise that I had to do something to help the conservation movement. So a group of my friends and I formed a YOC kestrel award conservation group. We made a tiny pond in our small allotment; tied together bundles of straw, and fixed them under window-sills for insects to live in, looked after some trees and planted some shrubs, and held a jumble sale in aid of some rain-forest in Africa. After we had done all this we received a Kestrel Award Certificate! I then joined WATCH; a children's conservation club and started to help with a local wildlife garden in Peckham. I have seen a grey wagtail there which is unusual for London.

Accurate identification is very important. One has to take notes on the size, shape, how it moves, where it lives etc. I find the exact type of notes to take in the book on the subject I'm studying. I have built up a library of some 55 books covering a wide variety of subjects, eg. insects, birds, trees, invertebrates, vertebrates, tracks and signs, wild flowers, grasses, ferns, mushrooms, and many more. Here is a good book I use covering just about everything except mosses and lichens. It is also suitable for beginners:

THE COUNTRY LIFE GUIDE TO THE COUNTRYSIDE OF BRITAIN AND NORTHERN EUROPE (Editor Pat Morris, Countrylife 1984)

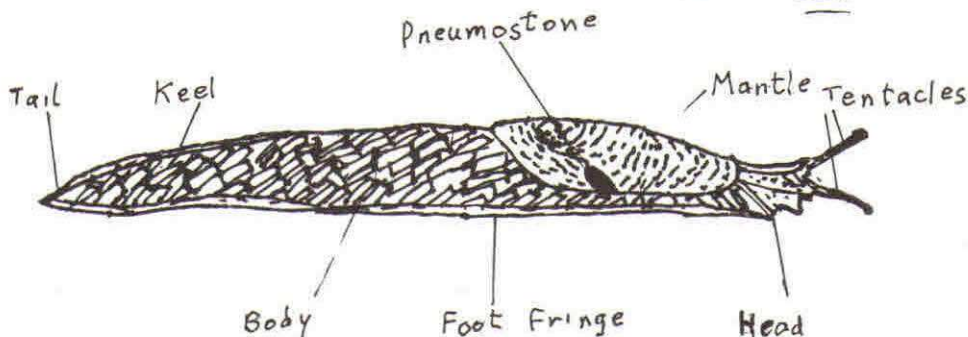
Throughout this time I have kept a wildlife diary on and off, but when I get fed up with it I just stop.

I have however, always kept a collection of dead specimens in my room. I never kill an animal, and only pick a plant if there is plenty of it. My prize exhibit is a buzzard skull found in Shropshire!

I find studying nature interesting and often exciting. I now have a bigger pond in my garden and it is doing well. There is still a lot to study in my area, and country walks add more variety. Yes, wildlife is everywhere.

by Joseph Deimel

AN EXTENDED LIMACID
SLUG



LEGAL BATTLES

Dear Editor,

Re the legal battles reported in newsletter 39 - I'm puzzled. As far as I can make out the court cases referred to seem to be establishing the point that "registered non-attending" children can't look to the courts for defence. But this is hardly suprising, since being "registered" at a school means being obliged to attend that school. Hence, whatever sympathies a magistrate might have, it's hard to see how he or she could rule against the LEA. What's more, it is not clear to me that this is the issue we should be contesting. After all, it is in principle perfectly reasonable for LEAs to say "If we are to educate your child then we expect regular attendance." Hence I don't think EOers really want to establish a right for registered children not to attend (whatever that would mean). The really important right we need to establish is the RIGHT NOT TO BE REGISTERED.

Now, as far as I can tell, this is an issue that is hardly covered in the Education Act. It seems (I may be wrong) to be left to the discretion of head teachers, though as with much else in the educational system, the locus of authority is pretty unclear, and I daresay the LEA will in practice become involved. If this much is basically correct, then some important points follow.

First it looks pretty difficult to pursue the matter in the courts. If there is in fact no law covering grounds for registering and not registering children then it is hard for the LEA to break it. Nevertheless, administrative decisions may still be subject to judicial amendment on such grounds as natural justice, reasonableness etc. So there may well be scope for legal action; but NOT by defending a "registered non-attending" charge-only by going on the offensive on the de-registration issue.

Second, if the issue in the first instance is an administrative one, then it should be treated as such (until that proves unsuccessful). This does not simply mean arguing again with the same officials - though even then switching to the different grounds of non de-registration might conceivably help. The alternatives are writing to the Chairman of the Education Committee (and your councillor), and either appealing to the Secretary of State, or going to the Local Authorith Ombudsman (the latter has no direct authority to overturn decisions, but the publicity and general hassle for the officials is often enough).

Another possibility (suggested by my local CAB office - very helpful they were), is appealing to the local Appeals Committee against the school at which the child is registered. (This is a long shot because the Appeals Committees set up under the 1980 Act are really meant to adjudicate on disputes over which school a child is sent to. Nevertheless, these committees do have lay members and might hear the case, "green form" aid is available - and it all takes TIME!) And of course, MPs can be VERY helpful, simply by asking to be kept informed (this was the

case in arranging a home delivery for our fourth child)

In general, it seems to me that the basis for all arguments has to avoid, as far as it can, the educational issues of how well the children are being educated. This is because as long as the LEA can decide where the goal posts are, it will be well-nigh impossible to score. (We have a case in our area where a home-educated child has obviously been learning a great deal, but the officials are harassing the parents all the same: "for a child as bright as this one, your efforts do not constitute education suitable to his age aptitude and ability.." seems to be the argument!) Instead, I suggest the case be argued on the grounds of a) fairness; in other areas de-registration is not an issue, and it is clearly improper for similar cases to be treated differently simply because one happens to live on one side of a county border, rather than another. And b) Civil Liberties: It is clearly the intention of the Act to allow parents to take direct responsibility for their children's education, if they so wish; this right is only qualified by the child's right of access to education - one must not be depriving the child in any significant way. Hence, so long as the child is not being or likely to be educationally neglected or deprived, the presumption is in favour of the parent's rights (which they may exercise for whatever idiosyncratic reasons they choose - such is the nature of civil liberties). Now obviously this heads back towards the educational question - is the child receiving "good enough" education? But the argument would be on different grounds: instead of "us" proving the education was good, "they" would have to demonstrate neglect and deprivation.

This letter has rambled on more than I meant it to. The basic point though, was made in the early paragraphs - on the face of it these court cases SEEM to be fighting on the wrong ground. And hence my puzzlement. Have I missed some obvious point? Have the avenues I suggest all been exhaustively explored and found to be dead-ends? OR more likely do they sometimes work and sometimes not? Or is it just that one ends up in court before one gets a chance to try these tactics, and so one has to fight on that ground even if it is pretty well a lost cause as a result? If it is the last of these then the implication is clear: react fast at the first sign of de-registration trouble - don't wait and see - because it may then be too late. Can anyone enlighten me?

Yours sincerely

Rob Paton

The Limes, 15 Bradwell Road, Bradville, Milton Keynes MK13 7AX
 ???

ANSWERS to quiz on page 6: 1) Prince Philip of course, opening Science Labs at Hurstpierpoint College Sussex. (TELEGRAPH 17.5.85)

2) Sid Vicious in the film THE GREAT ROCK AND ROLL SWINDLE, Channel 4 10.5.85)

THE COMPLETE HOME EDUCATOR by Mario Pagnoni
Larson Publications, U.S.A \$10.95 paperback

This, as you might guess from the modest title is an American "comprehensive guide to modern home teaching" It's by a teacher who gave up his job for a year to teach his own two boys at home. John Holt has written an enthusiastic forward commending the book's explanation of home computers and how to cope with them, while maintaining his own quiet but determined opinion that people can get along very well without computers.

Four out of twelve chapters deal with computers, but in the remaining eight Mario Pagnoni explains most convincingly how well home schooling can work - all you need is "love and a library card". It's a helpful, down to earth, very positive book,
Helen Holland

THE PUFFIN PRE-COMPUTER BOOK
THE PUFFIN TIMES TABLES BOOK both by Rose Griffiths
Puffin Books £1.50 paperback

Bright cheerful workbooks that will appeal to young children who enjoy games and puzzles - two characters; Inky and Splodge help explain what has to be done and the result is both entertaining and useful.

NB Apologies for the misprint in the last edition. You should look out for the Wagga (NOT Waggon) early Learning Series.
(Belitha Press / Hamlyn)

Helen Holland

NEW FROM PUFFIN

BROTHER IN THE LAND by Robert Swindells

I expect most of you don't need converting, but this story of young people who survive a nuclear holocaust might tilt the balance for a few. Intended for older children. It makes a thoughtprovoking read for adults too.

POEMS FOR NINE-YEAR OLDS AND UNDER chosen by Kit Wright

A good mix of light verse for moments when there's not even time for a very short story.

Helen Holland

dreadreadreadreadreadreadreadreadreadreadreadreadreadreadread

not produced enough answers for any pattern to emerge.

3.5 Publications Secretary. It was agreed that the newsletter should now have a print run of 1600. There are 6 editors in line, ensuring production for the next 12 months. The name and address of the person in charge of advertising in the newsletter should be printed on the back page. When any book is reviewed, a copy of the newsletter containing the review should be sent to the publisher of the book. As part of a curriculum review, each issue should contain a pull-out supplement on one learning topic. Agreed that we could afford to produce the new SINC on a machine that justifies the RH margin; 5000 copies should be printed at a cover price of £1.50. A notice should appear in the next newsletter saying "The contact list will contain your phone number as well as address, unless you inform us that you do not want it published." An updated list should be produced for sending to new members (300 photocopies). The letterheading should remain the same but overprinted along the bottom; "Education Otherwise Association Limited." and "Education Otherwise Charitable Trust, reg. no. ..." John is to write a note about the new legal status to be enclosed with copies of the introductory letter.

3.6 Research. The first questionnaire had produced 69 replies, (a 46% response); most of the children referred to were out of school. There had been a poor response from those whose children had returned to school. A report of this research will appear in the newsletter. It was felt that these questionnaires were a good way of enabling people to respond when they could not get to meetings. It was agreed that all outside research should be vetted by the research subcommittee - to consist of Anne Moss, Ann Wade and Rob Wade. We should insist on receiving feedback about results. The next project envisaged by the subcommittee will be addressed to children of 11 and over and their parents, along the lines of "What do you do in your educational pursuits?"

4. FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR MEMBERS WITH COURT CASE:

It was found that before a decision could be made on this very controversial topic, there were several other matters to be settled.

4.1 We should keep a small stock of the "Harrison v. Stevenson" judgement.

4.2 A notice in the newsletter should invite members to send copies of any relevant legal documents to Dick Kitto, along with information on the attitudes of their LEAs

4.3 A legal subcommittee was set up consisting of Simon Grant, Andy Anderson, Anne Moss, and Angela Montfort-Bebb, they will call on Dick Kitto for assistance. Their brief was to study case-law and to disseminate the information to coordinators.

4.4 The subcommittee will also investigate requests for financial support and make recommendations to the Council.

4.5 Members should make their first approach to their coordinator, who will then contact the subcommittee.

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

To reaffirm that parents have the primary responsibility for their childrens' 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.

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