

# EDUCATION

# THE R W S

Those lambs  
are in great danger  
from wolves out there  
They should come safely  
back into the  
fold



WOLFFENBÜTTEL

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Sorry this Newsletter is again overdue. The reason lies fair and square with the response to our television programme of over 1000 enquiries, nearly 80 new members, and a number of families in urgent need of advice and help, all of which has been very time-consuming. Letters are still coming in at the rate of 20 a day and I confidently expect our membership to reach 200 by the early summer. This isn't a great number perhaps but it confirms that we are a movement that is steadily growing and reaching more and more people.

In the last Newsletter I used the first page to list various requests for help and first of all I'd like to thank those who responded. Especially heartening is the extent to which people have responded individually to the need for personal help to those in their area, this has been really encouraging and is obviously one very important way in which EO can operate.

Now to requests:

Subscriptions These take you from January to January. The subscriptions of people who join after September in any year carry them through the following year. If you joined before September last year and did not pay by bankers order your new subscription is due, and, to remind you, we have put an <sup>^</sup> here:

Thank you for supporting us through our first uncertain year. Uncertainties there have been, and doubtless shortcomings, but one thing we have achieved: we exist. We have established a much-needed role to support and represent not only you, our members, but many thousands of other families who will benefit indirectly.

We enclose a renewal form. Please think carefully about the advantages of paying by bankers order - it saves you a lot of money and it saves us a lot of trouble.

The Lower Shaw Meeting There is going to be limited space at this so please book as early as possible.

The Newsletter Please send contributions, particularly factual and critical ones (like the notes in this issue about Ready to Read, PNEU and Where). Is there anyone who would like to take a more active part in editing the Newsletter - and improving it?

#### CONTACTS

We have offered the Newsletter as a free vehicle for contacts, advertisements, etc. I hope this gets going as I feel sure that once it has got going it will be useful to members.

#### THE FUTURE

I am now convinced that EO has a valid role to play not just in supporting its member families, but on the educational scene as a whole. We can never do this on the slender finances produced by our subscriptions. We need donations but in the end I think we shall only survive if we can get one of the charitable foundations, or some other body, to support us. Could anyone with any contact with or knowledge of possible sources of finance please write in with suggestions.

### ADMIN HELP

I am advertising for someone to come and help with getting our administration on its feet, starting a series of case studies, improving the Newsletter, and helping to set up local meetings. It's a temporary job, (I can only afford a maximum of 2 to 3 months) would involve being based at Lower Shaw Farm, where the person working would live free and receive a reasonable amount of pocket money.

If you know anyone who might do this would you ask them to write to me,

### HELP WITH PROGRAMMES

Ken Byron wrote the 0-12 leaflet. What do you think of it, how useful is it, does it need re-writing, adding to, amending? I would like to print this as a Handbook, but feel sure it ought to be revised, updated and perhaps expanded first. Please write to me if you have suggestions.

We urgently need a similar Handbook for the 13-16s. Can anyone help?

### LEGAL HELP

We do desperately need knowledgeable and sympathetic legal help - initially general advice on how best to set up a legal advisory service. Can anyone help, or suggest anyone who might be able to?

### LASTLY - THE CORE GROUP

The London Meeting did not come up with a core group. I still feel it would be very valuable to have a committed group of members who met every so often (2 month intervals) to discuss policy, strategy, action. This is how EO started and I still certainly feel a need for the support of a group and for a periodical exchange of ideas. Would anyone who would be prepared to come for a day's discussion about this (probably in London but it could be elsewhere - eg Birmingham) please let me know - this is not limited to 'older' members or 'expert' members or 'practising' members but it is limited to adults, please.

oOo

### THE LONDON MEETING

Something like 60 people came to this - a disappointing total though it was very good for those of us who did come to meet each other. We met for the first time a number of EO members who had travelled a long way to come and this alone made the meeting worthwhile. The absence of the general public, particularly of those 80 or so from the London area who had sent enquiries over the previous year and who were circularised, was disappointing - but it is of course a common experience that the number of people who follow up an initial enquiry is only a small proportion of the total. What came through to me from the meeting was a confirmation of the great difficulty families experience going it alone without cooperation and support from other local families, and the priority we must attach to starting up local groups.

### THE 'OPEN DOOR' PROGRAMME

Here is a copy of the letter that has been sent in response to all but the first few enquiries:

EDUCATION OTHERWISE

Tel (0793) 771 080

Lower Shaw Farmhouse  
Shaw Swindon Wilts

March 1978

Dear

Thank you for your letter asking about Education Otherwise. I enclose brief information about our movement and an application for membership.

We have been snowed under with enquiries as a result of the Open Door television programme and I'm afraid it is impossible to reply to them all individually at once, so for the moment we are limiting this to very urgent cases. We have a number of members throughout the country who are willing to give personal advice and help to other members. Again, as this is given on a voluntary basis, it is obvious that the amount of time they can spare is limited, but if you are in urgent need of help you would be welcome to get in touch with the one who lives nearest to you. A list of these members is given overleaf.

I have read all the replies we've received up to Saturday 4 March, and this has been a very disturbing experience. Most of them of course are straightforward enquiries for information, but quite a large proportion are cries for help, many of them quite desperate. It's clear that there is a pool of distress and anxiety amongst parents and children far greater than most people are aware of. We believe that everyone has a natural right to care about their own children and their upbringing and that this concern is being frustrated and often totally denied by the present system. We are determined that Education Otherwise shall not only offer an immediate service for its members but shall devote itself towards improving the overall educational provision in this country, and to establishing the freedom of families to be allowed to make responsible choices about the sort of education best suited to them.

To do this we need not only a wide membership but far more resources than we have at present. So clearly there is an enormous need for help at many different levels. Obviously financial support is crucial to our continued existence. We have kept our annual subscription as low as possible since we want membership to be available to everyone. The subscription covers the cost of the newsletter, publications and administration, but if we are to work towards a better educational climate we do need much greater resources. If you can suggest sources of finance or if you can afford to subscribe more than the minimum, please do so.

Over the next few months we intend to pursue three objectives. The first is to be able to offer far more effective legal advice and support than we can at present. The second is to set up a number of local groups. Where this happens will depend firstly on the number of people in the area who have shown an interest, but mainly perhaps on the presence in the area of one or two people who are able to put some energy into setting up a group. The third is to increase the number of advisory members throughout the country.

So as well as finance we do need all sorts of other contributions. If you can offer help of any sort please do so, but of course the backbone of this movement is the ordinary members who pay the ordinary subscription and who are practising Education Otherwise with their own families, or are hoping to, or are thinking of it, or who just wish to demonstrate their support by subscribing.

So whether you feel that Education Otherwise can help you with your individual problem, or whether you feel that you are able to offer help, we do need your support if we are to keep pace with this growing social movement.

Yours sincerely

DK

My sense of outrage has not diminished since I wrote that 3½ weeks ago, and I endorse my feeling then that EO has accepted a responsibility to combat the vindictive and punitive harrassment practised by many schools and Local Education Authorities towards families who do not conform or in many cases are merely asking for help.

oOo

#### NOTES FROM FAMILIES

Peter Jones: Pathways, London Road, Thrupp, Glos

This story might be called "How not to set up an EO Group", or to be kinder to ourselves "How the Stroud area EO group did not get set up."

From March 1976 until about July 1977 we had been one of three families running a "free school" group, in which the children, four in all, with occasional extras during the holidays, spent a day a week in each family home, and went out together on visits, etc. This group gradually folded up because of lack of energy, and conflicts between the parents, and also differences amongst the children. Towards the end Ursula, then 6, said she did not want to go on taking part; she said it was not interesting enough. I promised her that I would try to get another group going, when we had finished rebuilding our house.

To set things moving, I wrote an article about EO for the local paper. I wrote out the aims of EO in full, and quoted that letter in the Newsletter that said, 'I want to help those parents who are genuinely worried and do not know what to do ...'. I also plugged the advantages of being so close to LowerShaw Farm, which I described as EO's national centre! The general tone of the article was not anti-school at all but more "children learn better in small groups".

The local paper was very interested, asked me for some information about myself and Ursula, (can she read(!) etc., and produced a very good article, a definite improvement on what I had given them. They shortened it very little and kept in everything that I said I would like them to emphasize.

The response to this article was very good, and we thought we were really going to be able to set something up. The people who contacted us and came to our first meeting were very varied, with different educational problems. They were (1) two craft workers with two children 5 and 8, the older one with 'behavioural problems', (the father's description), (2) two artists with a child of 5 with severe 'school rejection'. He has nose-bleeds at school and has to be 'dragged' there every morning, (3) a catholic family, two children 5 and 8, who

wanted higher standards than the schools are offering at present. They were interested in the idea of an EO group when their children reached 'secondary age', (4) a woman with two boys 8 and 10, the younger of which was playing truant and breaking into the house during the day to make himself meals, (5) a couple, man a full-time teacher, with a girl aged 7. The wife had already written to Dick at EO. Their daughter, Lucy, was bored at school, and could not learn several things she wanted to learn. She was a very lively, intelligent child and got on very well with Ursula. Unfortunately, they made it clear that they just wanted some extra activities for her. They were not going to take her away from school.

All these people had dropped in to see us separately, so we arranged a Sunday meeting at our house. We had 28 people there, including children. They chatted informally, while Julia and I made introductions, got food going, and found the children things to do. At one point, Ursula and Lucy decided that they wanted to go out to the park and take two younger kids with them. These two, 3 and 5 had started the afternoon shy and withdrawn, but by now they were very keen to go to this new place with two older children they had only known an hour. I thought this a lovely example of how learning and growth occur in a free atmosphere (the acceptance of responsibility and willingness to trust) and far more important for the children's development than reading or long division, but it seemed to have no significance for the other parents.

We then had a more formal session, where each family explained their situation and said what they wanted out of an EO group. It was obvious from the start that families (3) and (5) were not really interested. People asked us a lot about our previous venture, why it failed, what we did, how we got on with the LEA, (no-one seemed to have any idea about the true legal situation,) and what particular things Ursula could do. Some just could not believe that a child could be a happy, wholesome, individual without going to school (no comment!) It was obvious from what people asked that no-one had really gone into the topic of non-school education, or had even questioned the commonly accepted 'processing' that goes on in schools. They still seemed to think that children need to be pushed, cajoled, bribed, prodded, stimulated (a favourite word, this) to learn, while I now find myself at the extreme of the educational spectrum. I don't think children need any institution in which to follow their education. Experience with Ursula has shown me that self-regulated and self-generated learning does take place and is much more economical in energy and time than artificial, forced learning. All this took me rather aback, because I had supposed that anyone interested in EO would at least have thought about these matters a little.

Other people's experience impressed our visitors a lot, and two or three of the families were going to drop in on the drama weekend at Shaw Farm which, so unfortunately for us, was cancelled. (I think these meetings where practising EO people can talk to interested outsiders would be very valuable support for those of us trying to set up a group. People keep agreeing that Ursula is 'bright, intelligent, sociable, ~~then~~ independent, contactful', etc, all words people have used about her; ~~they~~ they say ..... but she would be anyway! "What can you do, but show them more nice, bright, sociable, etc children who do not go to school? It's just like the doctor who, when you say you have cured yourself with garlic, the orgone box, or whatever natural remedy you happen to use, says "Well, you must have been going to get better anyway!")

In spite of this, there was a very warm atmosphere, a lot of learning going on amongst the parents, and everybody was keen to have another more serious working meeting, when we could thrash out what arrangements we were going to make for the children.

Prior to the second meeting families (3) and (5) withdrew, as expected, so we had three families including ourselves, and the promise of help from two friends, one a mathematics graduate, the other an experienced ex-nurse and playground leader with a son of nearly 2. Family (1) insisted at this meeting that we find a centre of some sort, so that the children could go on doing the same thing from day to day, if they wanted. I was not sure whether this was not an impossible demand that would be an excuse for withdrawal, but came round to the idea after a while. I thought it would be better for the children, and we would stand more chance of attracting other families, if we had a conveniently situated place in Stroud and looked more like a "school".

During the next couple of weeks we looked at various places and found one that was very suitable, for £10 a week. This did not seem too expensive, if we could find a few more families to join us. Soon after this apparent step ahead, family (1) withdrew (after initially offering to pay the rent for a while!), because they could not trust us to be able to deal with their son's 'behavioural problems' - a great deal of thinly veiled aggression - even though there was no evidence that his school was doing anything about it either! A couple of weeks after this the truant in family (4) found a friend at school and started to 'settle down', and then there were none, except us and Ursula.

This was all a very disillusioning experience. I couldn't count the number of visits and telephone calls I made, gathering people together and explaining things. It was also very educational to me in that it taught me how very dependent people are on the official school system. Even people who are self confessed drop-outs and revolutionaries seem to turn to the state - Big Daddy - to educate their children for them, instead of standing on their own two feet and doing the job themselves. Another lesson seems to be that we in EO perhaps don't realise what a very unorthodox, cranky, peculiar thing we are doing in not sending our children to school. How do we bridge this enormous gap? What points of contact are there between us and people who send their children to school, convinced that they are doing them a favour? Perhaps the London meeting will bring out something here. (PS It didn't, except the small public attendance just underlined how little real interest there is in what we are doing.) In one case it was quite obvious, especially to the mother, that her child was having a terrible time at school, and she was quite keen to join us, but her husband was just launching his painting career, and having a child at home all the time, and three or four other kids in the house a day a week would interfere with his work. Clearly, he had vetoed the idea, and the child had been sacrificed for his career. This is a thing that we must face - most parents are only too glad to get rid of their children from 9 till 4 every day. The presence of children in the home seven days a week can generate quite a lot of tension, as we know to our own cost. This is a particular problem when you only have one child.

What of Ursula and her progress?

While I was busy trying to get a group going she was rather left to her own devices. In spite of this she has made great progress in many directions, and this has inadvertently proved to us that self-regulated learning is the best way, and all that children need is a sufficient variety of experience and basic materials and available people when they want to ask about things. One thing that happens a lot, and which is very much excluded at school is that she can decide, often quite unconsciously, what response she is going to have from any given experience. At school the type of response is usually decided in advance by someone else. (Have a discussion, bring out the following points!) Looking in a derelict canal lock could be according to the interests or mood of the viewer historically, poetically, mathematically, engineeringly, artistically, socially, botanically, zoologically, interesting. I am rather dismayed to see in the Newsletter that some parents are busy teaching their children long division and grammar and saying when they should or should not have learnt a particular thing. As far as I am concerned the time to teach Ursula long division is when she comes up to me and asks me how you divide 27 into 233. It's quite possible that she will find out how to do it herself, in the same way as she has already worked out several basic mathematical processes.

She learnt to read very easily in this way. A year ago she could not read at all, except for familiar words like bus stop and bus destinations. She then suddenly got interested in it, and worked through the first four Ladybird books. (She chose these herself - we thought they were awful.) and then just took off. It occurred to me that it was a waste of her intelligence not to explain some spelling rules to her. Learning with the "Look and Say" method had made her think that you had to 'know' each new word as it came along, rather like learning a language. I suggested the spelling rules very tentatively, as I did not want to interfere with something that was going so well already, but she jumped at it enthusiastically. We took a common vowel combination such as EA or OW and made a list of useful words containing it. She loved this and would think of new words for these lists all over the place. She would often suggest EE words for the EA list, but when I explained this, she took it in her stride. After doing a few of these groups on paper, we gave up doing it, as she had realised that once you know a little you can work out the pronunciation of any word. She quickly progressed to being able to work out words like 'excavation'. This all lasted 4-5 months, but grasping the basic principles of reading took about a week somewhere in the middle. The same thing is happening now with writing. This seems to be a common pattern with children learning at their own pace. For a while they are well behind what schools would expect but at some stage shoot ahead and then are well in advance of average school attainment.

At present we feel no anxiety about Ursula's 'education', it is looking after itself very well. What does worry us is the lack of company during term-time. She does get bored at times, and this can be a cause of tension. When given the chance she mixes very well with other children and makes friends very easily. The only regular mixing she gets with other children in term-time is the four classes she goes to outside school hours - dancing (2), trampolining, and speech and drama. These are all activities she has chosen herself. Then our first group venture was falling apart, Ursula said she would rather go to an ordinary school, if we could not get another free venture going. Now she seems

a lot more decided against school, and always changes the subject when school is mentioned. I realise we are now coming to a decisive point in her development. In comparison with other children she is more and more obviously becoming non-schooled, and this difference will increase as she gets older. If she stays out of school much longer, it will be cruel to send her to school at all. I'd be very interested to know from other parents with one child how they manage the problems brought about by lack of company. At bad moments I feel we may be forced into sending Ursula to school, just because of the stranglehold schools have on children's physical presence. School really is a radical monopoly, to use Ivan Illich's term. He means by that that our institutions allow no other way. Perhaps we few practising members of EO are ahead of our time. The experience of trying to get a group going here makes me realise it is futile expecting much support as yet. We must expect to go it alone for some time.

Several people have asked about PNEU and we print below an account of her own experience of it from June Heard of Paignton.

I paid their fee of £35.00 for books and £5.00 for membership, fair enough because it did mean I received quite a lot of books which obviously must be acceptable to LEAs and not being a teacher (qualified!) I didn't know where to start with the over 12 age group. The fee they charge for advice and tuition is £150 for three terms. For this they provide a suggested curriculum, a teachers' handbook with a bit about each subject and how to teach it. (This wasn't really helpful because everyone will teach in their own way and it's just commonsense anyway) and a booklet for each form in which the syllabus is put down with a book or books (which they supply from the £35.00) on each subject and suggestions on how the pupil should work. Three assessment forms were sent, one for each term but if the child was going along OK the middle term one need not be sent in. These forms had a line for each subject, English, Geography, etc to report the child's progress and to also say how the person teaching was coping, then the tutor would send back their comments on both pupil and teacher. As Viv is progressing well and teaching is something that alters I felt we didn't need this service so I took a chance and wrote saying we were getting along fine and would not need the tutor's help. I sent the forms etc back and asked for a refund of part of the money sent. I explained we had not kept to the PNEU curriculum and were answerable to the LEA who could in fact ask us to change the curriculum and so I did not feel PNEU was suitable for this country while realising it could be a great help for parents who have to go abroad. They sent me back £100, the fee for the two terms to come.

So in answer to your query on PNEU, I don't think they are needed in this country, now there is EO. All we need when teaching is suggested books, we have the 0-12 years leaflet, (I am trying to put one together for the 12 years upwards) eventually we must try to have one for the upper age group, and we need people to advise on the LEAs in various areas - we will slowly get that, and someone to turn to as various queries arise - we have our list of voluntary helpers, so I cannot advise anyone to use the services of PNEU. £50 per term is far too high for an assessment at the end of each term. Although they say advice can be obtained at any time, they do suggest if there is difficulty with maths a professional teacher should be consulted and if there is no French-speaking person available, French would be better left out so its not very satisfactory is it?

From Lorna Trevelyan-Bicicchi:

"Ready to Read" published by "Three Four Five Ltd", Kenley, Surrey, £7.35.

I had not intended to start on the "Ready to Read" course until after the summer holidays but Samuel (then  $3\frac{1}{2}$ ) was present when the parcel arrived so we had to open it straight away and he wanted to begin at once, so I decided to take advantage of his immediate enthusiasm - I advise anyone buying the course to order all three packs at once to enable one to see the whole aim of the course.

Each pack teaches eight or nine words by use of games and puzzles. Each pack also contains "reading books" that can be read through completely by the child when he has learnt all 8 or 9 words. The material, I think, is very well presented, of good quality, clear, attractive, and immediately appealing to children, particularly the three clowns through whose mouths words are posted. The dice game in pack 3 was rather ineffectual and one or two illustrations in the "reading books" were not quite clear but as one would discuss the picture before reading each page I suppose this causes no trouble. These are my only criticisms.

The first pack teaches "I, can, see, look, at, me, my, mummy, daddy." You will see that these words are very commonly used by young children and many permutations of sentences can be made by re-arranging the words. This first pack includes the 3 clowns, a magic puzzle, and a sentence slide which is particularly effective. There is also a packet of the 9 words duplicated several times each and a word ledge for standing them on to make sentences. Also, sticky-backed words for making "stepping stones" games. Instead of using the picture cards provided of "mummy", "daddy", "me", we used our own photographs. One drawback if you have a daughter is that the picture of "me" is of a boy. Each pack contains a "work book", which is not as dreadful as it sounds. Samuel liked the mazes and other puzzles but not the colouring-in which is meant to train hand movements.

The booklet supplied with the course gives advice on how it should be used and about learning to read in general. It emphasizes that ten minutes per day is better than half an hour per week but we did not find this so we became so involved that the "lessons" invariably lasted 40 mins. It took us five weeks to get through the first pack as we did not do it every day, partly from lack of time and partly as I was doing other pre-reading and number activities with Samuel on other days, apart from the usual painting etc, and Nursery School every afternoon. He asked to do some reading nearly every day but due to the other activities mentioned, I think the average was every four days.

The second pack teaches "run", "and", "jump", "sit", "the", "baby", "go", "play", with the aid of more games and puzzles; it took three weeks to do this pack, partly as I got myself better organized at home, and the baby became less demanding on my time.

We then had a month's holiday in Italy which I thought would be disastrous to the reading because of lack of practice and the change of spoken language, but on the first day after our return, Samuel asked to start the third pack. Firstly, we revised and consolidated the previous 17 words learnt and to my surprise he remembered all but two on a first testing. We spent a month on this pack as I wanted to make sure that Samuel was learning the words thoroughly and remembering the old ones. The new words were "big", "little", "can't", "it", "is", "in", "up", "down".

By the end of the course Samuel could read all the reading books fluently, was sounding initial letters of words as clues, and was spontaneously analysing similar words such as can/can't, it/is/in. He's learnt to read what was actually written instead of what he expected and I notice that his eyes now travel in advance of the word he is actually pronouncing, scanning the words to come.

I was very pleased with this course and found it very exciting to see the progress made daily. Samuel, too, really enjoyed it and was upset on several occasions when we had done as much as possible for one day and had to put the material away.

I would not advise using this course in isolation, though. The accompanying booklet gives further practical suggestions, but it is essential that the work be followed up, for example, I used words learnt to make notices for Samuel's paintings, we identified words he knew on notices out and about, and he included them in his writing.

This course should not be used without a child having plenty of "pre-reading experience" as the jargon goes.

I know that several members of EO are against teaching reading at such a young age but, to the child, it is just another activity, as enjoyable as jig-saw puzzles or counting. The hangups appear when reading is made into a necessary task and physical or moral coercion is used. The minutes spent together by parent and child on reading activities can be just as pleasant and as intimate as the bedtime story.

oOo

NOTE: WHERE also had an article about Ready to Read, which was far more critical - however, the three critics were as far as I gathered professional experts rather than parents who had used the scheme with their own children. Has anyone else had experience of this scheme or of its companion Nursery Course, or of any other similar schemes, such as the Humpty Dumpty Club scheme? DK.

From Georgina Winkley

I am a de-schooled teacher with my time at my own disposal, and I want to use some of it in the interests of Education Otherwise. There are several things I can see that I can do. I can think about the long-term needs of EO, and its implications for change in society; I can offer the resources of my own experience as teacher and parent, and of a wide range of contacts among people concerned with learning in one way or another; I can tell a lot of people about EO and increase support for its activities; I have two ranges of specific skills which EO people may want to use, and which I shall be sharing in workshops.

I am at present training myself in the Buzan Learning Methods, an ever-expanding compendium of procedures that reliably work, mainly relevant to secondary and higher education but capable of adaptation to younger learners. The methods are based on the assumption that there are no known limits to the capacity of the human mind, and are evolved in accordance with observation of how people effectively learn and remember. I am developing the application of these skills to literature and creative work. When I begin to run courses I will see that EO members know about them.

A problem all EO parents have to face at some point is how to remove the effects of distressful learning experience, either in their children or in themselves. Their children may find it difficult to think in certain areas or to acquire certain necessary skills, because of what happened in school. Or they may be wondering how to guide a child who is interested in something they have always had a block about doing. Here, the methods of Re-evaluation Counselling can help. Like the Learning Methods, they proceed from the assumption of unlimited human potential; they attribute our apparent limitations to the effects of hurtful experience - which can be entirely removed. They provide a solid back-up both in terms of what to do, and in how to set up ongoing support. I shall be running a course\* in June to make this method available to people with an interest in educational change.

The course is one way I've thought of to get together people in various roles to establish their common ground in relation to educational change, and make it easier for them to pull together. I'd like to see EO people there because I see EO itself as one exciting current in a widespread process, one of the healthiest because it is conscious and purposeful. If large numbers of parents take or keep their children out of school, we will need people working within the system to think in terms of providing a service for home-based learners. EO families will also make an impact on work-patterns and attitudes: they will need flexible hours and a break-down of the bread-winner/home-maker division of labour, and many young people growing up in EO settings will go into work with a more active approach than most school-leavers have. We need to have people around who are thinking about these long-range issues and guiding the changes as they take place. I can be one of them and recruit others.

In its present phase, EO needs to increase its membership rapidly. Publicity helps, but personal contact is the most effective way. I can tell many people about EO and win support for its activities, and make their viewpoints and expertise available to EO.

That, then, is the range of support I can see myself giving to EO over the next eighteen months at least: making available my skills and contacts, spreading the word, and thinking as clearly as I can about where we're going and how to get there.

\* Details from: Georgina Winkley, 176 Bellingdon Rd, Chesham, Bucks.

NOTE: Georgina will also be contributing an introductory session to our meeting at Lower Shaw in May.

oOo

Martin Hemsworth reports: "The LEA dropped the court case when they realised that I was happy about the idea of a court involvement; you can draw your own conclusions.

We have one more boy in our group now and have had an educational visit and test. The result was very good and the boy's standard high over all areas.

I will be happy to advise or inform any interested person.

Martin Hemsworth's letter, which started in Newsletter 4, is concluded overleaf:

I was now teaching again, not one but two, the only difference was that this time I knew what to do and was confident in my ability to succeed.

It was at this time that yet more information of incredible teaching and lack of care came to light. I had in the short space of time they had been back at school, told them Paul could not construct sentences, and they said they would attack this area. Attack it, I think they surrendered. In one exercise he had to form sentences from words spelt; SWIFT. "The flue high in the sky swift;" this was marked correct FLUTTER. "I we flutter you with the good news". VAIN. "The boy was in vain for what he did". These were marked correct, and there were more just as bad. I might add I have still got these plus many more examples of incredible teaching, if I can use that word.

This term went as the last, steady progress, no co-operation from the LEA. The advancement being shown made it very clear how the school had been holding my sons back, particularly Paul. I was now not only sure I had done the correct thing by them, but had proof of this. I wonder how many children could have gone further if they had been given the chance, by this I mean that not only failures possibly would have achieved, but those who succeeded may have had even more potential. I can not speak factually on the higher level as I have no experience of the successful, or apparently successful child, what I can factually state, is there must be thousands of our children who need not have failed, if they had received dedicated and correct teaching. Also I do not apologise for saying (and have strong evidence) that high level qualifications are secondary to the right approach and atmosphere in obtaining a sound education. Any child given the right stimulus will want to learn and enjoy doing so.

We arrived at Christmas with a good term's work behind us, plenty of satisfying results and two happy boys pleased that they were advancing well along the academic road. Holidays are a good time to take stock and re-assess the situation.

When the LEA are totally anti you feel vulnerable to attack: although satisfied with one's motives and results obtained and able and confident to fight, never knowing when you are going to be set-upon is disconcerting.

I think the real aggravation is that you can never totally relax, having to keep one eye on them all the time. When undertaking an Education Otherwise project you need total concentration and dedication.

On discussing the future plans for the boys' education, as already stated, my wife and I felt confident until one problem began to play a big part ..... money. The financial situation was critical; as I had all but given up various enterprises. The chance of a job in a Children's Home had arisen and although not well paid, could help to pay some of the bills. Careful consideration was given: the boys were consulted on their views and we all came to a decision. That decision was that if another school could be found then the boys could try it. I also felt that they had gained a good grounding in basics and should be able to do well.

All as planned I started work. The boys went off to their new school. I asked if I could have an interview with the Headmistress and Year Tutor. The reason I felt this was important was that I did not wish

the boys to be branded by reports from the other school. Showing them the reason for my action and the results obtained, they would then assess the boys themselves and act accordingly. After many requests for this interview all of which were turned down, I realised I was branded a trouble maker, I can understand this as they had no idea of the real facts, but felt once again no control or rights over my sons' education were going to be allowed; add this to the mistrust I held for our education system I decided that I would take over for good. The boys were keen, once more we departed on an education otherwise project, only this time all the way.

My wife would earn the bulk of the wage, and the question was could we survive, would we survive? The answer was an emphatic yes. Our standards fell, the car went, struggle we did and still are, but the success more than made up for this.

I never thought a set pattern was necessary or indeed good. I decided that flexibility was preferable - to let the children's natural interest and questions set the subjects and topics. Maths and English obviously took priority and on these I did set a regular pattern of progression, this I felt was vital. On all the other subjects I have found that everyday life has led us into hours of interesting discussion, such as: weather, air, friction, molecules and erosion. There are many more including Middle Ages and how children lived then, woodwork and art. All the information, or nearly all, play a part in their life and thus create interest. One topic, that of the planets, including the sun and earth, had them talking and reading for days. It is surprising how one leads into all sorts of subjects, but the real success is in the children being captivated and eagerly discussing all and sundry.

This further cements my opinion that the interested child will learn and that many failures in state school are caused by the child being unable to express himself because of the rigidity insisted on.

Many tales of low standards kept coming to my notice. I felt the need to try and get this fact noticed; this of course was not on, the LEA did not wish to see, never mind accept, that perhaps I was right and could achieve where they failed.

Cover ups and vendettas are strong words, but they go on with alarming consistency. Statements made by our local headmaster include: "I will do what I like when I like with your son, I can even have a say in their home life, it is our job to bring them up and we have them longer than you do anyway." This was said to my wife and me. "You are too old to look after your son, why not leave him to us". This was said to another parent. When she asked to change schools, he said, "I will write such a bad report about your son no school will take him." Incredible? There are many more.

The chairman of governors of this school said when asked for help, "Yes, I have seen his work, it is shocking, but some fathers do have thick kids".

That thick kid, my son Paul, is now presenting clear and precise writing, his spelling and grammar are up to and above expected and his maths are at a very high standard on present day levels. Apart from the academic advances gained they are happier and eager to learn, they seem to be more aware of education and the fascinations of learning.

My philosophy is this: give the child a happy and secure environment and treat him as an individual in his own right. Discipline must be fair, not petty and dogmatic. Aim at the child's needs, not at a set curriculum, which in many cases is irrelevant to those needs. Flexibility is the last and essential criteria. I have proved in practice that my views do work. I hasten to add I do not, nor have I stated, that I could obtain high level qualifications, but I do say that I can obtain (and have) a high level of literacy and numeracy, plus a sound knowledge of geography, science and history. I would be sad if at least a top grade CSE in these subjects could not be obtained.

The LEA find anything to pick on, not mixing with other children being one; I have five children and they play with other children every night and at weekends. I think a very important point on the views of the LEA is who decides on the way a child is brought up and what is good or best? The parent surely.

I do not consider the school good or the attitudes of the school desirable. The standards of my boys were terrible and I have proved it was the system they were faced with that was at fault. The school failed and no one can say otherwise without fingers crossed; I would be less than a good father if I returned them to a system that had already failed them.

Anyone is welcome at any time to see for themselves the standards both academic and disciplinary. The work speaks for itself.

c0o

#### OTHER NEWS

##### Residential Weekend Meeting at Lower Shaw Farm, 19-21 May

This will primarily be an opportunity for parents and children to meet and get to know each other.

There will as well be three structured activities or events offered:

1. A seminar for adults run by James Fearnley.  
"Learning to live with children. Self-Regulation through Wilhelm Reich and A S Neill".
2. A seminar for adults run by Georgina Winkley.  
"The nature of the learning process".  
(see Georgina's article in this issue for an introduction to this)
3. Mainly for children.  
Spinning and Weaving with Kathy Campbell.

Cost is £10.00 per adult, children 3-12 inclusive half price, children under 3 free.

Accommodation is limited to about 30 adults and older children (ie there are 30 beds) - it is hoped that the under 3s will sleep in cots or carricots or on the floor.

If you wish to come please book early on the form inclosed in this Newsletter.

## ACE (THE ADVISORY CENTRE FOR EDUCATION)

This organisation represents the consumers' voice in education; it speaks on behalf of the parents and children who are the recipients of this compulsory diet whose ingredients they have so little control over.

ACE runs a free advisory service and this has in the past been especially associated with its advice on choosing schools, both state and private, but it does actually cover all aspects of education.

It also publishes WHERE (subtitled "The Education Magazine for Parents"). This costs £5.50 per annum for which you get ten issues covering the whole range of problems connected with schooling and education. Its articles are sometimes a bit dry and academic - for instance see the comment on page 10 on the article on the Ready to Read scheme, but this apart it is far the best guide to what is happening in education, and would certainly be of value to EO members.

ACE has recently moved from Cambridge to London, and has also changed its director. The new director is Peter Newell who with Alison Trufit set up the White Lion Free School in Islington. Before that he was Education Officer at the National Council for Civil Liberties. Does this mean that ACE and WHERE are about to develop a more radical and cutting edge in the educational world? I am sure it does and that as well as working to improve state schooling they have an interest in alternative approaches to education and will support us and our families.

Jean Heard writes:

"As to ACE/WHERE ... I have been a member and regular reader of WHERE since 1966 - not quite a founder member, but not far off! It has given me a very great deal of interest and support all the while Martin and Alison were growing up and being educated at home. Obviously some articles/issues are more relevant to one's immediate needs than others - but taken as a whole I find its attitude excellent and it enriched my educational outlook more than any other single factor.

"It will certainly continue to be sympathetic to Otherwise approaches under Peter Newell."

So, if you can't afford the £5.50, make sure your local library takes it and that you remember to read it every month.

In our next issue we will reprint an article from WHERE on "Parent/Teacher Co-operatives" by Michael Young and Eric Midwinter

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## BOOKSPREAD

Leila Berg and Judy Hall have started an organisation called Bookspread (Books for Children, Books about Children) to sell net and non-net books (ie books geared to bookshops, books geared to schools. There are some very attractive non-dreary books published for schools) to parents groups, play groups, etc.

Their stock can be seen and bought at: 20 Rowan Crescent, London S W16  
(01 764 4883) 4.30 - 8.30 most evenings - phone first.

They are also getting out detailed and explanatory booklists so that people can buy by mail; so far list (A) covers the Nippers and Little Nippers series (First Read-to-Yourself stories for 5, 6, 6½, 7, 7½, 8; the 5-year old ones can also be read to 3-5) and the "snaps" series of photographic stories for 3-6 as featured in the Observer; and list (B) covers children's books about birth. Each list is 30p - send a large see too. They will take out bookstalls too, but only locally.

c0o

### SCHOOL STUDENTS CHARTER

The National Union of School Students was set up in 1972 to give school students more say over the way schools are run, and to make them better places for ourselves. Just about everything in schools is decided for us, but we have our opinions of school life and they should be listened to and acted upon. We have started this campaign to win for school students the rights we feel we are entitled to. If you want more information about NUSS or want to join us, write to:  
NUSS, 3 Endsleigh Street, London WC1 (Tel 01 387 1277).

The Union has launched a school students' charter which lists five major infringements of their rights:

1. No Corporal Punishment
2. No School Uniform
3. No Petty Rules
4. No Prefects
5. No Secret Files

As they are, by definition, a school students union, it is perhaps natural that they haven't yet gone as far as listing

6. No Compulsory School

Perhaps some of our non-school students would be interested to join and raise this issue?

Copies of the charter and other information are available from the above address.

c0o

### SOME LEGAL PROBLEMS

We all know Section 36 of the 1944 Education Act by heart but what about Section 37? Here are some shortened extracts:

- (i) If it appears to the LEA that the parent is failing to perform the duty imposed under Section 36, it shall be the duty of the authority to serve upon the parent a notice requiring him to satisfy the authority that the child is receiving efficient full-time education .....
- (ii) If the parent fails to satisfy the authority then if in the opinion of the authority it is expedient that the child should attend school, the authority shall serve upon the parent a ..... school attendance order.

- (v) If any person upon whom a school attendance order is served fails to comply with ... the order, he shall be guilty of an offence against this section unless he proves that he is causing the child to receive efficient full-time education.
- (vi) If in proceedings against any person ..... that person is acquitted the Court may direct that the attendance order shall cease to be in force but without prejudice to the duty of the LEA to take further action under this section if at any time that authority are of the opinion that ..... it is expedient to do so.

I have underlined the passages that are worrying, for they make it clear that the onus is always on the parent, and that until an actual summons in Court it is always the LEA's "opinion" that has to be satisfied. In addition there is no provision for removing the child from school as a protection against harm or evident stress or distress; there is never any suggestion that any outside person or body could be consulted, or act as adviser or arbiter. Furthermore, even if the parent who has been summonsed is found not guilty, this does not preclude further harrassment by the authority in the future. (Subsection vi)

And what about that word "may"? It seems to imply that the Court has discretion and may not? Under what circumstances would it not lift the attendance order.

Here is Section 39.

- (i) If any child ..... who is a registered pupil at a school fails to attend regularly thereat, the parent of the child shall be guilty of an offence.

In other words if your child is registered there is no question of an otherwise option, or of providing an "efficient" alternative, you are automatically guilty. But how does your child become de-registered? Is it sufficient to notify the school? Suppose the headmaster says "what you are proposing is illegal, I refuse to de-register him" (this has actually happened). What is the legal position then? Then, how far are you expected to go in using force if a child refuses to go to school? Are you actually required to use force (there are several cases of parents being browbeaten by threats from the authorities into dragging their children kicking and crying to school). If the educational psychologist gets your GP to prescribe tranquillisers have you any alternative to forcing your child to take them (there are cases of families submitting to this too). If in your opinion the child has a legitimate reason for not going to school and you don't force him to go can you be summonsed under the Children and Young Persons Act because the child is in "Need of Care and Control". (This has happened too).

#### Other Problems

What are the rights and obligations of the school inspectors or advisors who come to check up on you?

Are they allowed to turn up unannounced?

How often? (One family was visited 10 times in 3 weeks, usually for a whole morning.)

Are they allowed to talk to the children without the parents being present?

Are they allowed to test children?

Are they allowed to sit in on classes?

We all know that there is no definition given of "efficient", etc but to what extent is the authority entitled to insist upon its own definition. (eg you must be a qualified teacher). At present many of them do in a completely arbitrary and unaccountable fashion.

Then what is "full-time"?

Can the Authority lay down the hours you are obliged to spend "teaching", and are there any guidelines for this?

These are just a few of the problems that families have been faced with and come to me for advice about. How sad it is, how outrageous, that when the whole education system in this country is beginning to crack and fall apart the authorities should waste their precious and dwindling resources in hounding families who do not comfortably conform, families who genuinely care for their children's welfare and who need and want help.

I have been taken to task by one or two parents who happen to live under benevolent and reasonable LEAs, for seeming to want to declare war on the authorities. No, I don't, and we are careful to state as often as we can that we wish to cooperate with them and that we advise everyone to do so if they can, but what if the authority won't cooperate?

oOo

#### THE CAT AND THE RAT

There was a cat that was  
eating a rat, and the poor  
rat said to the cat why  
don't you eat the mat? the cat said I  
don't like the mat but while  
the cat was talking to the rat  
the rat ran under the hat.

The cat couldn't find the rat  
so the cat went to sleep while  
the rat gnawed at the hat  
and a man set a trap for the  
rat, the man put the trap  
under the hat and he caught  
the rat under the hat and gave  
it to the cat.

The cat didn't like the rat  
so he put the rat on the hat  
and sat on the rat and that was on the  
hat the rat crawled out  
of under the cat and hid under the  
mat. A man stepped on the mat and  
squashed the rat that was under  
the mat and that day the cat had  
squashed rat

That day an Army of rats  
attacked the cats and rats  
got eaten except one that hid  
under a hat that was on a mat  
and that one rat bit a cat but  
the cat caught the rat and  
the poor rat was eaten by the cat

The cats thought they would  
attack the rats so they attacked the rats  
and the rats bit the cats and the cats  
ate the rats and the cats didn't win  
and the rats didn't win so the cats  
blocked the rats holes but the rat gnawed  
through and then they had new  
holes and the cats couldn't catch the rats  
So all the cats went to sleep and  
all the rats gnawed at hats and mats

by William Marshall, aged 8

#### AUTUMN

Orange, yellow, brown and red,  
Falling leaves from overhead.  
Silky fluff of Old man's beard,  
Reminds us though the flowers are dead  
New plants will come again next year  
From their brown seeds which now appear.  
Elderberries in big mauve bunches,  
Providing thrushes with their lunches,  
Hips and haws and conkers too,  
Show us where the flowers grew.  
Plums, apples and pears on the trees,  
On the ash hang bunches of keys,  
Mountain ash with berries red,  
On which the blackbirds will be fed,  
On the ground beech and oak mast  
Gathered by the squirrels to last  
Until next year comes once again  
And spring once more will start her reign.

by Elizabeth Theobald, then 8 years 10 months

#### THE OLD MAN

He sits a-dozing, thinking of long ago.  
What he thinks about is not for us to know.  
His brow, now bereft of its crown  
Has its tale to tell,  
Hollowed and sagged cheeks, deep laughter lines  
Also tell one well.  
Wrinkled hands in lap and slippered feet,  
His bent body now relaxing in his seat.

His gentle snores,  
The rise and fall of chest,  
Eyes half closed,  
His after-dinner rest.  
Soon a sudden noise will make him start,  
"That's that?" he'll ask and clasp his heart.  
"It's all right, it's only me,  
Would you like a cup of tea?"

by Vincent Theobald, then 11 years 11 months.

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## CONTACTS

### Project Two

The idea for this project has come out of the Rural Resettlement Group, which is also based at Lower Shaw Farm, and which was formed in January 1977 to stimulate and support those who wish to live and work in rural communities.

At present we are a group of mixed ages and interests - including 7 adults and 4 children, who intend settling together within a rural community with the aims of establishing links with and eventually integrating with that community. We wish to meet others sympathetic to our aims who would like to join us.

One of our immediate objectives would be to resist the tendency for rural communities to become commuter areas or second homes that are largely uninhabited for much of the time, and that consequently offer no work or recreational stimulus for their inhabitants.

Education will be an important aspect of the Project but we are not necessarily committed to EO from the start. Our attitude will of course depend on the composition of the initial members and will anyway remain flexible, but the feeling at present is to see what the local educational scene is like and whether there is an opportunity of working within it to break down the barriers between the school and the community.

Certainly I expect that if the local school and education authority are not amenable then the intention would be to set up an EO scheme for ourselves and any other local people interested.

At present we are looking for at least one more family with young children, and we are also looking for a largish house in a village.

If you are interested in this scheme we would like to hear from you. Can you write with details about yourselves (and an sae please) to:

Dick Kitto  
Lower Shaw Farmhouse  
Shaw Swindon Wiltshire