supporting student participation

Connect

Number 85-86: February-April 1994

People often have to compromise – students, staff, parents and others will often disagree about what should or can be done.

Some Expert Advice:

Dear JSCs

- Suntek: Design and Construction: Trymple South
- Student-Run Science Shows Update: Werribee
- Science 4-12: Yarram
- Alternative Education in Russia
- Children as Peacemakers

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12 Brooke Street
Northcote 3070
Victoria Australia
$6.00 (double issue)

Print Post Approved: PP 340646/0008

ISSN 0158-4995
This Issue

This issue contains the promised lift-out written by students from a number of Junior School Councils - advice from the experts to a new JSC or to a school considering starting one.

There’s also a selection of articles about young children as Peacemakers. This should connect with some primary schools that have been thinking about how to stop violence in the school and about the role of JSC members as mediators.

Another article, too, in response to a brief query: An earlier Connect (81, June 1993) reprinted some American comments about visits to alternative school conventions in Russia. At the time, we asked Yelena Pavlova, who had written about cross-age tutoring in Russia, to comment on her view of developments in alternative education there. The resulting article - an international exclusive for Connect - is in this issue, and makes fascinating reading.

Subscriptions

One of the depressing things about producing an educational magazine is the inevitable fall off in subscriptions in difficult times. There seem to have been a steady stream of letters from people who have been strong and active subscribers for years, who have ‘taken the package’ - and are now antique dealers or working in AIDS education. From a subscription peak of about 550, the paid-up list is heading down around 400 at the moment.

I suppose the positive side is the occasional supportive comment with an apology for not renewing: “I’m dropping right out of the school system... I’ve enjoyed your magazine and have learnt a lot, though it seems to me that those with the power don’t learn anything other than how to preserve the status quo. The contribution from people like you does add a brightness to the distant light in the tunnel.” “Keep up the good work - the mag. continues to inspire - a rock of sanity in the mad sea...”

The lesson, of course, is that Connect needs to rebuild a distribution to new teachers - and to schools who still say: “I hadn’t heard of you.”

Can you help with that? Do you know of people who should receive Connect? We’re happy to mail out a sample copy at your suggestion but would prefer to have a name and an introduction.

Next Issue

This double issue means that #87 is due in June 1994, with a deadline for contributions at the end of May.

Roger Holdsworth
SUNTEK

As any student or visitor enters Irymple South Primary School, they are confronted with a large painted sign bearing the message: “None of us is as smart as all of us”.

The school Suntek project mirrors these thoughts as the students, school wide, worked cooperatively to produce a valuable asset for both themselves and for future school generations.

School Community Focus

The major focus of this school’s programs is the involvement of the students, especially in the analysis of and participation in community issues. The school program looks at these in a way that helps develop students and provides them with skills to act on and positively influence these issues. An example of this involvement is evidenced in the students’ Suntek project (building a shade pergola).

Project Development

Given the high temperatures and hours of sunshine this area experiences (Irymple South Primary School is situated in the north-west corner of Victoria, nine kilometres from Mildura), the students seized on the school community’s priority of providing shade and beautifying an area of the school. Being aware of the need for skin care and protection from the sun, especially for children, the students could see here an opportunity to act positively and effectively. The result was the development of a project to plan and build a construction (a pergola), that would complement their Sunsmart behaviours, yet be affordable, effective and achievable. From this the Suntek (Sunsmart Technology) Company was formed and its logo designed.

Background information and data was required by the students to support this idea and to view the project as a need. Information and statistics from the local weather station confirmed much of what they were already aware: - the hours of sunshine received in both daily amounts plus monthly details too, and the high temperatures received by this area of the state. This data was recorded, graphed and discussed to reinforce the need for such a project and the benefits it would provide to the school environment. Further information on skin care, avoiding direct sunshine and Sunsmart behaviour were added, details which made the students well informed as to the need for providing this pergola.

Design and Construction

The first stage undertaken was investigation of the school site and the sketching plans by children for their dream design for providing shade. A variety of ideas were put forward and suggestions shared. The most suitable designs in terms of effectiveness, affordability and practicability were decided on by the class. More detailed preliminary plans were then drawn up with computer programs being utilised for the students to produce more precise drawings. From here, models were constructed.
The various groups of students then spent time testing the suggested materials for their suitability. Tests devised included:

- observation of heat absorbency - noting by how much materials left in the sun made water temperature rise;
- strength;
- longevity - where mudbricks were subjected to weathering and stress tests, for example, by subjecting a mudbrick to water dripping on it and an electric fan blowing on it; and
- the testing of roofing designs, especially roofing which could allow indirect light to the adjoining classrooms, but still provide full shade to the area under the pergola.

The angles of the sun, both summer and winter, had to be measured (and confirmed through contact with our local weather station), as it is year-round shade that is required.

Testing of a variety of wooden roofing slat arrangements enabled students to determine the most effective angles and spacings to satisfy these necessary conditions. Alternative roofing materials such as shadecloth were also viewed and discussed by the group as to their effectiveness and suitability.

Further advice and information, plus reinforcement of their plans, was achieved by the class’s meeting with an architect.

From their testing, plans and models, all groups of students made presentations at a school building expo. From this expo the most appropriate design and ideas were selected and a scale model built.

The students purchased materials for their model (eg. balsa wood, pins etc) from a supply company outlet set up by the class with simple invoices and accounts being kept. In this way approximate costs of construction were able to be determined.
Taking their plans, models, knowledge and data, the students presented their proposal to the School Council for support and approval. The possibility of the School Council providing a loan for the construction, opened another world to the students - that of financial management with a direct involvement in interest rates and repayments.

With the construction planning stages well under way, the whole school got behind the financing of the project. Guessing competitions, foodstalls, drink sales, a disco and skipping contests were just some of the avenues used to raise funds to ensure the success and completion of this construction.

The student initiative provided impetus for the action throughout. The decision making was left to the children with them determining directions to be taken and this encouraged them to articulate their needs to access resources - such as climactic data, finance, architect’s advice, building material costs, etc.

The program has developed children’s insights into problems and their solutions with the emphasis on them taking the initiative for developing the project. Their proposals are encouraged and followed through.
Influence on School Programs

Through this project, the students have recognised inconsistencies in school programs, and it has been from their suggestions that outdoor activities, such as physical education and sport, have been timetabled to morning sessions, lunchtimes have been shortened, tree planting programs developed plus hat wearing and skin protection encouraged.

Community response was also positive with parents being invited and agreeing to work alongside their children to complete the construction of this pergola. However, with the school’s project winning the State Curriculum Excellence Award for Science and Technology in 1993, tradesmen were employed to ensure that the pergola was completed prior to the end of the school year and the students involved, graduating to secondary school.

The project culminated in an official opening ceremony to celebrate the completion of the students’ project, to which the community was invited.

As a result of their actions, the children have seen that their views do count, that they do have ‘ownership’ in community development and they have acquired skills which will benefit them in later life - skills such as communicating with others, convincing fellow students and adults to offer support, and planning and being well informed in presenting their case.

Their ability to work cooperatively in completing this task and in providing an asset for the school and future student generations, has made this project both real and meaningful to the students.

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RUSSIA'S ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS:
ARE THEY REALLY ALTERNATIVE?

Grigory Zlotnik, Centre of Humanities at the Russian Ministry of Education
Yelena Pavlova, Moscow State Pedagogical University

When starting work on an article describing the state of 'alternative education' in modern Russia, the authors, to their small confusion, discovered that even the meaning of this term as it is being used in the Russian literature, is very vague. Depending on the specific author, the term can refer to a nearly indefinite number of phenomena. That is why a more adequate definition should be given, otherwise what the authors imply will greatly differ from what a Western reader would infer.

THE TRADITIONAL SCHOOL AS IT WAS IN THE SOVIET UNION

To discuss a notion of an 'alternative', one should be aware of what a 'tradition' is. As this article is specifically designed for publication in a Western journal, it might be helpful to begin by briefly featuring the Russian system of education, and those events of the past which contributed to its shaping. This is not an easy job. "The common mind can't grasp its fates/Nor it is measured by one's bushel," one of the most prominent Russian poets of the 19th century and a high-ranked diplomat Fyodor Tyutchev wrote about Russia in his poem of the 1860s.

This verse was commonly cited throughout Russia's modern history, especially in the Soviet period, for several reasons. On the one hand, the Soviet reality is excessively irrational and often inconceivable for those who do not share the same life experience. On the other hand, the Russians themselves often fail to point out what is really odd in the life they get used to. "When getting most tired, I used to complain/that I was inborn to the Years of Pain,/that I was to spend many years to learn/what should be in mind when a human is born," another Russian poet, Naum Korszhavin, wrote a century after Tyutchev, in the 1960s.

Finally, it should be noted that this article itself, being written by Russian authors, might illustrate a very specific point of view - that of the authors - and hence readers are invited to interpret it in any way which could seem appropriate to them.

The alternative education in Russia is taking shape as an opposition to the traditional Soviet educational system, most generally characterised by its uniformity.

Children from the most remote regions, from the Far Eastern region of Kamchatka to the European Baltics, were taught in accordance with the very same textbooks and curricula. The main goal set by Soviet authorities was to ensure that at any moment in time and at any school of the Soviet Union, class registers describing dates and topics of lessons and writing of homework, contained the very same records. Well, could you please imagine this situation - hundreds or thousands of schools, enrolling some 1,000,000 children varying in interests and abilities, from the most able to mentally disabled ones, as well as in life experiences from those whose parents were truly dedicated to them to those who were to grow up in a family of drunkards. Any school curriculum was strictly limited to a fixed number of school subjects, that is Russian and Native Languages, Literature, Foreign Language (English, German or French), Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, History, Social Science, Technical Drawing, Singing, Art and Physical Culture.

Another basic feature, in addition to the uniformity, running all through the Soviet system of comprehensive general education, was its formality. The main obligation of a teacher was to correctly and promptly file a class register. Whatever you would do in the lesson - even 'hide-and-seek' - if nobody is unhappy with it and the records in the class register are filed carefully and in due time, nobody will raise any claim against a teacher.

All those who intentionally or unintentionally violated the accepted order were severely punished. For example, one of our acquaintances who had come to a school from a research laboratory and thus, being not fully aware of the 'rules of school life', did not follow them strictly enough, once used a yellow marker when filling in a class register. Despite his marked ability as a teacher, after this occasion he was ordered out of the school.
Teachers to whom we told this story usually said it was unbelievable. But what shocked them most of all was not that an able educator was fired unfairly, but that he dared use a yellow marker! They really felt it offensive.

Another sacred duty of a school teacher was to get up a classroom properly. A portrait of Lenin was an obligatory element of a classroom's design, and portraits of Marx and Engels were considered desirable. Other portraits featured 'outstanding' figures of science or art, depending on the school subject which was normally taught in this room. The design also included a wall newspaper, a panel 'On Today's Agenda' or 'Refreshing' and other visual aids.

The teaching/learning process was formalised as well. Neither the author of a textbook nor the teacher were truly interested in the meaning of the subject offered. Children were required to memorise correct answers to questions which were formulated by someone else. Only a minority of the students were curious about the topic of the lesson; the others were mostly motivated to get better scores. However, teachers were obliged to assess all the students satisfactorily and children understood this completely. As a result, the learning process often represented some sort of ritual activity or a game with quite simple rules where teachers pretend that they teach, and learners pretend that they learn.

The third point which is worth mentioning is that there existed an enormous gap between school and life. What children heard in the classroom never overlapped with what they saw at home and in the street, as these were two different universes. (If you have a chance, please look at pictures in Soviet textbooks, paying specific attention to the composition and expressions people have on their faces - they are quite unnatural!)

Even those who intended to continue their education after leaving school and, for this reason, were really involved in the schooling process, did not think skills and knowledge acquired at school could be applied in the future. The acquired knowledge was necessary to pass exams. From generation to generation, those who entered a higher level of education were recommended to 'forget' everything they were taught before, as it was 'unnecessary'. And children, teenagers and young men and women considered it normal because they knew that their life, career and success depended mostly on circumstances rather than on their own abilities. Moreover, they knew fairly well that abilities which could guarantee a success in life were not required in school and could only hinder their passing through levels of education.

Finally, the system of education was a closed one. Like everything in the USSR, the school was subject to total supervision by the State. The Ministry of Education, regional, municipal and district departments of people's education were to reinforce regulations which, as was mentioned above, were similar for all schools. Schools even were not permitted to employ their own accountants, because schools were financed in a centralised way and could not deviate from their budgets, which were approved by an appropriate district educational agency.

Apart from these executive power bodies which performed a direct control over school life, the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences (formally considered a public organisation, but in fact heavily controlled by the Communist Party) was in charge of some sort of 'ideological' supervision. Curricula, textbooks and supplementary guides for teachers were developed mostly under its auspices. A firmly hierarchical organisation of the Academy made it almost impossible for new people and innovative concepts to get access to a school's life.

Even secondary and higher education were separated, as they were placed under different jurisdictions.

Despite all this, the Soviet school offered a first-class education to those students who were oriented to entering higher schools, but this education could not be labelled as a broad or comprehensive one. Normally, after leaving a secondary school, such students showed good results in maths and sciences, knew many facts and could work hard.

All features listed above have emerged under the strong influence of the totalitarian system. The collapse of the totalitarian society which began in 1985, has resulted in dramatic changes in the system of education.

A BRIEF HISTORICAL SKETCH

Alternative education emerged both in the West and in Russia in the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. At the initial stage of development, it was mostly based on theoretical concepts by Steiner, Freinet, Montessori, Korchak, Tolstoy, Berdyayev and others, and was partly supported by appropriate practice-oriented scientific schools.

The Russian system of education witnessed a certain outburst of educational innovation in the 1920s when the former school system, inherited from the past, was being consequently destroyed under the motto of total destruction of the 'world of violence', declared in the revolutionary song 'The Internationale', and a new 'proletarian' system of education was being created. Such innovations as the Dalton plan, school brigades and some others gained popularity.

But by the beginning of the '30s, together with introducing a totalitarian regime in the country, Russia practically left the world educational community. This was accompanied by
an increasing unification of school, factual prohibition of 'alien' approaches to education and the emergence of an 'Iron Curtain'. In the following 60 years, school remained one of the most conservative social institutions, doing violence to students, teachers, parents and administration to all those involved in the school process.

First changes occurred in the field of ideology. A teachers' congress which was held in 1988 adopted an alternative concept of education, which pioneered in openly announcing the course towards the variety and multiplicity of schools. The concept proposed by the conservative Academy of Pedagogical Sciences was not backed by either the public or the state. Of course, these were only words, not real deeds, but they not only reflected the changing situation, but also facilitated this changing. In addition to the concept, Regulations on School Councils were adopted to restrict the control of state educational agencies and, to some extent, permit schools to develop their own approaches to education. These documents never received the status of a law, but they have set up 'what is permitted'. Some schools began to modify their programs or invite higher school instructors and other specialists to serve as teachers. Children in these schools got some opportunity to choose. On the other hand, schools themselves began enjoying the same advantage, as students could now be selected on a competitive basis.

But it was too early to speak about alternative education. Occurring randomly, changes in educational content were neither comprehensive nor radical. Several Moscow schools were granted the status of gymnasium and thus obtained financial independence, though it could not be labelled as full.

At the same time, teachers and creatively-minded administrators got a chance to learn themselves. Moscow, Krasnoyarsk, Leningrad and even little towns were eager to host workshops and training schools on alternative educational systems, including those by Montessori and Waldorf, a system of developmental education by V Davydov and V Repkin, and a school of the 'Dialogue of Cultures' by V Bibler and S Kurganov. Workshops were centred around enthusiastic champions of Western systems and not less enthusiastic developers of the domestic ones. Even the notion of a 'pedagogical mass movement' appeared in this period. (Initially, it was predominantly politically oriented, but then it has gradually transformed into an educational one.)

Despite all this, the educational sector was changing more slowly than other sectors of society. In any case, alternative education has proved to be lucky, as it has fast become 'fashionable' and 'demanded'. Everybody was so sick and tired of the existing system, that all innovative approaches were welcomed simply because they were a little bit different from the tradition. The motto of the period could be described as: 'Let them teach worse if they do not make moral harm to children.'

Official bodies also played some positive role in this process. Eduard Dniepr, who was appointed as the Minister of Education in 1990, gave a green light to the establishment of such institutions and formed the Main Administration for supporting innovative and non-state educational programs within the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation. The establishment of appropriate offices and centres in charge of granting licences to non-state educational institutions in municipal and regional departments of education was also underway. The Regulation of Non-State Educational Institutions which was adopted in the spring of 1992, defined their legal and economic status and placed an emphasis on the professional evaluation of a required minimum of education offered by these schools and on social protection of children, parents and teachers in compliance with international law. State authorities governing education were instructed to support the development of a network of innovative educational institutions within the limits of their jurisdiction.

The adoption of the Law on Education in 1992 can be recognised as a most influential event in the history of modern alternative education in Russia. Under this law, every citizen or group of citizens (foreigners included) as well as every organisation, foundation or faith, were permitted to found a school.

A Western reader probably can hardly imagine what this really meant for Russia. And this meant that the State, for the first time in the last 70 years, relinquished its monopoly over human minds; after 70 years of 'black-and-white', society has recognised the right to existence of 'other approaches and opinions'. And this happened in the sanctum sanctorum of any social system - in schools i.e how the system aimed at reproducing its future citizens.
ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS AS THEY ARE IN RUSSIA

The alternative system of education which has been developing in Russia in the late 1980s and early 1990s can be characterized first of all by the tendency of being completely opposite to the state-owned official system of education which had been experienced under the totalitarian regime. This is reflected in the following aspects:

Alternative schools:

• want to acquire an image of their own, in contrast to completely similar so-called comprehensive schools; sometimes educational; institutions of this sort even refuse to term themselves as ‘schools’, preferring such denominations as gymnasium, pregymnasium (pre-school), lyceum, pension or Educational Centre;
• develop their own educational concept, or follow one of the approaches existing in world educational science;
• replace traditional classes and lessons by excursions, action games, workshops, lectures, conferences etc;
• invite highly qualified teaching staff (there are schools where up to 90 per cent of subject teachers are candidates of sciences and/or are employed by higher educational institutions as instructors) and increase salaries (by three to four times, compared with normal schools);
• select students on a competitive basis and decrease the size of classes, varying from 5-6 to 15-18 pupils per classroom, in contrast with the state-owned schools where the number of pupils in a class ranges from 25-30 to 35-40;
• charge a tuition fee (sometimes it is rather large, varying from a few thousand to 150,000 roubles);
• introduce ‘exotic’ subjects, like Latin or Greek as a second foreign language, Eastern kinds of single sports or tennis in lieu of traditional Physical Culture, dancing, art of performance, Bible lessons etc into the school curriculum.

Although different educational institutions apply these strategies partly or to a certain extent, all of them demonstrate the single tendency of elite education. This is probably a characteristic feature of the transition period and can be viewed as a response of society to the 50 years of total uniformity, when education served to reproduce ‘ordinary people’, similar to each other like twins, but loyal to the state; after 70 years during which the very term ‘intellectual’ was considered close to an offensive term, and a person knowing a foreign language was likely to be considered either a foreign spy in the 1930s, or an upstart in the 1950s.

The demand for more expensive, elitist education grows gradually. The newly-emerging social strata, comprising even now a significant part of the population, would prefer their children to take a course of training either abroad or in the ‘alternative’ educational institutions. Besides, there could be another reason for such a preference: even the fact that a child attends paid classes is somewhat prestigious in Russia (everything free is usually referred to as ‘poor quality’); moreover, if parents paid for the services, they would feel they cannot be infringed in their rights by teachers or a school director. (The motive is quite simple here: “I pay, hence they depend on me, hence I have a right to demand some compensation.”)

The dynamics of the increasing number of alternative schools is impressive.

First schools of this type began arising in 1990-1991.

The First All-Union Workshop of Alternative Schools was held in August 1991 (no notion of private school existed at that time).

The first issue of the information and technological journal Private School was released in May 1992. The First All-Union School-Workshop of Private Schools took place a month later, in June.

By the end of 1992, there were over 90 non-state educational institutions here in Moscow, enrolling over 7000 children. A number of private schools throughout the territory of the former Soviet Union is now evaluated at 200-350, most of them are located in big cities. According to the Ministry of Education of Russia, by the beginning of 1993, their share amounted to 2 per cent of the gross number of comprehensive secondary schools.

But shall we consider all of the ‘alternative’, if we are to comply with the definition accepted in foreign educational practice? In the words of Kozma Prutkov, an outstanding Russian satirist of the previous century (a fictitious figure, whose collections of poems, words and anecdotes were written by a group of Russian authors), “If you see the label ‘Elephant’ on the cage of a tiger, do not believe your eyes.”

WHAT IS ALTERNATIVE ABOUT ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS?

Thus, let’s try to examine this great and yet unclassified variety of phenomena which can be only approximately described as an alternative education. It should be noted that this very term, foreign by origin, is used not very frequently in an a rather description way, without any explanation, so it may seem that a reader should be convinced
that the discussed type of educational institutions can be, by definition, referred to as alternative schools.

Authors of the guide *Innovative Educational Institutions in Russia* (issued by the Federal Institute for Improving Teachers’ Qualifications in 1992) single out the following three types of alternative schools:

- author’s (founder’s) schools functioning on the basis of educational concepts developed by modern authors (founders) and leaders of such schools (V V Davydov, V S Bibler, A N Tubelsky etc);
- educational systems and institutions, using elements of different educational concepts, sometimes together with some elements of traditional education;
- institutions where both conditions of the learning process and of teachers’ labour were modified as a result of additional fundraising, but educational technologies and the content of education remain traditional.

The Centre for Licensing and Accrediting Non-State Educational Institutions at the Moscow Department of Education points to another three types of alternative educational institutions:

- schools which are based upon educational patterns differing from the traditional Russian context (Waldorf schools, Montessori schools etc);
- schools founded by faiths;
- national schools (Jewish, Armenian etc).

Then, it is clearly seen that even experts in this field do not agree about what should be implied under the notion of an alternative school. Moreover, as in Russian tradition, an ‘alternative education’ means everything differing from the conventional Soviet school, this term, is often referred to many institutions which have nothing to do with alternative schools as Westerners understand them.

In modern Russia, the notion of ‘alternative education’ is used in two ways:

- as an alternative to traditional education, and in this case it is more applicable to educational content and conceptual approaches to education;
- as an alternative to the state-owned system of education (ie private or donated from different sources), and this mostly concerns sources of financing and the legal framework that an educational institution is subject to.

Sometimes the term ‘alternative school’, in its first meaning, is substituted for the term ‘independent school’ ie an educational institution pursuing its own, independent policy - differing from the traditional state one - in the field of education. These institutions can be state-owned, financially supported from both public and state sources, or private. According to the guide *Independent Schools of Moscow* (1993), which contains brief information about 84 educational institutions, at present Moscow has about 1250 state-owned schools and about 200 public-state and private ones.

The term ‘alternative’ is applied rather often to secondary educational institutions of various profiles, which tend to extend (or even re-schedule) a curriculum of a comprehensive secondary school while retaining traditional educational landmarks. A curriculum of such an institution (which is usually termed as *gymnasium* or *lyceum* etc) can include additional ‘prestigious’ subjects such as languages, economics and social behaviour.

In any case, paradoxical though it is, the main overall trend of development shared by most schools which comply with the accepted notion of an alternative school, coincides with that of the traditional, state-owned system of education, i.e shifting to a person-oriented model of education.

The first attempt to provide a fundamental explanation for this phenomenon was made in the above mentioned publication *Private School* by founder and director of an alternative school in the Moscow Region, A Khutorskoy, who wrote in his article ‘Liberal Education: On an original image of an alternative school’, focusing on two types of education - a state one, and a person-oriented one: “The first has been painfully experienced by many people, and the second is directly opposite to the first.”

What is the main difference between them? “While a pupil in a state-owned school is raw material, a sort of clay out of which the required person is to be formed, a child in a humane school is a unique personality, demanding appropriate
conditions to ensure his or her self-realisation. A teacher in the humane school is like a gardener... A teacher carefully monitors each flower, tries to predict and provide for the way of its development which would be innate to it. Students themselves in such a school are not only plants; they are also gardeners for themselves and for others. The humane education is rooted in human nature; the other is rooted in external demand.”

Any humane school takes into account peculiarities of a child’s psyche, his or her levels of development, as well as of socialisation and adaptation, his or her interests and abilities. This is achieved by minimising the size of the class, setting up an individual rate of learning and varying the content. Most educational institutions of this type independently develop a new content of education, specifically in the field of humanities and integrated courses and try to adapt unconventional concepts to the domestic situation.

Concerning the second meaning, it might be interesting to note that non-profit alternative schools tend to enter the state system through being involved in the system of state-funded institutions; at the same time, most creative and original state schools tend to diminish their dependence on the state system through attracting sponsors.

In the very beginning of this article, we discussed more general features of a traditional education in the former Soviet Union. And it seems appropriate to complete it with the features of an alternative education being singled out. We believe that, at present, it is mainly featured by its opposition to the past. Existing schools (which have not been changed yet because of the great inertia of an enormous country and the impossibility of jumps) can suit nobody: neither children, nor parents, not teachers, nor society. The changes in society lead to changing the system of education. The Russian alternative school of today will become one of the core elements within the composition of the traditional school which is now in the process of radical restructuring.

Grigory Zlotnik
Yelena Pavlova
Dear JSCs

We have had Junior School Councils at our schools for several years. In 1993, we had several training days where we talked and learned about making our JSCs better. Some of these days were just at our schools, but we also met together at the end of the year.

We shared information about why we have JSCs, how they work and what we have tried to do.

We would like to tell you about JSCs. If you are just starting up a JSC or thinking about one, we hope this is useful to you.

Please contact us if you want more information. We would also like to hear from you about what you do.

Junior School Councils at: Preston, Preston South, Preston East, Preston North East, Reservoir East, Kingsbury and Merrilands Primary Schools.
Dear JSC: Why should we have a JSC?

We think it is very important to have a Junior School Council so that all students, through their JSC representatives, can be involved in making decisions about the school.

The JSC is a voice for students in the school. Ideas, questions, queries, comments and concerns can get passed on to staff, the School Council and other JSCs.

We think that it is important to have a JSC to make the school’s decisions better. A JSC can:

- “discuss options and problems.”
- “see things through the children’s point of view.”

This might be about ideas for improving the school. The JSC can:

- “change things inside and outside the school.”
- “look after the school and other things.”
- “keep the playground safe and fix up problems in class and out in the playground.”
- “help around the school.”
- “get the school into shape.”
- “raise money.”
- “get things going.”

It can also help the people in the school - particularly the students - to be happen in the school. It can:

- “listen to other people’s problems.”
- “organise fun things for students.”
- “help people with problems.”
- “keep the kids safe.”
- “watch our behaviour.”

The Junior School Council is also important to help all students to be actively involved in their school. It can:

- “be in charge of important things around the school.”
- “set a good example.”
- “get other kids involved.”

If we didn’t have a JSC, our school could be a mess, it wouldn’t be as safe, there could be more fights and children getting hurt.

We should have a JSC because we need to help kids when they need help.
Dear JSC: What can a JSC do?

The JSC is making different decisions all the time. Often, it is meeting with other people in the school to discuss how we can change things.

- "A JSC can help to decide on things. It can make recommendations as to the needs of the children."

The first thing that a JSC does is to respond to problems that the students bring up. So it is difficult to say exactly what it can do, because anything that students bring up can be worked on. For example, this is what some JSCs said:

- "Our JSC works on problems in the schoolyard and in class as well."
- "Our JSC works out difficulties."
- "The JSC will work on problems the kids have."
- "We work on problems that kids have any difficulty about - inside and outside."
- "We help stop the kids from fighting, and help the school with problems."

The second thing is to help get things done around the school. Again, ideas come from the students in the grades:

- "We work on plans made by grades and by the JSC."
- "Organising special projects to improve our school."
- "Beautifying our school."
- "Helping the school."
- "Often we make suggestions and think of things that we hope the School Council might be able to provide."
- "They can suggest things that require repair or maintenance. If we know things need to be fixed, we can report it to the School Council for someone to attend to."
- "Last year, the children were surveyed by the JSC about the sorts of play equipment that children would like erected in the playground."
- "We surveyed children about their needs for sports equipment."

Sometimes this also means that the JSC runs things as part of the normal program of the school:

- "Helping in the canteen."
- "Help arrange pupil of the week, and birthdays."
- "Canteen/basketball."
- "We can help provide a stall at school fetes."
- "We can help with tree planting and maintenance of the gardens by watering."

Some JSCs see raising money to help the school and others as an important part of what they do:

- "We raise money for special causes."
- "We help raise money for Red Cross - Somalia, for social service and through cash a can."
- We raised some money to help sponsor a pupil to the Australian Primary School championships in Brisbane. We assisted fundraising for Legacy, State Schools Relief and the Anzac Day Appeal."
- "They raise money for the school and put more games in the classroom."
- "They can raise money from fundraisers."
- "JSC can work on fundraising things, by themselves or with the rest of the school. Social service type things are good for the JSC to follow up."

The JSCs also do things to entertain the students:

- "Running discos."
- "Entertaining the students."

These are all different ways of taking part in the decisions and running of the school. They show students and teachers that the JSC is an important part of the school, and that students can learn to organise things.
Dear JSC: Who should be on the JSC?

There's not just one way of organising the JSC. However, we all agree that the people who should be on JSC should be responsible and caring people. They also have to be smart and well-mannered.

- "The members need to be people with confidence in speaking - they need to talk to the grade and talk to members of the Council. They need to be good listeners as well as talkers. They need to take their job seriously as they also have to report back to the class that they represent."

JSC members should be representative of the school:
- "Both girls and boys should be on the JSC - a boy and a girl from each grade level."
- "In a composite grade, you need representation from each grade level still! eg a grade 5 boy and a grade 6 girl."
- "The JSC should have about eight student members."
- But there are lots of different ideas between us on what grades should be on the JSC. Here's what some schools said:
  - "It should be grades 1 to 6. Grade 1s should know what the JSC means and be able to understand."
  - "Grades 2 to 6: the younger people should be involved so they understand better!"
  - "Only grades 3 to 6 - the little kids don't know much."
  - "We need people who understand what's going on - older people - grades 3 to 6."
  - "Children in the Preps are probably too young to help at this time and it may be necessary to have an older person visit or represent them as well."

In addition to student members, there could also be a teacher member or representative.

So you will have to decide what's right for your school.

Dear JSC: How Do You Get onto a JSC?

We all agree that students elect the Junior School Councillors.
- "Anyone can be on JSC. You need to be elected by your class."
- "You should be on the JSC by other people voting."
- "You get selected by children in your grade."

But there are different ways of doing this:
- "Each grade votes for two people who represent the grade for half a year. There has to be one male and one female."
- "Names are suggested; people can nominate themselves and others."
- "The teacher helps to organise the voting procedure. Some people use a ballot box; some vote for names on the board. The candidates leave the room. Some hold a secret ballot."

The system seems to work well and the people on the JSCs are usually good representatives who work well with each other in order to help others.

But one school said there were problems with the occasional 'quitter' and another said:
- "Some concern was expressed that we often vote for friends and not necessarily the people who we think will do the best job."
Dear JSC: When should the JSC meet?

There are lots of different ideas about when, how often and for how long a JSC should meet:

- "We like meeting fortnightly."
- "Once a week is fine for us."
- "We'd like to meet daily but we meet fortnightly."
- "We meet on a regular basis. We meet twice a week: once for a meeting and once for a workshop. Workshops are times when people can do their jobs eg make posters, write letters."
- "We meet weekly, but would like to meet twice a week, as we don't get enough done."

- "We'd like to meet twice a week - there are lots of things to discuss."
- "We should meet regularly to discuss problems that come up during the week."
- "Meetings last from a half hour to one hour."
- "If there is a special event, eg disco organisation, extra meetings would be called."
- "If the meetings are held in the morning, it provides ample time for the representatives to report to the children in their classes while things are still fresh in their minds."

Dear JSC: What Rules Do You Use in Meetings?

Again, there are lots of different ideas in our JSCs. We have worked out the rules that make sense to us, and so that everyone gets heard.

One school said:

- "Although we probably have some rules, we really don't think about them because we feel we are able to work together quite well."

At other schools, these seem to be common rules:

- "Don't talk when someone's speaking."
- "Don't make fun of people's efforts."
- "Accept people's ideas."
- "Stupid comments are out!"
- "If everyone wants to speak on a topic, then go round in turns."
- "Be polite to others who are in the JSC."
- "Listen to others when they have a question."
- "Put your hand up if you want to talk about something."
- "We expect people to be prepared, attend all meetings, listen to each other, concentrate on what is being said and get jobs done."

The teacher is in charge of meetings in some places, while at other JSCs the teacher is there mainly to supervise and help, and the students chair the meetings. Some JSCs said they had a rule to:

- "Do what the teacher in the room tells you to do."
Dear JSC: How do you involve other children? Do you report back?

It is important to report back - to tell other students what has happened and to get ideas. Reporting back is a two-way process. We ask students for information, we survey them, we address their needs and concerns and we make them aware of the jobs of the JSC so they can see it works.

- "Yes, we do report back to the children so they know what's going on, and ask questions and opinions."
- "Yes, we let them know what news we have to tell them."
- "The kids should report back because if students have problems they can tell the JSC."
- "You involve other children by reporting to their grades and discussing items with them."
- "The JSC needs to report back to their classes on a regular basis and inform the community by reporting back through the newsletter about the things that they have discussed. By discussing, surveying, asking questions and by being a good listener, children will see a purpose for the JSC and will, in turn, see its achievements."

Here are some of our ideas:

- "We report to our own grades."
- "We tell them what we talked about in each meeting."
- "Two people report after each meeting to the grades. Two people from the JSC go about to all the grades and talk to them about the JSC and report the notes from the meeting."
- "After every meeting, the JSC representatives report back to their grades about what happened in the meeting. The other children can ask questions, give their opinions and vote on important issues."
- "We have a radio show every Tuesday lunchtime and use this to report back. We also go to classes and discuss reports - and ask for opinions."
- "We have a newsletter item in the school newsletter."
- "Minutes of meetings are given to the JSC members. They are also shown in class, in the school newsletter and in a JSC newsletter."
- "We report to the School Council through the Teacher Representative."
- "We do surveys of what students think."
- "We have a suggestion box."
- "We put signs up with the results of surveys and also advertising of functions we are organising."

We also try to get other students involved in activities:

- "We have birthdays, pupil of the week, and involve students in social service."
- "We make a grade responsible for things."
- "We invite people to meetings - to hear what they have to say."
Dear JSC: What problems has your JSC met? How have you solved them?

A JSC is serious business. It will meet and deal with problems.
Some of those problems are problems around the school that we help solve:

- "We have met many problems like: fighting in the yard, coarse language, throwing sand and stones, swearing at people mowing the lawns and teasing."
- "People can wreck things."
- "Bad sportsmanship."

Some problems are problems with the JSC and how we run. We are dealing with these all the time. And getting better. But some of the problems are:

- "Some problems that we have are people not listening to each other, not coming to meetings, not concentrating on what’s being discussed and people not being prepared for the meeting."
- "People not being prepared for meetings."
- "People don’t turn up to meetings."
- "We have found how expensive it is to buy games and play equipment."
- "We have found how hard it is to raise money."

Some of these problems are with communication between the JSC and students:

- "Children don’t communicate with the JSC."
- "Some people make silly suggestions."
- "People don’t listen to each other."
- "At school we have a radio broadcast and teachers have been filling out the sheets. We also give out awards and sometimes can’t read the names of those gaining the award."

Here are some of the solutions we have found for these problems:

- "Telling the teachers on yard duty if children have done anything wrong and warning the children."
- "We have arranged a can collection and discos and other fun ways to raise money."
- "We have talked to other kids about taking care."
- "A suggestion box is good communication both ways."
- "We’ve organised more fundraising, and more sports activities."
- "You need to find the right people who are involved and get them to help you."
- "We have solved problems by discussing them at the JSC with the teacher in charge of the JSC and some things have been taken to the School Council."

You’ll have to go to the principal...

I’m too nervous!

... but she did anyway!
ONE JSC's STORY
Preston South Primary School JSC

Getting Onto the JSC

At our school, students make a list of names (girls and boys) of people who want to be in the JSC. In some grades, people had to say why they wanted to be a Junior School Councillor.

Then the students voted. A boy and a girl were picked for each grade (except Preps). This meant that Preston South had sixteen (16) Junior School Councillors for the whole year.

Meetings

Every week, the Councillors meet from 11.45 till 12.15. Sometimes, we have special meetings eg when Roger came, when we had to practise for our school concert, helping with the fair.

Sometimes the meetings are better than others. When we are planning things and sharing jobs and showing things to others and working in small groups - that is the best!

Jobs

We have a girl and a boy president, from Grade 6, a girl and a boy secretary from Grade 6 and a girl and a boy treasurer from Grade 5.

The presidents contact people, speak to grades and communicate with staff and the principal. The secretaries write letters asking for information and thanking people, and the treasurers count the money.

The JSC Teacher

The teacher gives ideas, helps us not to be shy, helps us to plan, gives reports and requests from JSC which are taken to the Senior Council.

What We’ve Done

We organised an Easter hunt, put in a new adventure playground, helped plan for more plants to be put in, raised money by selling popcorn, icy-poles and items from the fair, met with Mrs Padgett about Junior Neighbourhood Watch, checked on playground usage, and helped lonely people in the playground.

Problems and Solutions

Some kids are still mean in the yard.
We haven’t had enough time to do everything.
We try to do some things well, and leave other ideas until later.

That's one way a school has organised its Junior School Council.

The exciting thing is that there isn't one correct answer. We work out how our JSC can run and what it can do.

But we can learn from each other.

We would like to learn from you.

Please write to us and tell us about your JSC.
Please write to Connect, too, and tell people all over Australia about what you are learning.

Dear JSCs:
In 1992, I successfully submitted to the Small Change Education Foundation for a grant to take science to primary school students. The reasons were several, but included:

- primary students don't have much access to science, especially if the science involves chemicals;
- this was a good, pleasurable way of getting to know primary students, and a good way for them to get to know us.

Following a very successful project in 1992, I also applied this year and was fortunate enough to be successful again.

There were two phases to the project. Phase One aimed to take science into primary schools using level 11 students as facilitators. These students could use this project as a means of satisfying their Communications Project in English, since the requirement is speaking to a group of students other than their peers. Phase Two invited primary students to Yarram Secondary College for a real chemistry lesson in a real science room! Again, level 11 students were used as demonstrators.

When a group of three reliable students approached me asking if they could visit primary schools to give science lessons, I readily agreed. I had already organised a schedule of dates for visits, and had planned to invite students from my Chemistry class to help, but here was an offer from students who were capable and who were showing initiative.

Since the students wished to take lessons rather than just assist, it was important that they design the lesson. After some consultation, we came up with the idea of **Fingerprinting** - a lesson involving collection of prints by two different methods and recognition of the basic patterns from a set of inked prints. Follow-up work was left for the class teacher in the form of a survey to ascertain which fingerprint pattern is the most common, and a couple of problem-solving exercises which involved fingerprints as clues.

Our timetable of visits was rather hectic. We tried, whenever possible, to visit three schools per day. We would arrive at the first school at 9.00 am and stay till 10.15 am or thereabouts. We then drove to our next school for a session between recess and lunchtime, and held our third session at another school between lunch and home time. Our visits to ten feeder schools took place in August and September. Class sizes varied from 35 grade sixes in one group at Yarram Primary, to an entire school (all nine students!) at Binginwarri.

Our lesson plan gave us about an hour's worth of activities. We began by asking questions such as: "Have you ever watched movies in which detectives are looking for fingerprints?" We then went on to collecting prints from a glass surface by dusting with powder and lifting with sticky tape. Since this method doesn't work on an absorbent surface, we also showed students how to collect prints from paper by developing them with an "iodine gun". We then considered what the three basic patterns are before getting students to ink their fingers and put their prints on an official Police form!

Time permitting, we then tallied the number of arches, loops and whorls for the whole class and illustrated these tallies in bar graph form. Mostly, however, this was left to the teacher as a follow up exercise, as were the two crime-solving problems which involved fingerprint clues.

Our presentation was very well received, with several schools asking us if we could come back. Although this was not really possible, Stage 2 of Science 4-12 went some way to satisfying this request.
Grade six students, who would become Level 7 students in 1994, were invited to the Secondary College at the rate of about two schools per week. Part of their visit involved a 50-minute science lesson. The theme of the lesson was carbon dioxide, and the students were divided into five groups and rotated through a series of five experiments with Year 11 Chemistry students as instructors. This time, I involved the whole class of Chemistry students, five at a time, on a rostered basis. The content of this session included producing carbon dioxide from vinegar and bicarb soda, recognising the limewater test for carbon dioxide, proving that exhaled air contains carbon dioxide, putting out a birthday candle with carbon dioxide, and proving that baking powder, soft drink and Alka Seltzer all contain carbon dioxide.

We rounded off the lesson with a teacher demonstration showing that "all that fizzes is not carbon dioxide", by reacting zinc and acid and inflating a freezer bag with the resultant gas. Then, after darkening the room, I ignited the hydrogen. The resulting conflagration certainly got their undivided attention!

At the end of the lesson, morning tea was provided for the primary students. We gave them cakes and soft drink, asking them to keep in mind that they were eating and drinking carbon dioxide!

Phase Two of the project was as successful as Phase One, judging from the feedback received from primary schools and from the students themselves.

I would be remiss if I didn't say a word or two about the Small Change Foundation. Everyone who works at the Foundation has been most helpful and supportive. They are genuinely interested in the projects they have funded and there are lots of great things happening in state schools which are only possible because of the support and backing of the Small Change Foundation. I recommend that you contact the Small Change Foundation if you have an idea which you think is worthy but needs financial support. I have found every one of the staff really great to work with!

David Aumann
Yarram Secondary College
The last issue of Connect (#84, December 1993) reported on Student-Run Science Shows in Victoria’s Werribee area. The students and teachers who took part in the 1993 Science Shows provide this follow-up report:

The Werribee Science Network ran its annual Science Shows for primary schools late in 1993. All four Secondary Colleges were involved, including Werribee Grange in its first year of operation - a champion effort!

The following articles are from year 8 students who set up their show in a primary school gym, and from grade 3/4 students who walked to their local secondary college to see a show given by year 8s in a science room.

The shows have evolved to the stage that this year, when the crunch came, the actual running of the event was often carried out entirely by the secondary students, each with carefully defined and rehearsed roles, including that of MC. The science teacher was present merely to maintain order and forestall law-suits. Of course, a great deal of practice had gone on in the weeks leading up to the show.

We were funded by a small residual from 1992’s Small Change grant, and by using the material resources of participating schools and of the Network.

In some cases, students paid for bus travel as in a normal excursion.

Plans to solicit financial and material support from local industry and tertiary institutions were put on hold until 1994. These organisations have hereby been put on notice!

Ken Greatorex
Convener, Werribee Science Network

The Presenters ...

On Monday 22nd November, the class of 8G from Galvin Park Secondary College put on a Science Show for Glen Orden students from grade 4. We performed the show at Glen Orden Primary School in their gym.

We got there by bus and, once we arrived at about 1 pm, me and my partner Jason started to set up our experiment, which was on magnets. Jason and I were responsible for our equipment and we had to make sure it was packed onto the bus. We had to perform two shows and we taught the kids all about magnets and how they have different ends (North and South poles).

I enjoyed the Science Show and I think the kids of Glen Orden enjoyed it too. I think running the Science Show was a good experience and it was a good chance to show how good you can talk, and to make it interesting so people will come over.

Matt Hampton

We performed science experiments that we have learnt in Science this year.

I was doing pulleys and the grade 4s were asking me about what pulleys were. I said to them that it was a sort of labour-saving device. I used the example of taking a car engine out of the car and you pull on a rope and it lifts it out without straining muscles.

I learnt that you can lift things without straining muscles. I think the grade 4 students learnt that pulleys is very boring. There was one kid with big thick glasses who was very fascinated. I didn’t enjoy it very much because I was bored. So was everyone else except this kid with big thick glasses. Everyone enjoyed everyone else’s experiments except mine.

Anonymous

My partner was the one and only Kellie Weston. Kellie and I did a lung capacity test, a heart and pulse rate test and a blood pressure test. I learnt that your pulse varies and that bigger people have more air in their lungs than little kids.

I think the kids learnt that they have a lot of air in their lungs.
I thought that the Science Show was OK. I think the kids enjoyed it. The benefits of running the Science Show was that it makes you get more involved with what you are doing and gets you used to talking to people and explaining things properly.

*Melanie Pietrzak*

We gave two science shows of 40 minutes each in the Glen Orden gym, on the wet area. We gave the grade 4s shows at 1.20 pm and 2.00 pm and went back at 2.50 pm.

I did my experiment with Matt. We did the magnets show. Other students, like Melanie Johnson cut up bulls’ eyes and Jimmy and Dario with the balloons.

Our responsibilities were to give the students an enjoyable time and to teach them new experiments and to keep them amused and to bring and return the Galvin Park science equipment. We tried to tell them why and how the magnets did not stick to each other and they really enjoyed it.

To be honest, I enjoyed it because I was helping people learn and I was having fun.

*Jason Campbell*

We left for Glen Orden during lunch on a bus. When we got there, we had to find out way to the gym and find our equipment. We gave two 40-minute shows. For the first 20 minutes, the children looked at the tables we had set up with small experiments. My partner, Rebecca, and I set up two experiments to check your reflexes.

Then came the second half. Rebecca and I made glue, but could not test it. Adele made crystal forests and Tegan and Melanie J cut up bulls’ eyes. Kelly and Melanie P checked people’s pulse rate and blood pressure. The kids seemed to enjoy the shows and learn from them.

We also learned some things, like speaking clearly and explaining things that you understand that others might not.

*Alison Barry*

Justine and Michelle did an oxygen experiment. They had the responsibilities to set up and pack up their own experiment. They also had to make sure they did the experiments well. We learnt to take responsibilities for what we did. We also learnt how to talk to small crowds and made sure they understood.

I think the Glen Orden kids learnt a lot about the experiments. And I think they enjoyed it. They liked being involved in the experiments and learning more about science.

I liked putting on the show for the kids because I think they appreciated it. The benefits of the show was to get the kids ready for science in high school and to love it more.

*Michelle*
On Monday, I went to Galvin Park Secondary College and watched a science show. We saw dead animals.

We also saw an experiment where you put bubbles on your hands and they burn.

They also put a powder on the table and set it on fire. It started smoking.

The science teacher’s name was Mr Greatorex. He was very nice.

Anonymous

Today, grade 3/4H and 3/4F went to Galvin Park Secondary College. The first thing I saw that I was very interested in was a hair lifter. Sarah, Courtney, Nicole, Erin and Tracey had a go on the hair lifter. I was going to go up but I didn’t. Sarah went up last and she looked so funny.

The next thing I saw was a burning pencil. The boy had this machine and had like a pair of pliers and a pencil and burnt the pencil.

The next thing that I liked - the burning bubbles. The first volunteer was Nicky Myles. She had to hold some bubbles in her hand and then one of the year 8 girls lit the bubbles on Nicole’s hand, but it did not burn her.

The next thing I saw was animals in glass. I liked the baby pigs and the tiny kittens. I thought that the kitten was a little dog. I had a fun day.

Jodie Dewsbury

There was a tin and people lit it up and it didn’t work and the lid blew off.

There was a big ball of steel and the girls put their hands on it and their hair came up.

There is a bridge made out of icy-pole sticks that could hold a 10-year-old person.

Paul Popata

At the experiment show, they showed us a Van Der Graaf Generator where you get a stick thing and you put it on the ball top and blue sparks come out. Then you put your hands on the top and your hair frizzes.

You put a hole in a tin then you light a match and light the gas. It is supposed to whistle. But instead, the lid popped, under great pressure.

Mr Greatorex filled one balloon with hydrogen and one with helium and then he popped the hydrogen one and let the helium one go.

Andrea Rhodes

Grade 3/4 Students ...

On the 6th of December 1993, grades 3/4F and 3/4H went to the Science Show. This is the Van Der Graaf Generator:

Courtney Nichols

The volcano had smoke coming out of it. I liked when the people had the bubbles in their hand and then they got a match and lit it and then they put the match on the bubbles and it didn’t burn them.

Sarah Sembri

The volcano was good. I liked it. First it was smoke, then it was fire.

This boy had a ball, thing and touched the Van Der Graaf Generator and people’s hair went up.

The Whistling Tin: this boy said the tin whistled, bit it didn’t... it popped.

These bubbles were on a kid’s hands and they burst into fire.

Ryan

I liked the big tiger snake in the jar. I also liked the burning bubbles. You put detergent in the water, then Nicole M picked up the bubbles, then the year 8 lit a match to burn the bubbles.

Cara Deller

Drawings also by: Sarah Musial, Michael Cannon, Darren Tang, Travis Wilkins, Nicole Lemos, Leanne Nguyen, Leah, Tracey, Gary Coulson and Jay Magee - Glen Devon Primary School.
Children as Peacemakers

These three stories focus on the community of Downtown Alternative School of Toronto, Canada and its efforts to involve children more effectively in solving issues of conflict and aggression. They are reprinted from Democracy and Education, Vol 8 No 1, Fall 1993.

Peacemaker at Work
by Joan Baer

"Do you want to try to solve this problem? Do you want to solve it with us, or with a teacher? Do you agree to listen? No interruptions? No running away? No name calling? Tell the truth?"

Lesley and Robbie were asking these questions. Lesley and Robbie were both six years old. Mikolaj had a problem in the yard at lunchtime and brought his tear-stained face to me. I asked, "Do you want to solve this problem, Mikolaj? Do you want to solve it with me or the Peacemakers?" Children invariably choose their peers, and Mikolaj chose Lesley. Since Peacemakers always work in pairs so that representation is fairer, Lesley chose Robbie to work with her. Peacemakers can be any children who declare themselves. We talked about how difficult it is to be a good Peacemaker. You have to be a good listener, and you have to know you don't touch people in conflict because you might become part of the problem. You also have to be able to stop what you are doing - a game of ball or a math task or your art work - if you are called to be a Peacemaker. Being a Peacemaker at the age of six or seven is a tough job.

We are trying to nurture some strategies that children can use to resolve conflicts by collaboratively working through a conflict within an agreed-upon framework. As teachers, we do not take this lightly. We model and follow the strategies that have been worked out with the children over the years, and we are in a process that has no ending. Lesley and Robbie were the first two children in September this year who wanted to try to be peacemakers, and soon there were Zak and Erica and Ryan and Andrea. And then a discussion arose: What if everyone in our class was a Peacemaker, and then, everyone in the school, and then, everyone in the whole world? This is the stuff dreams are made of, and yet we know that conflicts in our lives will never go away.

After the first questions were asked by the Peacemakers, each person in the dispute was asked to tell his or her story. Mikolaj went first, "I was trying to play this game with Zak and Daniel and Domenic, but they started hitting me." Zak replied, "We were playing this game and Mikolaj always comes into the game and wants to play, but he hits us and kicks us and he doesn't know how to play the game." Daniel responded, "And he doesn't come in at the beginning, and he doesn't know how to play." "And he always hits us, so we hit him," Domenic added. Lesley, as Peacemaker, asked, "Do any of you have anything else to tell? Do any of you have solutions?" Zak answered, "I think that Mikolaj should come into the game sooner so that he knows what the game is." Daniel continued, "I think Mikolaj should use his words instead of hitting us." "I don't like to be hit," Domenic added, "and I think we shouldn't hit back." Mikolaj's tears have faded into a smile. Robbie, as Peacemaker, asked all of the participants if they agreed with the solutions, and nods of agreement were all around. There was no punishment. As a teacher, I had been reduced to being a fly on the wall, which is where I preferred to be.

These scenes are repeated daily at Downtown Alternative School. Some conflicts are harder to work through than others. Sometimes Peacemaking strategies have to be postponed until all of the participants have cooled down. Sometimes the Peacemakers come and say they couldn't help, so we gather together again and I ask, "Do you want to try to solve this problem? Do you want to solve it with me or the Peacemakers?" And so it goes.

Joan is a teacher at Downtown Alternative School in Toronto, Canada.
Developing a Model Program

by Esther Sokolov Fine

In the best of all possible worlds, school is a warm and comfortable community of learners. Teachers work as a team, and parents support their work. The philosophy which holds the community together includes multi-age grouping, whole language, ongoing writing and research done by children at all developmental stages, respect for children's intentions, and play with lots of open discussion about a wide range of important local and global topics. Curriculum is negotiated in the classroom as a routine part of the day-to-day program in which affirmation of children is a deep commitment.

Downtown Alternative, a small public elementary school located in the inner city of Toronto, Canada, was organized by parents through negotiation with the Toronto Board of Education twelve years ago. Its mandate is to offer this kind of schooling to a small group of children on a first-come-first-served basis. It is one of many alternative schools in the city.

In 1986, when I first joined the staff of this school, there were four teachers and seventy-five children from junior kindergarten through third grade. The school is still this size but will move into a newer building in September, 1993, to allow for gradual expansion to sixth grade over the next few years.

In 1986, we looked around at our best of all possible worlds. We knew we had it all, but we also knew that something was wrong; something was missing. Our program was democratic. Our beliefs were tied to democratic principles. But there were still small children who were fighting, hitting, putting each other down, and bullying one another on the playground and elsewhere, and we were still using the same old authoritarian strategies to stop, quiet, discipline, and separate them. We were not satisfied with our approach to conflict and aggression among the children, and we knew something had to change.

We talked among ourselves and with parents. We did some research, and one family brought in a videotape about the Conflict Manager's Program that was being explored in several large San Francisco schools by the Community Board of San Francisco.

We showed the video to our first through third grade children and they were interested. In discussion they decided that two third graders would be the first to try out the mediation process, but they wanted some changes. From the first, they decided there would be no special shirts or arm bands and that, instead of calling themselves 'conflict managers,' they would be 'peacemakers.' They would try out the model seen in the video for a few days to see how it worked and would then report back to another first through third grade meeting for further discussion and planning. They would use the same basic system of rules in the San Francisco model. As a pair, they would attempt to intervene on conflict when they saw it occurring on the playground. The rules they started with went approximately like this: Do you agree to solve this problem? Do you want to solve it with us or a teacher? Do you agree to listen? No interrupting? No arguing back and forth? No name calling? Tell the truth?

Following a brief trial period, the children decided to take up this model in a serious way and to allow other children in the school to become Peacemakers by letting it be known that they were 'ready.' At the end of this first year, many of the first through third grade children considered themselves to be Peacemakers, and four third graders wrote a small book called The Peaceasaurus, in which they told the story of Peacemaking in their own way.

Now, seven years later, we are still working at Peacemaking. It is work that is never done. We have become a model for the Toronto Board of Education as part of its effort to intervene on violence in the school system. We are writing a book about the development of this program in our school (Heinemann, in press) and are about to embark upon a three year video research project at Downtown Alternative School. The project will investigate the key role that language seems to play at the heart of the negotiation process.

In 1993, many schools have become breeding places of violence, not surprising in an increasingly unjust and violent world. The only way out, it seems to us, is through effective negotiation; and it is in our schools that the language and skills required for negotiation can be developed and practiced by children from a very early age. Whole language classrooms are the obvious starting places for this work. Models of 'authoritarian discipline' and 'no discipline' have not given us safe schools or safe communities. At Downtown Alternative, we have a model that we believe is working. In this model, problems don't go away; rather, they serve as opportunities for language development and social growth. Peacemaking does not make life in school easy. It complicates it and enriches it - which should be our goal. It makes school safer and more humane. Peacemaking opens up traditional silences, leading children into some very sophisticated forms of thinking and talking and seems to have a positive effect on learning across the curriculum.
Does Peacemaking mean that teachers never take over or intervene? The answer is ‘No.’ Downtown Alternative School teachers, like teachers in any school, are responsible for the safety and well-being of the children. They are always nearby. They hover during Peacemaking sessions to support, to learn, and to make certain that everything is all right. But, to whatever extent it is safe and possible, the responsibility for negotiation and discussion remains in the hands of the children. There is an ongoing expectation for “taking responsibility for oneself” within the Downtown Alternative School community, and this is an expectation that the children tend to live up to. This sets a high standard for the teachers and parents as well as the children. It is a standard that reaches to the core of our work as teachers. It never gets easier; it mustn’t ever be reduced to a formula or a mere set of routines because, at its core, it is about the ongoing struggles inherent in human interaction and development that are crucial to any classroom.

Esther is an associate professor of education at York University, North York, Canada.

Emerging Peacemakers
by Ann Lacey

“Yesterday was one of those ‘worst’ teaching days. I came home feeling bruised and battered, drained by my futile attempts to make myself heard by the four-year-old tyrants, angry at the self-centred young wild boys who seem to require all my attention...” This was an entry from my journal.

The next day I was determined not to let them rule the room. I had a somewhat better but ragged morning without a break. After lunch Josh rushed in: “Ann, we have to do a Peacemaking with Jesse (seven years old), Aaron (nearly six), and Omar (age four), and it’s going to be in the hall.”

“Do you need help? Can I be there?” I asked.

“No,” was the reply.

“We can’t be there if I don’t talk?” I compromised, and the reply was a delayed “O....kay.” “Well, I’d like to have it in here. Can you go fetch Jesse?” I asked.

We called all the children over. As they struggled to the rug, Omar and Aaron, both four-year-olds, burst into the room late, luminous and changed, dragging scarves and half-zipped jackets.

“Ann, Ann, we peacemaked outside!” they announced.

We made a circle on the rug, a small, close, intense one. I plunged in, as they seemed to be waiting for form. “We seem to have a problem here, but we need to understand what happened. So let’s listen to each person that was involved. Omar, would you go first?” Omar confidently listed about ten things he had been involved in (he hit Charlie with a ball, put snow down Bobbie’s jacket). There was also something about a big boy from another school jumping on him. After each pause I prompted “And then what?”

Finally he finished. I asked Aaron if he had anything to add. “No, Omar said it all,” he replied. I looked at them; they felt different, I could tell.

They weren’t still caught up in the guilt and blame. “What happened?” I asked. “How did you work it out?”

“We peacemaked, we told you,” Omar and Aaron shouted together jubilantly.

“How did you do it?” I asked.

“We had a meeting in a tire,” they replied.

“Who was with you?” I asked.

“Just ourselves,” they replied.

Things were moving fast, and I couldn’t quite get the picture. What kind of resolution did they come to and what did this have to do with Josh? Did Josh play a part, or was it done to him? Or did he want to be a peacemaker for their problem? Did he observe a moment of resolution I did not have the privilege of seeing? It seemed chaotic to me, yet I moved forward on instinct. Something obviously was resolved, and I thought that they seemed to need to report.

Josh took his turn, and he rambled on, listing a series of wrongs and some accusations, a garbled story at best. Jesse spoke next, “Josh said it all,” he claimed. “Oh, and it was an Alpha (the other school) boy who jumped on Omar.”

A few more people spoke; Sophia said, “Omar, I hope that never ever happens to you again. It hurts my feelings to see that happen.” Judith declared, “Sometimes I even cry when people get hurt.”

It seemed to be over, the circle broke up, and we returned to normal book time. I was totally confused - what just happened? Later, as I was discussing the incident with Susan, a student teacher, I was facing a bulletin board of children’s valiant early writing efforts - treasures of scrawls of meaning. Suddenly I understood that the Peacemaking emerges and eventually develops just like the writing. What seems random and chaotic actually contains important information, communication to us from the children about what they know about Peacemaking:

Connect 85-86: February-April 1994
References

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Community Board Program 149 Ninth Street, San Francisco, CA.


Acknowledgements

The authors wish to express their thanks to: The Ontario Educational Research Council, The Federation of Women Teachers’ Associations of Ontario, and The Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada for their support of our research.

Copies of The Peaceasaurus ($3.50) and a related book The Food Fight, Ta-Daa ($4.50) are available from the Federation of Women Teacher’s Associations of Ontario, 1260 Bay Street, Toronto, Ontario Canada M5B 2B8. Cheques should be made payable to the DAS Parent’s Association.

Democracy and Education, is a journal of the Institute for Democracy in Education, College of Education, Ohio University, 313 McCracken Hall, Athens, OH 45701-2979 USA. Phone: (+1 614) 593 4531; Fax: (+1 614) 593 0177.

PEN PAL REGISTRY

The US-based Pen Pal Registry is a group of parents and teachers who are attempting to encourage written correspondence between young people, and to form lasting international friendships and understanding. It matches US students with students in other countries.

There is an annual US$15 fee for schools wishing to take part - this allows any students of the school to register throughout the year. Connect has been sent a couple of copies of the Pen Pal Registration Form, which we’re happy to pass on (with a copy of their letter to us) to any school or individual who is interested.

Alternatively, contact the group directly:

Pen Pal Registry
PO Box 564
Peculiar MO 64078
USA
STUDENT VOICES

In December 1992, students from throughout New South Wales were brought together at Bathurst by the NSW coordinators of the National Schools Project. A brief report of that conference was contained in Connect 79 (February 1993).

The full conference report: Students Rethinking Schools for a Changing World, has now been published by the Project. In this report, Dr James Ladwig and Dr Jennifer Gore describe both the conference processes and the outcomes - in student voices. It also includes a description of student research at Keira Technology High School.

This report notes, “One special feature of the conference was that it was led by students, for students.” It provides useful information on how this happened - and, by implication, about how other groups can adopt similar approaches. Connect has copies of this 24 page report, and they are available from us free - just send $2 to cover postage.

For more information, contact:

Viv White,
Coordinator, The National Schools Project,
GPO Box 33, Sydney NSW 2001.
Phone: (02) 561 8965.

TAKING CHARGE

Taking Charge is a kit that informs young people about their life rights. Produced by the Victorian Youth Advocacy Network and the Legal Aid Commission of Victoria, in association with National Curriculum Services, the kit is intended for secondary students in years 9 and 10 and for young people who have left school.

Taking Charge is made up of six units which focus on life rights issues relevant to young people. Each of the units includes student worksheets containing content and activities, and a resources list to encourage and support further investigation. The units are: Have I the Right?; Rights with the Police; Families - Of All Types; Rights in Relationships; Rights at School; Rights in the Workplace.

The kit also includes a Note for Teachers, and a Life Rights Poster.

The kit is available for $25, which includes postage and handling charges:

National Curriculum Services
PO Box 361
Abbotsford VIC 3067
Phone: (03) 415 1299
Fax: (03) 419 1205

A STUDENT PARTICIPATION WORKSHOP IN 1995?

The Australian Curriculum Studies (ACSA) will hold its 1995 Conference in Melbourne. For past Conferences, Connect has assisted in helping students to attend these Conferences, and to have a voice in debates about curriculum issues.

A frequent request has been for a preparatory conference for students, in the few days before the ACSA Conference.

In addition, there haven’t been any national student participation conferences - for students and/or their supporting teachers and others - since two held in 1980 (Melbourne) and 1981 (Adelaide).

I know it’s some time away still - July 1995. But... Is there interest in attending? Is there interest in helping to plan and organise it? What would such a Workshop/Conference look like?

Connect will be a forum to talk over ideas, with a view to getting a planning group together later in the year. I’d be interested to hear from you now!

Roger Holdsworth (see page 2 for contact details)
Local and Overseas Publications Received

Connect receives many publications directly or indirectly relevant to youth and student participation. We can’t lend or sell these, but if you want to look at or use them, contact us on (03) 489 9052 or (03) 344 8573:

AUSTRALIAN STUDENT PUBLICATIONS:

Get Knitted (YWCA, Vic) No 6; Dec 1993
JSC Newsletter (Preston/Reservoir JSC Network, Vic) Volume 2, Editions 3, 4; November, Christmas, 1993

OTHER PUBLICATIONS:

Australian:

Options (Youth Bureau, Canberra, ACT) November, December 1993, January 1994
Network News (Surry Hills, NSW) Dec 1993
Student Voices (National Schools Project, NSW) A Report on the Student Futures Conference, Nov 30 - Dec 2, 1992, Bathurst, NSW; Ladwig and Gore
Creating Safer Communities (Vic Community Council Against Violence, Vic)
Education Links (Stanmore, NSW) No 46, Spring 1993
Youth Issues Forum (YACVic, Fitzroy, Vic) Spring 1993
Submission on the Education (Amendment) Bill 1993 (Vic) (National Children’s and Youth Law Centre, NSW)
Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training Inquiry Into Violence in Schools (National Children’s and Youth Law Centre, NSW) 30th November 1993

Overseas:

Foundation Update (ANPA, USA) Vol 19 No 3, Fall 1993
Celebrate Diversity (ANPA, USA) Newspaper in Education Week, 1993

We worked well and had fun.

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The articles listed in this column are of general background value or otherwise not appropriate for reproducing in the columns of Connect. However they are available on photocopy for research purposes. The length and cost (copying and postage) are listed. Please order by code number. (A fuller list is available in Connect 46/47 - to October 1987. We are currently working on a database that will enable these articles to be accessed by subject, key-word etc.)

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401 Inquiry Into Violence in Schools; submission from National Children’s and Youth Law Centre to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, 30th November 1993 (13 pp; $1.30)
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