

Fall 2009

yes!

Building a Just and Sustainable World
ISSUE 51

12 Things Really Educated
People Know

Question Authority:
The Power of Asking "Why?"

Reinvent Yourself:
This Time, Try a Green Job

13 RADICAL ACTS OF EDUCATION

Learn as You Go

WHY LIFE'S BEST LESSONS ARE
OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

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field trip exploring
Puerto Rico's rainforest.

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**“I have never let my schooling interfere
with my education.”**

MARK TWAIN



Citizen scientists identify shoreline plants and creatures on Whidbey Island, Washington, as part of a Washington State University Extension project to assess and catalog marine life on local beaches.

WSU EXTENSION BEACH WATCHERS PHOTO



Reinvent Yourself, Reinvent the World

As a child, I remember thinking adults reached a magical age when they became “grown-ups” and were therefore done growing. Now that I have reached that age myself, I realize that we’re not done—we have the option of continuing to develop throughout life.

We need people who choose to continue learning. The problems we’re facing are at a scale we have never faced before, and they won’t be solved with old-school thinking. Our ecological life-support systems are in crisis, with extinctions, water scarcities, and climate disruption threatening the future of civilization. We’re spending trillions to prop up an economic system we know to be unsustainable, unjust, and unfulfilling. And warfare continues to eat away at the soul of our nation, inflicting trauma on millions around the world, and draining resources we desperately need to invest in the transition to a green and equitable economy.

We need people who are awake, engaged, lifelong learners—people who are culturally and ecologically literate, who can build healthy, loving relationships, and who can ask tough questions and critically evaluate the responses.

How can we learn these capacities and teach them to generations to come?

Instead of obeying authorities, taking tests, and jumping through hoops, we need to learn to think for ourselves, to build sustainable communities, and to protect our ecological diversity. We need to learn how to make a living in a world facing climate change and peak oil. And we need to learn the art of democracy and movement building so that we can counter the power of the corporate elites and put our government to work setting policies for a better world.

This issue of YES! explores how to develop these capacities and foster them in the next generation.

- Former New York Teacher of the Year

John Taylor Gatto (page 18) takes an irreverent look at our schools showing how they can either develop or undercut our ability to assert control over our own lives.

- Educators Ron Miller (page 46) and David Sobel (page 31) show how we can learn to recognize and protect our place on this Earth, including the communities and natural systems that sustain life.

- Julia Putnam tells the story of her education in Detroit, which took off when she got involved in rebuilding her community, learning from mentors like movement elder Grace Lee Boggs (page 24).

- Author and educator Parker Palmer shows how we can learn to stay centered in our own values and ethics, even when workplace expectations push us to violate what we know is right (page 48).

What else does it mean to get educated in these chaotic times?

It means learning how to heal and nurture ourselves and others, especially those who have been traumatized by war and other forms of violence (see page 40). It means acquiring the job skills that can sustain us and our loved ones while serving the larger human community (page 38). It means questioning authority, distinguishing between what’s important and what’s background noise, and learning how to access the vast knowledge commons that is our birthright.

Our educational institutions can help us with some of these skills. But they won’t get us where we need to go. This issue of YES! highlights those who are creating the educational models we need to survive, to thrive, and to help build a better world.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah van Gelder". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Sarah van Gelder
Executive Editor



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NEW VISIONS

Solving today's big problems will take more than a quick fix. These authors offer clarity about the roots of our problems and visions of a better way.

WORLD & COMMUNITY

New models that foster justice and real prosperity, and sustain the Earth's living systems. How can we bring these models to life and put them to work?

THE POWER OF ONE

Stories of people who find their courage, open their hearts, and discover what it means to be human in today's world.

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READERS FORUM

Tell us. Send your response to an article, stories about making the world a better place, and ideas for connecting with readers to 284 Madrona Way NE, Suite 116, Bainbridge Island, WA 98110 or to editors@yesmagazine.org.



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A captive audience

I just finished ordering 28 gift subscriptions to YES! This, in my mind, is a contribution to the Earth. Perhaps it will help nudge some minds to broader thinking. While I was at it, I sent a subscription to all my doctors, where I know your magazine will be read by dozens of people. Maybe next year I'll just open the phone book and send it to all the offices with waiting rooms. I hope other readers will copy my idea. Thank you for your thoughtful work.

VIRGINIA MALMQUIST
Bellingham, WA

Minty-fresh fly-swatter

One more thing to add to the Yes! Picks: Fly Patrol (Summer 2009): Putting a few drops of pure peppermint oil on a

cotton ball on a little plate will clear flies from the kitchen! A couple drops in the trash keeps them from there, too!

DIANE EARDLEY
Los Angeles, CA

Call for a new economy

I'm writing to respond to David Korten's commentary, "Why Not An Economy of Real Wealth?" Amen! I felt so much saner after reading Korten call our current economy what it truly is: insane.

CAROLYN HAUCK
San Francisco, CA

Where money comes from

I can't tell you how thrilled I am to hear about your summer issue: "The New Economy."

This couldn't come at a better time. It's a sad state of

affairs that most people still don't understand that the current system of international finance pivots on "money out of thin air" that is created PRIVATELY.

To gain momentum, this has to be more than a themed magazine issue. Would YES! consider keeping a column/section open in future issues for The New Economy?

CHRIS DAVENPORT
Toronto, ON

Editor's note: YES! has continuing coverage on our website, www.yesmagazine.org/neweconomy.

Use a "peace" indicator?

What if we linked our dollar with "indicators" of personal, cultural, and ecological health? If our residents know that PCE (pronounced "peace") health is the goal, and we have indicators of progress, won't it give us a sense of confidence amid the turbulence of transitioning? The dollar was linked to gold because gold was valued, then it was disconnected from gold around 1970. So now, why not link it to health, because we value health now? What if currencies all over the world were linked with "indicators" of local and global PCE health?

LINDA REDMAN
Fairbanks, AK

Banning big-box stores

Here on Maui, we are trying to get an ordinance passed through our county council, limiting big-box stores from opening in new locations and restricting new stores to 90,000 square feet.

We want to maintain our small-town character and island lifestyle. The proposed ordinance has a lot of support from the small-business community, some unions, and informed residents.

We are trying to create a sustainable future: an economy based on community-owned businesses, energy independence, and a locally based food supply. YES! Magazine has become my favorite subscription—the examples of other communities who are developing sustainable models is educational and encouraging.

KAI NISHIKI
Maui, HI

Pedaling in search of new views

My partner and I are beginning a project called The Path Less Pedaled—a pedal-powered project to seek out and tell the stories of people who have followed some sort of intuition—independent makers, small business owners, community activists—folks

 **Hey, look!** This is not ordinary dull white paper with occasional imperfections.



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who have eschewed the status quo in search of a life less ordinary.

I want to ask what it means to be small by choice. There are people who are building a "new" economy around the idea of neighbors buying into their community. I want to see how life is different. There

are people who are promoting alternative transportation as a mainstream idea. I want to experience their journey.

The entire project will be managed from two bicycles. Follow us at pathlesspedaled.com.

Laura Crawford
Long Beach, CA

Responses to our July online newsletter, which asked readers:
What is the most important thing you've learned?

I have been a teacher and a university professor for some 50 years. I believe that the most important thing that we can teach students—if it is teachable at all—is to be prepared to deal with uncertainty. It seems that each one of us has to learn this lesson anew, considering the fact that so few things in life are certain.

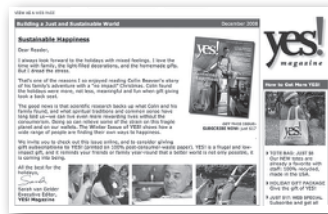
Shimon Gottschalk

Most important thing I learned: Never give up.
Robert S. Kirsner

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YES! ONLINE

THE YES! WEBSITE HAS A NEW LOOK! We have a beautiful, new, user-friendly home for our growing archive of 3,000+ stories, tools, and multimedia, and a host of new features to explore.

VIDEO: Matt Damon faces history ... Oysters return to NY ... Parker J. Palmer on how to say "Yes" to the possible

SLIDE SHOW: Harvesting the wild foods of the Sonoran Desert ... Direct-action bootcamp: See activists in training

ALSO: Five best places to do your learning on the Web

WWW.YESMAGAZINE.ORG/FALL09

Signs of Life

SMALL STORIES ABOUT BIG CHANGE



CLIMATE CHANGE

Amazon Tribes Win Against Big Oil

In the Amazon rainforests of Peru and Ecuador, indigenous groups are on the front lines of the climate change battle.

Communities in both countries bear the brunt of demand for oil and gas resources buried in the rainforests. The Amazon is one of the world's most significant "carbon sinks," and when resource-extraction industries destroy forests to make way for roads, drilling, and pipelines, they release carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, contributing to global warming. In Ecuador, toxic dumping by oil giant Texaco has also created deadly pollution that locals say has caused cancer rates to soar.

Native groups in both countries have scored recent victories, but at great cost.

In Bagua in northern Peru, demonstrators blocked a road in protest of new laws that would have eased the process for foreign companies to acquire land title and road-building rights-of-way in the Amazon. The protest erupted into a confrontation with police on June 5 that left dozens of demonstrators dead. International outcry over the deaths forced Peruvian Presi-

dent Alan Garcia to rescind two of the nine laws in question.

On July 21, James Anaya, U.N. Special Rapporteur on indigenous rights, called for an independent investigation of the events in Peru. Activists have accused the Peruvian government of attempting to destroy the powerful indigenous organization AIDESEP, whose leader, Alberto Pizango, has been accused of sedition and is currently in exile in Nicaragua.

Meanwhile, Ecuadorian communities have won a ruling

against Chevron Corp., which owns Texaco. Their 16-year-old, \$27.3-billion liability suit concerns Texaco's nearly three decades of activity in the Lago Agria area of the Amazon, during which, plaintiffs say, the company dumped 18 billion gallons of toxic wastewater into the rainforest. Chevron merged with Texaco in 2001 and has been fighting the case in both Ecuador and the U.S. On June 29, the U.S. Supreme Court tossed out an appeal by Chevron to shift the liability to Ecuador's

state-owned oil company.

Demonstrators in both Ecuador and Peru have received an outpouring of international support. Images of the Peruvian massacre circulated online, galvanizing supporters, who held demonstrations in South America, the United States, Canada, Australia, and Europe in solidarity with the Amazon activists.

Activists have lobbied for alternatives to free trade agreements that require governments in developing nations to loosen



“ There’s no ombudsman for future generations. We’re it.”



AMANDA MCKENZIE, ORGANIZER WITH THE AUSTRALIAN YOUTH CLIMATE COALITION. MCKENZIE AND 1,500 YOUTHS MET IN SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA, IN JULY TO LEARN HOW TO STAGE DIRECT ACTION TO PRESSURE GOVERNMENT LEADERS TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE.

www.YesMagazine.org/flashdance Street performance from PowerShift Sydney

Not long after the Bagua, Peru, protest ended in the deaths of family members and friends, the indigenous Amazon community outside Wawas discovered an underground oil pipeline had burst, leaving oil seeping through the ground and flowing into water sources.

Interested? tinyurl.com/baguatrip



BEN POWLESS PHOTOS

restrictions on natural resource exploitation. The decrees that led to the Peruvian protests were a response to the U.S.-Peru Free Trade Agreement.

Chevron has also tried to use trade agreements to retaliate against Ecuador. Four U.S. senators—Ron Wyden, Robert P. Casey, Jr., Dick Durbin, and Patrick Leahy—recently urged the U.S. Trade Representative to reject Chevron’s plea to deny trade benefits to Ecuador.

Lisa Garrigues is a YES! contributing editor.

ALSO ...

India will soon embark on a “National Solar Mission,” part of the country’s eight-part climate plan. The plan calls for boosting India’s solar energy output from nearly zero to 20 gigawatts by 2020. Greenpeace India campaigner Siddharth Pathak says the move could bolster the country’s leverage in U.N. climate talks in December, though India’s refusal to commit to carbon emission limits has vexed richer countries demanding tougher action.

ECONOMY

Sit-In Keeps Factory Open

Inspired by last year’s win by employees at Republic Windows and Doors, workers at the Des Plaines, Illinois, Hartmarx factory voted to stage a sit-in this June against banking giant Wells Fargo.

Wells Fargo was the main creditor of Hartmarx, a century-old apparel company that manufactured the tuxedo Barack Obama wore to his inauguration. Early this year, Hartmarx declared bankruptcy after Wells Fargo denied the company a line of credit. Wells Fargo then threatened to liquidate Hartmarx and lay off its workers, rejecting offers by several investors to buy the company.

Nearly 500 Hartmarx workers voted to occupy the factory to prevent its closure, taking inspiration from the Republic workers who successfully recovered their accrued vacation time and severance pay after occupying the Chicago factory last year.

Forty-three members of Congress sent a letter to Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner, asking him to pressure Wells Fargo to keep Hartmarx intact and decrying “financial institutions that are receiving taxpayer assistance but refusing to provide credit in this tough economic climate.”

Illinois treasurer Alexi Giannoulias threatened to move the state’s accounts out of Wells Fargo. “They can either do the

right thing and save 1,000 jobs, or they are not going to do business with the state of Illinois,” Giannoulias said.

These efforts pushed Wells Fargo to accept a bid from Emerisque Brands to buy the company and preserve the workers’ jobs.

The win adds fuel to another campaign targeting Wells Fargo’s move to cut off credit to Quad City Die Casting in Moline, Illinois, jeopardizing the jobs of its 100 factory workers. This summer, members of the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America held protests at 20 Wells Fargo branch offices. On July 9, nearly a dozen union supporters were arrested for blocking a road in front of a Wells Fargo branch in Rock Island, Illinois. The protesters called Wells Fargo “a roadblock to recovery.”

Laura Kaliebe is a journalist living in Seattle.

ALSO ...

Despite the recession, the green economy is outperforming the rest of the global economy, according to two new reports. New energy investment in renewable sources in 2008 surpassed worldwide investment in fossil fuel power for the first time, says a report released by the United Nations in June. In the United States, green jobs grew more than twice as fast as the overall job market between 1998 and 2007, and the green economy has suffered fewer setbacks than the economy as a whole, according to data released by the Pew Charitable Trusts.



NAVID BARATY PHOTO, NAVIDBARATY.COM

The Future Action Reclamation Mob (FARM) project built raised beds along San Francisco's Hooper Street. Everyone in the surrounding California College of the Arts community is invited to work on the urban farm and to eat from it. Check out thinkdiscussact.org/farm.

ELECTIONS

Legal Settlements Protect Voters

Organizations in Ohio, Missouri, and elsewhere are correcting problems that prevented thousands of people from voting in recent elections.

The League of Women Voters reached a settlement in July on a four-year-old lawsuit against the state of Ohio. The lawsuit was intended to fix problems that were rampant in the state's elections systems in 2004, when voters waited in line for up to 14 hours and registered voters cast provisional ballots that were never counted.

The settlement mandates monitoring of poll worker performance and voting equipment

malfunctions and requires the secretary of state to oversee activities of county elections boards.

In June, ACORN reached a settlement with the state of Missouri requiring the state's Department of Social Services (DSS) to provide voter-registration applications to its clients. DSS first began offering this service in July 2008, following a preliminary court order. Since then, more than 100,000 low-income voters have registered at public assistance offices. Only 15,000 such voters registered in the three years prior.

In July, a voting rights coalition—including ACORN, the NAACP, the American Civil Liberties Union, and Project Vote—filed lawsuits in New Mexico and Indiana. The suits allege noncompliance with the National Voter Registration Act,

which requires states to make voter registration available at public assistance offices.

The national voting rights group, Project Vote, says few states are following that directive. During the first two years after the law went into effect in 1995, 2.6 million low-income voters registered, but registration among that demographic has since dropped by as much as 90 percent in some states.

"In this last election, there were still something like 11 million low-income eligible voters who were not registered to vote," says Brenda Wright, director at Demos, a national policy think tank. "Making voter registration accessible and convenient at government agencies is a proven way to give people access to the process."

Susie Shutts is a freelance writer based in Ohio.

FOOD

Cities Eat Local

Increasing numbers of U.S. cities are looking to lessen their climate impact by growing and eating local food.

The city of Berkeley, California, has approved a climate-action plan that sets a target for reducing citywide greenhouse gas emissions 80 percent by 2050 and includes measures to localize the food sector. The plan will fund new community gardens and park projects, develop a community orchard on vacant city land, and provide financial incentives to restaurants that sell local organic food.

Last year San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom convened a panel of experts to find ways to make food grown within 200 miles of city limits available to locals. On July 8, the mayor's office directed all city departments to identify unused city land that could hold community gardens, and required all farmers markets operating in the city to accept food stamps.

The city of Minneapolis recently passed a resolution that creates a local food task force and opens up city land to community gardens.

Seattle is also implementing its Local Food Action Plan. This year, the city committed \$500,000 from a parks levy to build new community gardens on vacant city land.

Jessica Bell is a former staff member of the California Food and Justice Coalition.

“ Appreciate the under-appreciated today. ”

A PROMPT FROM DOGOOD, AN IPHONE APP DESIGNED BY UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN STUDENTS THAT ENCOURAGES ITS 1,000 USERS TO DO A NEW GOOD DEED EACH DAY.



HUMAN RIGHTS

Tribes Approve Same-Sex Marriage

👍 Same-sex marriage may not be legal in the state of Oregon, but an Oregon tribe has exercised its sovereignty to recognize same-sex marriages on its 10-square-mile reservation near the Oregon coast. The Coquille Indian Tribe allows marriage licenses and benefits for gay and lesbian couples as long as at least one partner is an enrolled tribal member. On May 29, two women became the first same-sex couple to legally marry on the reservation.

The Suquamish Tribe in Washington state may soon follow suit. Its tribal council has approved a proposal to amend the Suquamish constitution and will finalize a same-sex marriage ordinance pending two public hearings later this summer.

Heather Purser is a YES! editorial intern and member of the Suquamish Tribe.

WATER

Act Two for Clean Water

The U.S. Senate may be poised to undo a Bush-era policy that undercut protection of the nation's waterways.

Until 2002, the U.S. EPA and the Army Corps of Engineers had the authority to keep pollution out of creeks and stop builders from paving over small wetlands.

But two rulings on the Clean

Water Act by the U.S. Supreme Court took a narrow reading of the law's language, limiting the Act's jurisdiction to "navigable waterways" and the small streams and rivers that are connected to them.

The rulings stripped protection from 20 million acres of wetlands and 60 percent of the nation's stream miles, such as the Los Angeles River and nearly all of Arizona's small streams.

Now 24 senators have sponsored a bill that would restore those protections. The Clean Water Restoration Act has passed the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, and is headed for the Senate floor. The act has the support of a large number of environmental, wildlife, and fishing and hunting groups, along with the Water Environment Federation, which represents the water treatment industry, though the law is meeting resistance from big agriculture and developers.

—Madeline Ostrander

ALSO ...

👍 In a July 4 vote, Bundanoon, Australia, may have become the first community in the world to legally ban bottled water. The ban was promoted through the grassroots "Bundy On Tap" campaign. The town plans to implement the law by September, once it sets up bottled water alternatives, such as several new free filtered "water stations" to be placed around the community.



Volunteers remove litter along the Los Angeles River during *La Gran Limpieza*, a cleanup day held May 9 by Friends of the Los Angeles River. Participants hauled out a total of 37,000 pounds of trash from more than a dozen sites. A Supreme Court ruling removed the river from protection under the Clean Water Act. A bill being considered in the Senate would restore that protection.

PETER BENNETT, GREENSTOCKPHOTOS.COM



KATE SKEGG PHOTO

Marisol Becerra Fighting pollution in Little Village

20-YEAR-OLD MARISOL BECERRA began her fight against environmental threats to her mostly Mexican-American neighborhood in Chicago when she was just a freshman in high school.

After joining the Little Village Environmental Justice Organization, Becerra mapped the locations of toxins in her community, mostly from two coal-fired power plants nearby.

Becerra later launched "Youth Activists Organizing as Today's Leaders," a group whose members lobby elected officials and go door to door educating people on local environmental pollutants, and she started a related website for young people, El Cilantro.

Becerra was one of six environmental activists to win the 2008 Brower Youth Award. Sponsored by the Earth Island Institute, the award provides recipients the opportunity to develop their interests in leadership and environmental issues.

 www.YesMagazine.org/becerra
Marisol tells her story



BUDDHISM FOR
DEVELOPMENT PHOTO

Heng Monychenda Peaceful approach in rural Cambodia

HENG MONYCHENDA WAS A slave laborer under the Khmer Rouge regime in the late 1970s before his family fled to a refugee camp near the Thai border.

He spent more than a decade in the camps, became a monk, and in the 1990s, returned to his home in Cambodia's Battambang Province to create Buddhism For Development (BFD).

The organization works to empower rural Cambodians and to combat the legacy of the Khmer Rouge, which destroyed farmland and left the country stained with poverty, violence, and disillusionment. BFD established local dispute-resolution committees, made up of community members, to help prevent domestic violence and resource conflicts.

BFD continues to train thousands of farmers, young people, and volunteers to foster a "Dharmacatic" society. The group will celebrate its 20th anniversary in 2010.



NANCY DIERSING PHOTO

John Halas Buoying coral reefs

AS A DIVER OFF the Florida Keys, John Halas noticed long ago that careless anchoring was damaging the area's coral reefs. So in 1981, he developed a reef-friendly method of anchoring that is now used in 50 different coastal regions.

Now a marine biologist with the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, Halas has installed mooring buoys from Malaysia to Egypt, and is working with marine experts in Vietnam and the Philippines to establish the system there.

In June, U.S.-based ocean-conservation group Oceana awarded Halas its first Ocean Heroes award for the invention and international success of the mooring buoy, which uses techniques developed for coral sampling to drill through live coral into the limestone below and attach a buoy, riser, and polypropylene line. Vessels can hitch onto these buoys, rather than dropping damaging anchors onto the reefs.



www.YesMagazine.org/halas

John Halas installs buoys in Vietnam and the Philippines



JACK MCNEEL PHOTO

Valerie Fast Horse Bringing technology to tribes

AFTER A STINT in the Army and a corporate career in computers, Valerie Fast Horse returned to her Northern Idaho Indian reservation nine years ago and brought her knowledge home to her people.

Fast Horse and her staff built a \$3.5 million broadband network from scratch, aiming to preserve Coeur d'Alene tribal history, language, and culture.

Internet technology, Fast Horse believes, can give voice to Native people and dismantle stereotypes. Rezkast.com, a website developed by Fast Horse and her staff, provides a space for Native people to express themselves while sharing ideas, language, and culture with others.

A former member of the Coeur d'Alene tribal council, Fast Horse now wants to improve democracy on the 2,000-member reservation by broadcasting council meetings online.

Fast Horse hopes to inspire a new generation: "I refuse to hear the word 'no'; instead, I hear 'not yet.'"

COMMENTARY :: Brooke Jarvis

HEALTH CARE DÉJÀ VU

See if you recognize this story: A small group of academics and analysts come together to propose reforms to the U.S. health care system.

They want to help workers, the elderly, the poor, and others whose needs aren't being met. But instead of working with those groups, they try to gain the acceptance of industries whose interests are threatened. Popular movements have no sense of ownership, doubt that the plan will work, and offer little support. The health care industry mobilizes against the plan, calling it socialist, and it never becomes law.

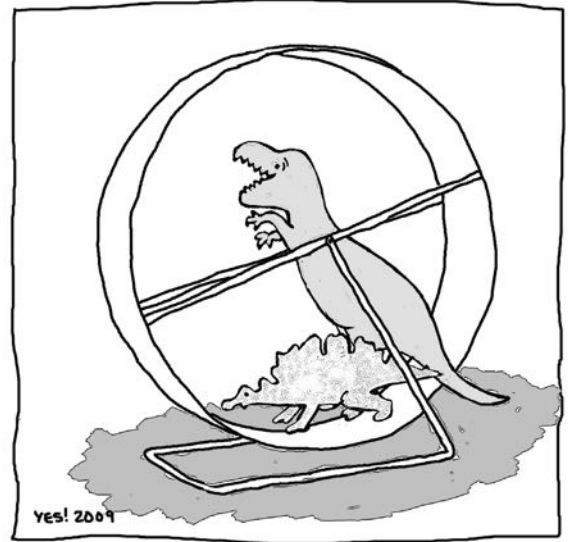
Flashing back to the Clinton bill of 1993? Predicting how the Obama plan will turn out? Actually, I was describing a proposal made in 1915. Though favorably reviewed by congressional and state commissions, the proposal's only partial legislative success was in New York, where protesting women suffragists and trade unionists had added it to their demands. Elsewhere, the reformers' emphasis on lobbying and research alone couldn't build the necessary momentum. Meanwhile, insurance companies, conservative politicians, and business and physicians' organizations derided the proposal and compared it to Bolshevism.

For the rest of the century, health care reform efforts—one led by the Committee on the Cost of Health Care in the 1920s, the short-lived inclusion of health coverage in the New Deal, the Wagner-Murray-Dingall bill of the Truman era, and, of course, the Clinton plan—followed the same storyline.

In each case, says historian Beatrix Hoffman, “the relentless opposition of medical, business, and insurance interests pushed reformers to design health care proposals around placating their opponents more than winning popular support. In turn, ordinary people had trouble rallying around complex proposals [that didn't recognize] a universal right to health care.”

The root of the problem, Hoffman says, was that the proposals came from elites who sought to compromise with interest groups, where they believed real power lay, rather than to ally with grassroots movements. Reformers gave up too soon—folding to entrenched interests before assessing the strength of their own hands. They failed to enlist the support of the majority of Americans who favored public health care, just as they failed to unite the diverse, already mobilized social movements—like those for civil and women's rights, organized labor, or, later, for AIDS and cancer funding—that considered it a worthy, but politically unlikely, goal.

This same dynamic still operates today. Reformers and



In the future, we'll power the rat race.

ANDREW SIAS

I'm tired. Humans need to quit depending on us.

ALEXI HOLFORD



www.YesMagazine.org/cartoon for more reader captions

opponents alike have treated this latest attempt as a political game—what concessions can (or should) be squeezed from powerful industries?—rather than as the righting of an injustice that concerns us all.

Our failure to reframe the issue is part of the reason that, though we've been at it since 1915, we're the only industrialized nation without universal access to health care.

But this time, we may have a chance to transform the debate. The broad, committed, grassroots movement that was missing before is beginning to take its rightful place in the equation: marching in the streets, petitioning Congress for real solutions, and mobilizing to debunk the myths spread by industry.

Still, we can only get so far unless we learn from past failures. A plan that ignores the demands of the people in favor of industry (say, by leaving a single-payer system off the table) runs the risk of losing that crucial grassroots support. The belief that health care is a human right and ought to be universally accessible in a country as rich as ours is not just a good idea in itself. It's a powerful rallying cry, necessary for achieving the sustained grassroots momentum we need to succeed this time around. **V**



Brooke Jarvis, YES! Magazine's new Web editor, blogs at yesmagazine.org/brookejarvis

www.YesMagazine.org/healthcareblog
More on the health care debate.



Native Recipe for Health

The Tohono O’odham Nation tackles diabetes with a return to desert foods

Gabriel Thompson

On a stretch of desert near the U.S.-Mexico border, the only eatery on the Tohono O’odham Indian Reservation opened last spring to a full house.

The Desert Rain Café brightened a space in a small shopping complex, drawing dozens of curious customers who filled patio tables by noon. Its menu, local by design, featured ingredients from the café’s own farm: desert squash enchiladas, mesquite-flour muffins, hummus made from tepary beans. The café recently extended its hours to take advantage of its booming business.

But the Desert Rain is more than an earnest new venture in a sleepy desert outpost. The café and its reliance on native foods is part of a community solution to a community problem: diabetes and obesity.

Members of the Tohono O’odham Nation, whose sprawling reservation begins southwest of Tucson, Arizona, and extends into Mexico, suffer from one of the highest type 2 diabetes rates ever recorded.

“The concept here is not *if* I get diabetes, but *when* I get it,” explains Christina Andrews. She estimates that,

during her tenure as executive director of the Department of Human Services (the tribe’s health department), 80 percent of patients were diabetic. “When you see all of your relatives die from the disease, it begins to seem inevitable.”

Around the country, diabetes is ravaging native communities. American Indians and Alaskan Natives are more than twice as likely to have diabetes than whites, and three times as likely to die from the disease. The death rate among the Tohono O’odham (pronounced “autumn”) is even higher—



TOCA PHOTOS

The Tohono O’odham diet traditionally came from farming in areas flooded by monsoon rains, harvesting wild foods, and hunting. This combination offered a healthy and varied diet. Today, the O’odham are bringing back traditional foods. From left: Harvesting prickly pear fruit. Digging out the agave heart. Soaking up the last of the saguaro fruit syrup.

twice that of other American Indian tribes.

But O’odham members have launched their own programs in an effort to reverse that trend. A new kidney-dialysis center has opened next to the tribal headquarters, and a grass-roots organization, Tohono O’odham Community Action (TOCA), with its café and farm, has turned to traditional foods to solve a modern problem.

THE LAND OF THE O’ODHAM is breathtaking. The 60-mile drive from Tucson to Sells, the sleepy town at the tribe’s center, passes through terrain filled with saguaro cactus, ocotillo, and mesquite. The Baboquivari Mountains—sacred to the O’odham—unfold on the left, eventually descending into vast floodplains.

The tribe has 13,000 members living in about 70 villages across the Sono-

ran Desert. Abandoned houses are abundant, and many of the buildings are tagged with gang graffiti. Signs of poverty are everywhere: The annual median income of the O’odham is about \$23,000, lower than the \$31,600 median income for Native Americans nationwide.

What might look like impossibly dry land used to sustain the O’odham; they cultivated drought-resistant crops and diverted flash floods from summer monsoons onto their fields. But when the summer rains didn’t fall, the food supply tightened, and eventually, the scientific theory goes, “thrifty” genes developed.

Efficient genes could help explain why the O’odham are so vulnerable to diabetes. “There is usually a genetic component to obesity and diabetes,” says Joan Chamberlain of the National Institutes of Health. “These same

genes that allowed people to live frugally and survive famines aren’t prepared for the massive abundance of calories and fat.”

The average weight of O’odham men in 1938, for example, was 158 pounds. By 1978, the average weight had increased to 202. According to Dr. Peter Ziegler, clinical director for the Indian Health Service (IHS) in Sells, more than half of O’odham women ages 35 and older are diabetic, with slightly lower rates for men (along with a potentially sizable percentage of people still undiagnosed).

Perhaps the most dispiriting trend is how diabetes and obesity are affecting ever-younger individuals. A 4-year-old O’odham was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, and at the IHS unit in Sells, nearly half of the child patients are obese, with another 20 percent considered overweight. >>>

Native Recipe for Health

The destruction of the O’odham food system wasn’t only about food, it was about culture—exchanging an active lifestyle and local diet for an existence reliant on paychecks and processed food. Millennia of food independence became dependence in a matter of decades.

» “All O’odham are big people,” Andrews says. “Everyone in my family is big.”

Historically, the Tohono O’odham were slender and athletic. People ran between villages to share news or simply visit. For recreation, races between villages were organized. And in order to survive in the arid terrain (Tohono O’odham means “Desert People”), they spent much of their time gathering food—from the fruit pods of the saguaro cactus to the mesquite beans that would be ground into flour.

“We’re living in a very different time period,” said Danny Lopez, a tribal elder who was born in 1936 and taught the O’odham language and history at the local community college. Lopez, who passed away in 2008, served as a link to traditional O’odham ways, teaching the youth songs and storytelling, and stressing the importance of speaking the language. “Can you believe when I was growing up,” he said, “we didn’t even have a word for diabetes?”

IN 1996, TERROL DEW JOHNSON, a tribal member and award-winning basketweaver, was teaching weaving classes in Sells when he met Tristan Reader, a former tenant organizer in Boston. Reader had started a community garden on the grounds of a reservation church where his wife had been hired as a pastor. Johnson and Reader got to talking about the many challenges facing the O’odham—a lack of activities for teens, high unemployment, the diminishing knowledge of O’odham culture and history—and decided to hold a six-week arts and culture pro-



TOCA PHOTO

Elder and youth harvesting cholla buds.

gram for at-risk youth.

Later that year, Johnson and Reader founded TOCA and spent the first several years developing its youth and culture programs.

With the input of elders like Lopez, the organization began learning more about the tribe’s history—just how drastically the O’odham diet and lifestyle had changed in recent decades, and how this change was tied to the destruction of traditional farming. TOCA took an activist approach: What could it do, today? How could it change people’s behaviors?

“We have to remember that in the last 60 years there wasn’t some dramatic change in genetic makeup,” Reader said. “It’s the diet that has changed. And blaming everything on genes can disempower people and make them feel they can’t do anything about it.”

Reader pointed to an ongoing, \$100 million genetic research project conducted by the National Institutes

of Health on the Pima Indians—who are related ancestrally to the O’odham and suffer a similar diabetes rate. A previous study compared the diabetes rates of the Pima in Mexico—who still farm and adhere to a traditional diet—with the Pima of Arizona. The Pima in Mexico had a diabetes rate less than one-fifth that of their U.S. kin.

TOCA’s task was to find a way to tackle the diabetes crisis in a way that resonated with the O’odham community and drew upon O’odham culture. In 2000, when Johnson’s grandfather passed away from complications related to diabetes, TOCA leaders had an idea.

TRADITIONALLY, THE STAPLE OF THE O’ODHAM DIET was the tepary bean, which needs little water to grow and is low on the glycemic index (which measures how fast the body converts carbohydrates to glucose), a factor that may aid in controlling diabetes. The O’odham also cultivated drought-

resistant crops like 60-day corn and squash.

Nutritional research has shown that foods of the desert, like the tepary bean and mesquite flour, played a key role in regulating blood-sugar levels and slowing sugar-absorption rates, being low in fats and simple sugars but high in soluble fiber and complex carbohydrates.

It is estimated that in 1930 the tribe grew 1.6 million pounds of tepary beans on the reservation for their consumption; by 2000, that amount had shriveled to less than 100 pounds. A number of factors contributed to the dramatic decline in the O'odham's food production. As the city of Tucson grew after World War II, it needed water, and deep wells were dug along the reservation's boundaries. The aquifers dropped, reducing river flooding and runoff needed for irrigation. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) contributed to the decline in subsistence farming by moving Indians into jobs as cotton workers off the reservation as a means of assimilation.

The destruction of the O'odham food system wasn't only about food, it was about culture—exchanging an active lifestyle and local diet for an existence reliant on paychecks and government commodities, mostly processed foods high in starch and sugars. Millennia of food independence became dependence in a matter of decades.

"They came here to civilize and educate us," Lopez, the tribal elder, said, his delivery characteristically dry and deadpan. Lopez was shipped to a BIA boarding school in Phoenix for two years as a youngster, and his family was recruited to work in the cotton fields north of the reservation. At one time, his village, appropriately called Big Fields, included 1,100 acres of cultivated crops. Today, the fields lie fallow.

JOHNSON'S GRANDFATHER FARMED A SMALL FIELD in a village near Sells until the 1970s. After the passing of

his grandfather, Johnson says, "We thought, why not plant traditional crops on it as a way to pay homage to him?" The 37-year-old Johnson, like his parents and two siblings, is diabetic. After locating the field with the help of his grandmother—the area had become overgrown with mesquite—TOCA cleared it and planted tepary beans, with seeds provided by a Tucson-based seed bank, Native Seeds/SEARCH. At the time, there was only one person on the entire reservation still growing traditional crops.

Several years later, with financial support primarily from the First Nations Development Institute and the Kellogg Foundation, TOCA leased land on an old tribal farm close to the border with Mexico and later purchased a combine, helping spur production. "If we wanted this to be more than a novelty, then we had to increase the scale," explained Reader.

Today, Johnson's older brother, Nolan, is in charge of both the 125-acre farm near the border and his grandfather's original plot of land. This year TOCA will harvest 50 tons of squash and melon, 45 tons of tepary beans, and 10 tons of 60-day corn, all of which ends up at the grocery store, at tribal festivals, and in patient meals at the IHS hospital. TOCA hopes to partner with schools on the reservation and serve traditional foods to students.

"At school, most of the kids are eating two free meals a day through federal programs, heat-and-serve stuff from Sysco," said Reader. "So it doesn't make a whole lot of sense to tell people to eat right, and then give kids who are prone to diabetes a breakfast of waffles and maple syrup. We need a complete systems change."

WITH PRODUCTION developing rapidly, TOCA's next task is to overcome the same barriers to healthy eating that poor people face across the country. Unhealthy food is inexpensive and quick.

Each year, TOCA gives away 2,500 pounds of tepary beans, and

expanded production has allowed it to drop prices. Two years ago, for instance, tepary beans sold for \$3 a pound; a customer can now buy a pound for \$1.75.

A second barrier to eating traditional foods, identified through a 2002 survey of residents, is preparation. "If it takes four hours to cook the beans, and you're working all day, what are you going to do?" asked Reader. "We need to make it convenient." The Desert Rain Café, in the same shopping complex as the grocery store, is one way to address the problem.

TOCA's message: When respected and cultivated, the land considered sacred to the O'odham created healthy O'odham. TOCA pushes this message to the younger generation, planting school gardens, and organizing traditional outings to gather the saguaro fruit and other native plants.

"We meet with kids and ask them about traditional O'odham foods," said Johnson. "And they start talking about things like fry bread." Fry bread is made from flour, salt, and lard; Indians adopted the unhealthy concoction with the introduction of government commodities. "We have to re-educate people and tell them that fry bread isn't an O'odham tradition. We need to go back even further."

TOCA members know that the destruction of O'odham culture can't be reversed quickly with a new pill or program: That's the Western way, the model of hollow promises and quick fixes. After a century of adopting the prescriptions of others, the results have been disastrous. New innovations may have their place, but nothing can substitute for historical memory. 📌



Gabriel Thompson is the author of *There's No José Here: Following the Hidden Lives of Mexican Immigrants and Calling All Radicals: How Grassroots Organizers Can Save Our Democracy*.



www.YesMagazine.org/nativediet

Watch how cultural renewal improves health



www.YesMagazine.org/tohono

Harvesting the Sonoran Desert

Percentage of American LGBT students who report being verbally harassed: **86.2**

Percentage of American students who periodically skip school: **5.5**

Percentage of LGBT students who skip school due to feeling unsafe: **32.7**

Grade point average of LGBT students frequently harassed: **2.4**

Grade point average of LGBT students who know at least six supportive educators: **2.9**¹

Percentage of land protected worldwide as parks: **12.1**

Percentage of ocean designated as marine protected areas: **0.7**²

Percentage of increase of species in marine protected areas: **21**³

Percentage of life-insurance agencies rated “excellent” by raters paid by the insurance company: **47–81**

Percentage rated “excellent” when the rater was not paid by the insurance company: **11**⁴

Number of Florida deaths in 2007 related to abuse of prescription drugs: **2,382**

Number of Florida deaths in 2007 related to all methamphetamines: **989**

Number of Florida deaths in 2007 related to the abuse of marijuana: **0**⁵

Number of American Indians who fought in WWI (1914 to 1918) as volunteers: **6,000**

Year American Indians were granted U.S. citizenship: **1924**

Number of American Indians who served in the Vietnam War (which ended in 1975): **41,500**⁶

Year American Indians were granted religious freedom: **1978**⁷

Percentage of Americans who say they have no religious affiliation: **30–40**⁸

Percentage of Americans who described themselves as Christian in 1990: **86**

Percentage in 2008: **76**⁹

Amount a private company paid to take over Chicago’s municipal parking: **\$1.157 billion**

Number of years the company controls parking rates and collects the revenue: **75**

Income the municipal parking system will generate during those 75 years: **\$2.13 billion**¹⁰

Age of oldest human being on record, Jeanne Calment (1875-1997): **122**¹¹

Age of longest-lived mollusk on record, a quahog clam: **400+**¹²

Approximate age of Methuselah Pine, the world’s oldest-known living tree: **4,600+**¹³

Complete citations at www.yesmagazine.org/ptc

1. Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, October 8, 2008 **2.** Conservation Letters, October 1, 2008 **3.** The Partnership for Interdisciplinary Studies, 2007 **4.** Consumer Reports Money Adviser, May 2009 **5.** New York Times, June 14, 2008 **6.** Bureau of Indian Affairs, July 1, 2009 **7.** American Indian Religious Freedom Act Report, P.L. 95-341, August 1979 **8.** ABC News, May 6, 2009 **9.** ABC News, March 9, 2009 **10.** Chicago Inspector General’s Office, June 6, 2009 **11.** The New York Times, August 5, 1997 **12.** School of Ocean Studies, College of Natural Sciences, Bangor University, August 2008 **13.** The New York Times, June 17, 2003

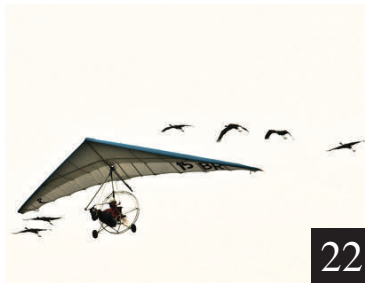
Learn as You Go

Our schools aren't giving us the tools we need to face the unprecedented demands of our time. Here's how we can learn the skills to take on environmental and economic challenges, build resilient communities, and create good lives for ourselves and our loved ones.



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Take Back Your Education. Tests and grades don't really matter, says John Taylor Gatto. Experiences do.



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What You Might Not Have Learned Yet. The 12 capacities of highly educated people.



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Teaching Freedom. At 16, Julia Putnam met the mentors who would teach her to turn her love of Detroit into action.



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Outside the Classroom. Kids who get involved in their communities do better on tests—and in the real world.



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Question Authority. The youth of Hampton, Virginia, have an official role in city government: Ask hard questions.



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Trading Up. Old-style apprenticeships prepare workers of all ages for jobs in the green economy.

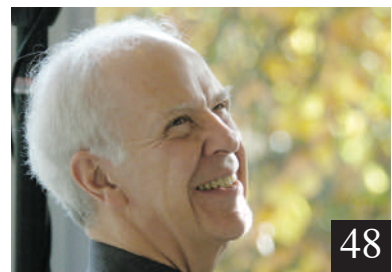
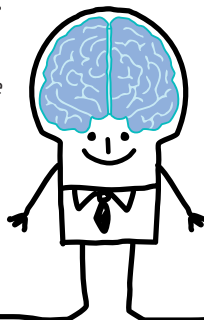


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Healing Behind Bars. Young inmates gain respect and dignity by expressing themselves through poetry.

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Test Yourself. Find out how you "know" things, and see what you can learn.



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Parker J. Palmer. When you show up to work with your values intact, you can be a powerful force for change.

More and more people across America are waking up to the mismatch between what is taught in schools and what common sense tells us we need to know.

WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT?

Take Back Your Education

John Taylor Gatto

Nobody *gives* you an education. If you want one, you have to take it.

Only you can educate you—and you can't do it by memorizing. You have to find out who you are by experience and by risk-taking, then pursue your own nature intensely. School routines are set up to discourage you from self-discovery. People who know who they are make trouble for schools.

To know yourself, you have to keep track of your random choices, figure out your patterns, and use this knowledge to dominate your own mind. It's the only way that free will can grow. If you avoid this, other minds will manipulate and control you lifelong.

One method people use to find out who they are becoming, before others do, is to keep a journal, where they log what attracts their attention, along with some commentary. In this way, you get to listen to yourself instead of listening only to others.

Another path to self-discovery that seems to have atrophied through schooling lies in finding a mentor. People aren't the only mentors. Books can serve as mentors if you learn to read intensely, with every sense alert to nuances. Books can change your life, as mentors do.

I experienced precious little of such thinking in 30 years of teaching in the public junior high schools of Manhattan's ultra-progressive Upper West Side. I was by turns amused, disgusted, and disbelieving when confronted with the curriculum—endless drills of fractions and decimals, reading assignments of science fiction, Jack London, and one or two Shakespeare plays for which the language had been simplified. The strategy was to kill time and stave off the worst kinds of boredom that can lead to trouble—the trouble that comes from being made aware that you are trapped in irrelevancy and powerless to escape.

Institutionalized schooling, I gradually realized, is about obedience in exchange for favors and advantages: Sit where I tell you, speak when I allow it, memorize what I've told you to memorize. Do these things, and I'll take care to put you above your classmates.

Wouldn't you think everyone could figure out that school "achievement tests" measure no achievement that common sense would recognize? The surrender required of students meets the primary duty of bureaucratic establishment: to protect established order. >>

13 Radical Acts of Education




PAUL DUNN FOR YES! MAGAZINE

No. 1

Roadtrip Nation Takes the Route Less Traveled

It all started when four restless college grads realized school hadn't led them to a career they cared about. One had trained to be a doctor, two to be business consultants, and one had no idea—but all knew there were more possibilities. So they bought a bus and drove around the country, interviewing people whose careers had taken inspiring turns—an environmental activist, a symphony conductor, a fisherman, a cartoonist. Their journey became a documentary film, then a television series, then an organization that sends groups of young people out on the road every year to find out how people choose careers they're passionate about.

This summer, three roadtrippers visited the YES! office and interviewed Executive Editor Sarah van Gelder. "We're talking with people who are taking the unconventional route," said Calvin Stalvig (pictured left), 22, a recent fine arts grad from Wisconsin. "Their stories are like a call to arms. Now I need to travel and find my passions and a community I can dedicate myself to." —Madeline Ostrander


[www.YesMagazine.org/
roadtripnation](http://www.YesMagazine.org/roadtripnation)
Let Roadtrip Nation
open your eyes

» It wasn't always this way. Classical schooling—the kind I was lucky enough to have growing up—teaches independent thought, appreciation for great works, and an experience of the world not found within the confines of a classroom. It was an education that is missing in public schools today but still exists in many private schools—and can for you and your children, too, if you take time to learn how to learn.

On the Wrong Side of the Tracks

This fall, a documentary film will be released by a resident of my hometown of Monongahela, Pennsylvania. Laura Magone's film, "One Extraordinary Street," centers on a two-mile-long road that parallels polluted Pigeon Creek. Park Avenue, as it's called, is on the wrong side of the tracks in this little-known coal-mining burg of 4,500 souls.

So far Park Avenue has produced an Army chief of staff, the founder of the Disney Channel, the inventor of the Nerf football, the only professional baseball player to ever strike out all 27 enemy batsmen in a nine-inning game, a winner of the National Book Award, a respected cardiologist, Hall of Fame quarterback Joe Montana, and the writer whose words you're reading.

Did the education Monongahela offered make all these miracles possible? I don't know. It was an education filled with hands-on experience, including cooking the school meals, serving them individually (not cafeteria-style) on tablecloths, and cleaning up afterward. Students handled the daily maintenance, including basic repairs. If you weren't earning money and adding value to the town by the age of seven, you were considered a jerk. I swept out a printing office daily, sold newspapers, shoveled snow, cut grass, and sold lemonade.

Classical schooling isn't psychologically driven. The ancient Greeks discovered thousands of years ago that rules and ironclad procedures, when taken too seriously, burn out imagination, stifle courage, and wipe the leadership

clean of resourcefulness. Greek education was much more like play, with studies undertaken for their own sake, to satisfy curiosity. It assumed that sane children want to grow up and recognized that childhood ends much earlier than modern society typically allows.

We read Caesar's *Gallic Wars*—in translation between fifth and seventh grades and, for those who wanted, in Latin in ninth and tenth grades. Caesar was offered to us not as some historical relic but as a workshop in dividing and conquering superior enemies. We read *The Odyssey* as an aid to thinking about the role of family in a good life, as the beating heart of meaning.

Monongahela's education integrated students, from first grade on, into the intimate life and culture of the town. Its classrooms were free of the familiar tools of official pedagogy—dumbed-down textbooks, massively irrelevant standardized tests, insanely slowed-down sequences. It was an education rich in relationships, tradition, and respect for the best that's been written. It was a growing-up that demanded real achievement.

The admissions director at Harvard College told *The New York Times* a few years ago that Harvard admits only students with a record of distinctive accomplishment. I instantly thought of the Orwellian newspeak at my own Manhattan school where achievement tests were the order of the day. What achievement? Like the noisy royalty who intimidated Alice until her head cleared and she realized they were only a pack of cards, school achievement is just a pack of words.

A Deliberate Saboteur

As a schoolteacher, I was determined to act as a deliberate saboteur, and so for 30 years I woke up committed to making the system hurt in some small way and to changing the destiny of children in my orbit in a large way.

Without the eclectic grounding in classical training that I had partially absorbed, neither goal would have been possible. I set out to use

the classical emphasis on qualities and specific powers. I collected from every kid a list of three powers they felt they already possessed and three weaknesses they might like to remedy in the course of the school year. I pledged to them that I'd do my level best inside the limitations the institution imposed to make time, advice, and support available toward everyone's private goals. There would be group lessons as worthwhile as I could come up with, but my priorities were the opportunities outside the room, outside the school, even outside the city, to strengthen a power or work on a weakness.

I let a 13-year-old boy who dreamed of being a comic-book writer spend a week in the public library—with the assistance of the librarian—to learn the tricks of graphic storytelling. I sent a shy 13-year-old girl in the company of a loudmouth classmate to the state capitol—she to speak to her local legislator, he to teach her how to be fearless. Today, that shy girl is a trial attorney.

If you understand where a kid wants to go—the kid has to understand that first—it isn't hard to devise exercises, complete with academics, that can take them there.

But school often acts as an obstacle to success. To go from the confinement of early childhood to the confinement of the classroom to the confinement of homework, working to amass a record entitling you to a "good" college, where the radical reduction of your spirit will continue, isn't likely to build character or prepare you for a good life.

I quit teaching in 1991 and set out to discover where this destructive institution had come from, why it had taken the shape it had, how it managed to beat back its many critics for a century while growing bigger and more intrusive, and what we might do about it.

School does exactly what it was created to do: It solves, or at least mitigates, the problem of a restless, ambitious labor pool, so deadly for

Things I Want to Learn ...

From contributing editor Frances Moore Lappé:

To conceive and share an “ecology of democracy”—integrating our knowledge of ecology and human nature to ignite more effective hope-in-action.

To tap dance better.

To be in such a place of perpetual gratitude that I can embrace death when it comes.

From board member Puanani Burgess:

How and why shoyu was invented. The history of food invention and human curiosity.

How the words that I type on this computer get to you.

Is God necessary?

From contributing editor Carol Estes:

To dance the Lindy Hop.

To find my way through the wilderness with map and compass.

A system for managing multiple projects at the same time.

What it's like to be incredibly fit.

capitalist economies; and it confronts democracy's other deadly problem—that ordinary people might one day learn to un-divide themselves, band together in the common interest, and take control of the institutions that shape their lives.

The present system of institutionalized schooling is a product of two or three centuries of economic and political thinking that spread primarily from a militaristic state in the disunited Germanies known as Prussia. That philosophy destroyed classical training for the common people, reserving it for those who were expected to become leaders. Education, in the words of famous economists (such as William Playfair), captains of industry (Andrew Carnegie), and even a man who would be president (Woodrow Wilson), was a means of keeping the middle and lower classes in line and of keeping the engines of capitalism running.

In a 1909 address to New York City teachers, Wilson, then president of Princeton University, said, “We want one class of persons to have a liberal education, and we want another class of persons, a very much larger class of necessity to forgo the privilege of a liberal education.”

My job isn't to indict Woodrow or anyone else, only to show you how inevitable the schools you hate must be in the economy and social order we're stuck with. Liberal education served the ancient Greeks well until they got too rich to allow it, just as it served America the same way until we got too rich to allow it.

What Can You Do About All This? A lot.

You can make the system an offer it can't refuse by doing small things, individually.

You can publicly oppose—in writing, in speech, in actions—anything that will perpetuate the institution as it is. The accumulated weight of your resistance and disapproval, together with that of thousands more, will erode the energy of any bureaucracy.

You can calmly refuse to take standardized tests. Follow the lead of Melville's moral genius in *Bartleby, the Scrivener*, and ask everyone, politely, to write: “I prefer not to take this test” on the face of the test packet.

You can, of course, homeschool or unschool. You can inform your kids that bad grades won't hurt them at all in life, if they actually learn to master valuable skills and put them on offer

to the world at large. And you can begin to free yourself from the conditioned fear that not being accepted at a “good” college will preclude you from a comfortable life. If the lack of a college degree didn't stop Steve Jobs (Apple), Bill Gates (Microsoft), Michael Dell (Dell Computer), Larry Ellison (Oracle), Ingvar Kamprad (IKEA), Warren Avis (Avis Rent-a-Car), Ted Turner (CNN), and so many others, then it shouldn't be too hard for you to see that you've been bamboozled, flummoxed, played for a sap by the propaganda mills of schooling. Get rid of your assumptions.

If you are interested in education, I've tried to show you a little about how that's done, and I have faith you can learn the rest on your own. Schooling operates out of an assumption that ordinary people are biologically or psychologically or politically inferior; education assumes that individuals are sovereign spirits. Societies that don't know that need to be changed or broken.

Once you take responsibility for your own education, you'll join a growing army of men and women all across America who are waking up to the mismatch schools inflict on the young—a mismatch between what common sense tells you they'll need to know, and what is actually taught. You'll have the exquisite luxury of being able to adapt to conditions, to opportunities, to the particular spirits of your kids. With you as educational czar or zarina, feedback becomes your friend and guide.

I've traveled 3 million miles to every corner of this country and 12 others, and believe me, people everywhere are gradually waking up and striking out in new directions. Don't wait for the government to say it's OK, just come on in—the water's fine.



John Taylor Gatto was a New York State Teacher of the Year. An advocate for school reform, Gatto's books include *Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling* and *Weapons of Mass Instruction*.

Higher Education

12 Things You Might Not Have Learned in the Classroom

Really educated people ...

I + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5 + 6 +

1. Establish an individual set of values but recognize those of the surrounding community and of the various cultures of the world.

2. Explore their own ancestry, culture, and place.

3. Are comfortable being alone, yet understand dynamics between people and form healthy relationships.

4. Accept mortality, knowing that every choice affects the generations to come.

5. Create new things and find new experiences.

6. Think for themselves; observe, analyze, and discover truth without relying on the opinions of others.



- | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---|--|---|--|---|--|---|--|---|---|
| 7 | + | 8 | + | 9 | + | 10 | + | 11 | + | 12 |
| Favor love, curiosity, reverence, and empathy rather than material wealth. | | Choose a vocation that contributes to the common good. | | Enjoy a variety of new places and experiences but identify and cherish a place to call home. | | Express their own voice with confidence. | | Add value to every encounter and every group of which they are a part. | | Always ask: "Who am I? Where are my limits? What are my possibilities?" |

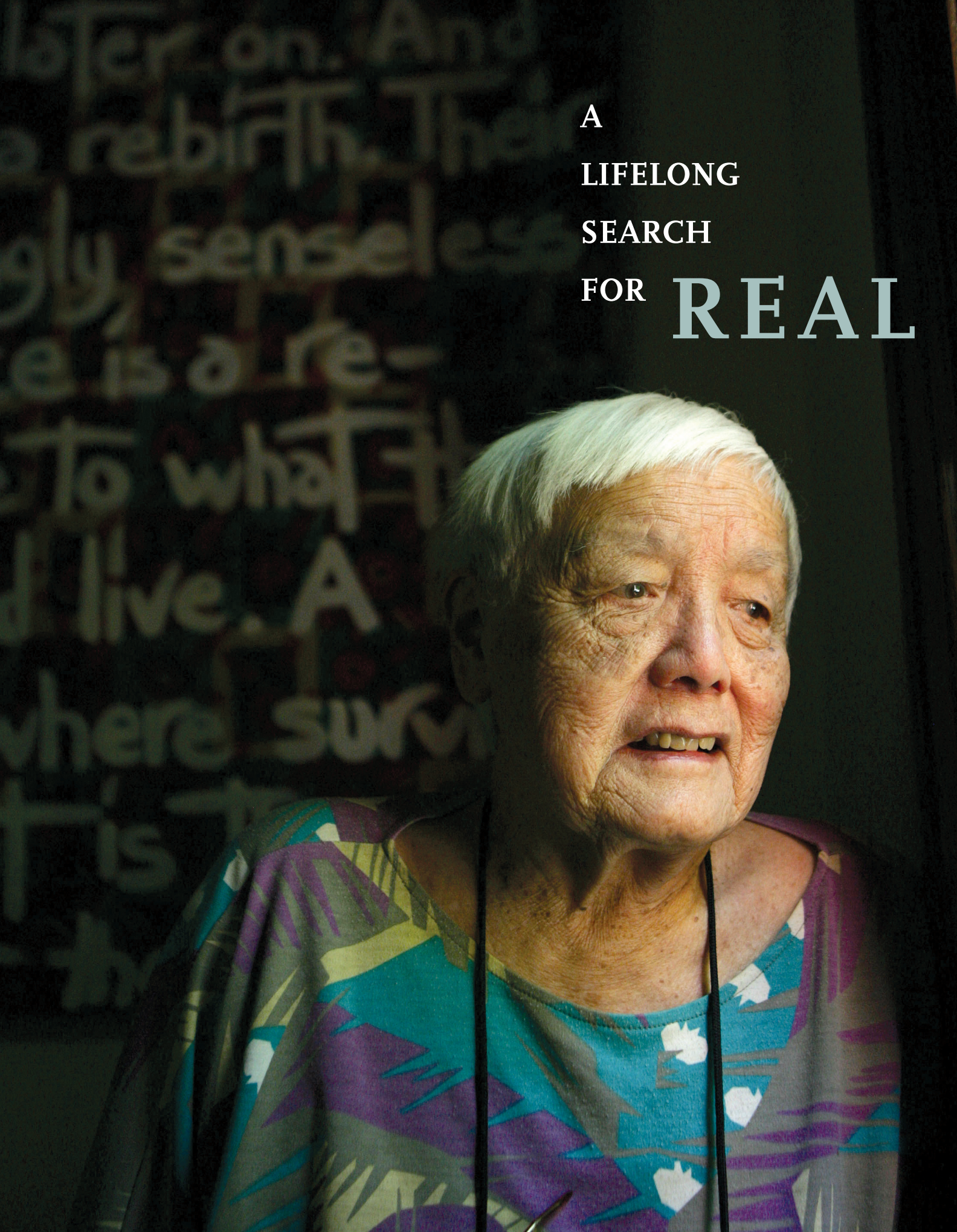


YOU WON'T FIND "takes honors classes," "gets good grades," or "attends only Ivy League schools" on John Taylor Gatto's list of qualities of an educated person. Gatto taught in New York City schools for 30 years and was named New York State's Teacher of the Year, but his experiences convinced him that what students need is less time in classrooms and more time out in the world. Building character and community, Gatto argues, is more valuable than learning from tired textbooks and rigid lesson plans. This list is adapted from his latest book, *Weapons of Mass Instruction* (New Society Publishers, 2009).

LUIGI MASELLA PHOTO, FLICKR.COM/PHOTOS/LUMASE

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A
LIFELONG
SEARCH
FOR **REAL**



Grace Lee and Jimmy Boggs brought people together to rebuild inner-city Detroit and, in the process, to teach the things you can't learn in a classroom. At 94, Grace is still at it. She and Julia Putnam reflect on Detroit Summer—where Julia found the lessons she longed for.

EDUCATION

Julia Putnam

My education began in 1992, although I'd already finished my sophomore year at the best high school in Detroit. I was a successful student by the standards of my family and my teachers—I had certainly learned how to get good grades. But I was 16, and I felt stuck. Stuck in a city that everyone seemed to agree had reached its heyday and was now dead—no hope of ever having beauty or vitality or relevance again. Stuck in a high school that felt empty and soulless.

Then, my friend, Mary, excitedly met me in the cafeteria.

“Did you see the couple who were here today?”

“No. What couple?”

“An Asian lady, Grace Boggs, and her husband. He was black. They were visiting classes. They started this program called Detroit Summer. You should check it out.”

Mary shoved a flier in my hand. And there it was. The call to Detroit Summer. And my real education began.

Where Detroit Summer Came From

Detroit Summer was Jimmy and Grace Boggs' response to Mayor Coleman Young's idea that casinos would replace Detroit's disappearing auto industry jobs and solve all the city's problems. Jimmy and Grace, longtime activists, knew that such a quick fix would not rejuvenate Detroit and, especially, would not engage its young people, who were dropping out of school in appalling numbers. They recalled how sending young people south for Mississippi Summer re-energized the civil rights movement. Detroit Summer was their way of recreating that energy in the inner city.

Jimmy and Grace realized that young people needed a

chance to make a difference in their city. They had long been active in the Black Power movement in inner-city Detroit. Grace says, “I identified more with Malcolm X than with Martin Luther King, Jr., and like most Black Power Activists, I viewed King's ideas of nonviolence and beloved community as somewhat naïve and sentimental.”

But she found herself revisiting the words of King as he struggled with what he saw in the cities he visited after rebellions erupted in the streets. When I met with her recently, Grace said, “That's why my opening ceremony speech at the first Detroit Summer centered on his response to these rebellions. He proposed that young people ‘in our dying cities’ needed programs that were designed to change themselves and their society.” Grace and Jimmy's experience in Detroit had led them to the same conclusion.

“We wanted to engage young people in community-building activities: planting community gardens, recycling waste, organizing neighborhood arts and health festivals, rehabbing houses, painting public murals,” Grace says. “Encouraging them to exercise their Soul Power would get their cognitive juices flowing. Learning would come from practice, which has always been the best way to learn.”

My First Detroit Summer—and Beyond

The flier my friend handed me sounded as if someone had read my mind. It spoke of the crisis in Detroit: disappearing factory jobs, blight, hopelessness, helplessness. All the stuff I'd heard time and again. But this time, there was more. Just as young people made the difference in the civil rights movement, the flier said, so too would young people be the difference in Detroit. A movement was beginning, it said, a movement to rebuild, revitalize, and respirit Detroit from the ground up.

There are very few things I have been so sure of as knowing that I would be a part of Detroit Summer. It was a relief and >>

At 94, Grace Lee Boggs still teaches freedom—speaking, writing prolifically, and conducting seminars at the Boggs Center.

ERIC SEALS FOR YES! MAGAZINE



Julia Putnam, left, was the first youth volunteer to sign up for the first Detroit Summer in 1992. She met with Grace Lee Boggs recently to talk about how Detroit Summer changed her life and those of many young volunteers.

ERIC SEALS FOR YES! MAGAZINE

» joy to know there was someone out there who believed as I believed. I was not alone.

I took the bus to the First Unitarian Universalist Church on the corner of Forest and Cass on the day of registration. The opening ceremony was in the church basement, and a huge banner hung inside with a paint can drawn in as the “O” in Detroit and a hammer as the “T.”

That’s where I met Jimmy Boggs. He was old but handsome—regal. I had to listen closely to understand his Alabama accent. He punctuated his sentences with a high-pitched “OK?” He told his audience of volunteers that young people today wanted to get paid to go to the bathroom. But if we were going to make a difference, it would have to be about more than money. He said that’s why he was so proud of us for showing up to volunteer our time to make a difference in the city. Because his generation was tired, and he was depending on us to take our turn. OK?

I was moved, touched that this man who knew nothing about me was proud of me. Had I been that starved for this kind of praise? I think so. My family praised me, but it was for things I was supposed to do—I was obedient, didn’t cause trouble, and my grades were fine. For that, my family was proud, appreciative. Jimmy was proud of me for going beyond that. He was proud because I cared about something other than myself. I’d never even thought to give myself credit for that. I was ready to put my time and energy toward a Detroit that I could be proud to live in.

Grace taught me how to put my intellect into that endeavor. I met her a few days later, during lunch. Grace pulled up a chair, sat directly across from me, and leaned in close. She locked her eyes on me, and asked me a question. I don’t remember what it was. There have been many over the years. It was undoubtedly a big one, something philosophical and impossible to answer easily: What do you think should be

done about gang violence? Why do you think young people feel alienated in school? What does God look like?

I had to resist the urge to look over my shoulder. What did I think? No adult had ever asked. Certainly not with this kind of intensity and gleeful expectation, as if my opinion mattered, and with the assumption that I'd have an intelligent response.

After I got over the shock and shared my opinion, Grace did what I've seen her do a thousand times to hundreds of young people. She listened intently. She grinned delightedly, touched my knee, got up and moved on to the next conversation. Grace is not necessarily interested in the right answer—she's interested in the ideas. She delights in young people grappling with the tough questions. She watches the process of movement building as it is handed down from generation to generation and evolves over time. Grace, at 94, says, "I've lived long enough to watch evolution happen."

In Detroit Summer, I was surrounded by adults who not only asked me real questions, but took time to answer mine. Grace gave everything historical context, helping us understand how Detroit had evolved into the place it was—how the industrial period and the post-industrial period affected the daily lives of people in the city.

The other volunteers not only taught me skills, but also challenged my assumptions. Christopher Shein, a super-tall, surfer-dude-accented Californian—not a common sight in Detroit—taught me to dig my hands into compost and feel the heat of decay that would nurture our garden.

Ray Jimenez, an ex-gang member from Fresno, came the first year. At one dinner, he shared with me and a few others his fear of coming to Detroit. We described our fear upon hearing that we'd be working with ex-gang members. Then we all laughed. How stupid, we realized, the fears that we'd been fed that kept us divided, separated, hostile.

Like Carrie, who went to a Catholic high school with Anne Rashid. Anne lived in Detroit, but Carrie lived in a wealthy suburb, and she was terrified her parents would find out that, instead of hanging out safely at Anne's house, she was driving to the east side to paint houses and fight neighborhood blight. Part of cleanup was to inspect Carrie to make sure she had no obvious stray paint on her.

I was raised to believe that suburbanites feared and hated me. They thought I was poor and black and scary. It was healing to see that there were people like Carrie who risked disapproval (and sure punishment) because they wanted to join in rebuilding Detroit. There were so many conversations and conflicts and triumphs that happened over the course of that summer and the summers that followed, opening my mind

to what it meant to live in a community that was diverse in class, race, gender, age, and abilities. It wasn't always easy and it wasn't always fun, but it always produced growth and a kind of learning I would never get in school.

The learning and growth wasn't just for the young people. Grace says, "It felt expansive to be around young people who were not bogged down by old ideas. It was an extraordinary mix of people from all over."

We, as young people, were not just serving the community. The community was also serving us. Volunteers had long, important conversations with each other, often over lunches that the adults made so we could concentrate on our work revitalizing the community. Many of the young volunteers didn't drive, but adults 30 to 40 years our senior could be counted on to drive us to and from events. We were serving one another. And this, I learned, is what community means.

Forgetting Detroit Summer

At age 19, I became Detroit Summer's youth coordinator, and I've worked with young people ever since. I became a teacher when I was 23 because I believed that I could take my Detroit Summer experience into the classroom and use it to help young people struggle with the big questions.

There were two main reasons I was good at teaching. First, I remembered, in great detail, what it felt like to be a powerless student, and that helped me to connect with the most disconnected child. Second, I modeled my interactions with young people on Jimmy and Grace and on my Detroit Summer experience. Like them, I tried to ask the real questions, not condescend or coddle. And, like them, I believed that young people could be of use—not when they got older or when they got a job, but right now.

And I was of use as a teacher. For a time. But teaching under the restrictions of the existing system began to get to me. No matter how much you resist, there is the prevailing, nagging notion that teachers know best, that we are there to impart wisdom that the kids should feel privileged to receive.

I realized I'd lost my way when I found myself thinking vicious thoughts about a student who refused to read. I had tried everything and I was afraid that his poor performance would reflect badly on my teaching. I had given up and turned against him—he was lazy and apathetic and doomed. I'd given up on a kid who was only 13. I needed a break.

I'd started to use only the lines I'd been given in my education training and was trying to get my students to read them aloud along with me. I had forgotten my own high school experience and that moment when my real education began.



I had to remember that a real education is not solely about jobs and an increase in class status. I had to remember Jimmy's idea that, "The chief task of human beings was the struggle for human relations rather than for material goods."

» If I wanted to teach again to my own standards, I had to remember the lessons of Detroit Summer—to relearn as an adult those things that meant so much to me as a teenager. I had to remember that a real education is not about jobs and an increase in class status. I had to remember Jimmy's idea that, "The chief task of human beings is the struggle for human relations rather than for material goods."

I had to remember Grace's words that "learning must be related to the daily lives of children. It is not something you can make people do in their heads with the perspective that, eventually, they will get a good job and make a lot of money."

The Legacy of Detroit Summer

Just as I was feeling ready to return to teaching, the Boggs Center began to host Freedom School meetings. By then, Detroit Summer no longer existed in its original form. It carries on in other venues, including the Detroit Summer Live Arts Media Project, which involves young people in collecting oral history and in activism through media; the Boggs Center to Nurture Community Leadership, an organization created to promote and continue the work of Jimmy and Grace Lee Boggs; and Detroit: City of Hope, an organization that builds connections among nonprofit organizations and activists in their work to rebuild Detroit.

The Freedom School meetings were in response to the crisis in the Detroit public schools. At those meetings, I met other educators and community members who shared my struggle to create in schools the educational experience that I had in Detroit Summer. Since May 2008, a diverse group of parents, educators, community members, and residents of Detroit have worked on starting the Boggs Educational Center, a school dedicated to the transformative educational experience that King proposed before he died and that Jimmy and Grace have modeled in their lives.

The school will be rooted in the Hope District, on the east side of Detroit. The school's philosophy is centered on Grace's position that children are most intellectually and physically engaged when they are involved in the struggle to revitalize their community. Our mission is to nurture creative critical thinkers who employ multiple literacies and contribute to their surrounding communities.

We challenge the notion that there is only one path to suc-

cess, and that this path necessitates being stuck in a classroom for 12 years. We believe that there are as many paths to success as there are children in a room, and that success comes from having a sense of self and a sense of purpose. We believe education is about becoming our best, most human selves.

The Boggs Educational Center will demonstrate Grace's vision of a new kind of education where "much more learning will take place outside school walls. Inside, an integral part of the educational process will be the design and operation of the building."

We will provide a response to Grace's observation that "the reason why so many young people drop out from inner-city schools is because they are voting with their feet against an educational system that sorts, tracks, tests, and rejects or certifies them like products of a factory. They are crying out for another kind of education that gives them opportunities to exercise their creative energies because it values them as whole human beings."

Instead of the message that children are merely empty vessels that must be filled with facts, the community of the Boggs Education Center will tell our children: You are of use, you are important, we need you. You can learn anything you need in order to be the best person you can. Since we are all counting on you for our very existence, we need you to be your best self—to be healthy and kind and committed. And you can do it. We are here to support you. We love you.

These are the words I know children long to hear. They are the words I heard from Grace and Jimmy in 1992 and that, with the wisdom of her 94 years, Grace still speaks today. They are the words I heard from every adult in Detroit Summer. They are the words I had to remember to say to my students before I could teach again.

They can be hard words to say. Especially to sullen teens who put on a mask of indifference and defiance, to teens who seem so far gone that they might cuss you out at your very attempt to love them. But when we say them, we are being our best selves, and we are inviting the best self of the person in front of us. Our success is related directly to our interconnectedness, and it is this idea that education should be designed around. ♣

Julia Putnam lives in Detroit with her husband and two children. Currently, she's developing a school inspired by the ideas of Jimmy and Grace Lee Boggs.

www.YesMagazine.org/boggs for articles by Grace Lee Boggs

No. 2

Radical Acts of Education



Above: New Orleans hurricane cleanup
Right: Diana Morales-Manley, self-portrait



DIANA MORALES-MANLEY PHOTOS

Kids Take Charge of School

Fifteen-year-old Diana Morales-Manley struggled with reading when she was a young child. Instead of lowering her grades or holding her back, the **ALBANY FREE SCHOOL** let her pursue a budding fascination with photography. “Even though I wasn’t good at reading, I enjoyed looking at photos in books,” she says. She improved her reading by sounding out words in photo captions and looking for context clues in the images.

In seventh grade, she got a first-hand lesson on Hurricane Katrina when she traveled to New Orleans (shown above) and photographed people struggling to rebuild and help one another. The following year, Morales-Manley used her camera to document a class trip to Puerto Rico that included Deirdre Kelly, the Free School cook pictured on our cover, and studied Spanish and politics with locals who were immersed in a campaign to stop the U.S. military from testing bombs on Vieques Island.

Students at the Albany Free School and its sister school for upper grades, **HARRIET TUBMAN DEMOCRATIC SCHOOL**, decide how and what to learn. The schools believe kids learn what they need if given time, space, and access to mentors. They might strengthen language skills by staging a play, or get a social studies lesson by apprenticing with an attorney. Or they might organize a regular history class, with exams and homework. Above all, kids learn “how to be in control of their lives and solve their own problems,” says Free School teacher Bhawin Suchak.

—Madeline Ostrander



CHRISSE ORR PHOTO

No. 3

Radical Acts of Education

Santa Fe Tells Its Stories

You can glimpse the lives of Santa Fe youths in public art displays around the city. The **ACADEMY FOR THE LOVE OF LEARNING** created *El Otro Lado* (“the other side” in Spanish), a citywide public art project that encourages people to learn about one another.

Through the year-old project, local kids turn their heritage stories and immigration experiences into writing, paintings, photographs, and journals. Displays scattered in public places around Santa Fe transform feelings of alienation into feelings of community.

The artwork above is called “Carlos,” with images by Carlos Mora and Chrissie Orr, and is installed at Genoveva Chavez Community Center in Santa Fe. The project incorporates audio narratives of the artists’ personal stories. Here is Mora’s narrative: “I was born in Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic, an island in the Caribbean. I currently live in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Home to me is within myself ... I carry home with me wherever I go, wherever I am ... Home is Santa Fe and it is also the Dominican Republic.” Check out aloveoflearning.org. —Heather Purser

Life's Best Lessons are Outside the Classroom

Students find real-world solutions when they **LEARN FROM THEIR COMMUNITY**, not just their textbooks.

Daniel Fireside

Jaydon Serrano pushes back and forth in his swivel chair, his back against a wall of blinking sound equipment. "I'm a little nervous and excited," says the second-grader.

"You'll do great," says his mom, Ida Martinez.

It's his turn to rehearse now, and the teacher asks him to read from the script in his hand. It's a description of his class trip to an arts education center in Villa Victoria, a sprawling public housing complex in Boston's South End, filled mostly with Puerto Rican residents, including many of Jaydon's classmates. His delivery is smooth; He's been practicing for a while, but one word trips him up. "What does 'affordable' mean?" he asks his mom. Ida helps him sound it out and defines it. "I didn't used to know that word, but now I do," he says with satisfaction.

In a short while, Jaydon and four of his classmates will enter a sound booth, don headphones, and speak into microphones larger than their hands. They are inside the studio of WBUR, Boston's main NPR station. Across the thick pane of glass in the engineering room, they are watched by parents (looking proud, but almost as nervous as the kids), teachers, and well-wishers.

It's an important moment for all of them. It's the culmination of a lot of work by the second-grade class and

teachers, but it's also another success for an inner-city public school that's bucking the trend of high drop-out rates, tuned-out kids, and dispirited teachers.

The second-graders are students at Young Achievers Science and Mathematics Pilot School on the south side of Boston. It's not an exclusive school. Two-thirds of its students receive free or reduced-priced lunches; two-thirds are African-American, one-fifth Latino, and the remainder white, Native American, and Asian. Its curriculum isn't focused on "teaching to the test," though the school's test scores consistently exceed the district's average pass rates for math and English. The school succeeds by plugging the kids into the world around them—giving them a stake in every part of their community from neighborhood housing to food, recycling, and local government.

"Our success is based on a vision of education where kids learn by doing real things within the world around them and developing relationships with the assets within the community in which they live," says Jinny Chalmers, principal of Young Achievers for the last 12 years. It's dinner time, and Chalmers scoops out pasta for the anxious kids and parents as they wait their turns in the recording booth. For her, the radio project isn't just a fun activity, but an essential part of the school's mission, one of many projects that let

the students participate directly in the life of the community.

José Massó, who hosts the station's music show, ¡Con Salsa!, gently guides the kids as his sound engineer sits behind him.

"When I talk, you can hear me through here," says Massó, tapping his headphones. Massó helped launch the radio project after attending a school curriculum night with his granddaughter. He and others at WBUR, as well as other Young Achievers parents and staff, have donated tremendous amounts of time and energy to the project, giving students an experience usually available only to children at exclusive private schools.

Jaydon, Kamal, DJ, and Deseau take turns at the microphone describing their trip through Villa Victoria. They talk about the neighborhood's ties to Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcom X, both of whom had spent time there during the 1960s. On his fourth try, Jaydon nails his segment describing a community struggle to protect affordable housing and keep the neighborhood from falling victim to a misguided 1960s urban renewal program. Their teacher, Annie Shah, stops DJ from fidgeting and rustling his paper while the others have their turns.

"Awesome job, everyone!" she says.

"Thank you, Miss Shah," they respond in unison. >>>

» The Power of Place

Young Achievers was founded in the late 1990s by community activists concerned about the persistent gap in math and science test scores among the city's minorities. The school began with a small, ad hoc set of programs, but its mission and curriculum expanded in 2003 when the school received a grant and training through a partnership with Community-Based School Environmental Education, or CO-SEED.

Based at Antioch University New England, CO-SEED is one of the leading proponents of a teaching approach called place-based education. With roots in environmental education, service learning, and the ideas of radical educators John Dewey and Paulo

on what the kids need rather than on the textbook. "You start thinking about how to get the kids engaged versus thinking, 'How do I get the kids to learn all this math?'" Sobel says. "You get to the same point, but the means are different."

At a place like Young Achievers, this means that a language lesson takes the form of a radio show. "It all ties back to the classroom," says Bo Hoppin, the CO-SEED project director who has been working with the school for the past six years. "The kids are getting practical experience in oral communication, writing, and history."

Likewise, a unit that teaches first-graders about food involves a visit to area farms. The kids go to a farmers market, take trips to a homeless shel-

decade, 1,200 students a year have worked with environmental engineers, area ranchers, farmers, and public land managers to restore the shrimp's natural habitat.

In Guilford, Vermont, students at the Central School were having a hard time wrapping their heads around their lessons on ancient Greece. Their social studies teacher, Antioch alumna Jennifer Kramer, noticed the many Greek motifs in the town's movie theater, originally built in the 1930s. Kramer established a partnership with the theater managers to have the students create a guide to the Greek and Art Deco elements of the theater, including images of the Temple of Hephaestus, constellations on the ceiling, and a bas-relief featur-

The more students are exposed to hands-on learning, the more they express an enthusiasm for engaging with their communities and taking care of the environment. And they gain critical thinking skills.

Freire, place-based education extends the learning environment beyond the classroom into the rest of the world, and invites the community to get involved as mentors. Parents are also encouraged to be part of the process, increasing their connection to the school and commitment to their children's active involvement. In CO-SEED's vision, children don't just learn about their local community; they actively seek out solutions to the problems they encounter.

CO-SEED's founder, David Sobel, has become a national voice for education reform. "My interest in what we call place-based education emerged in the last 10 to 15 years," says Sobel. "It started with a conviction that schools weren't doing environmental education right. My colleagues and I felt that education needed to put a connection to community and place front and center."

According to Sobel, when teachers get students involved in their surroundings, they begin to focus lessons

ter and soup kitchen, and meet with the mostly Jamaican migrant farm workers who pick fruit and vegetables in the area.

Students who engage directly with their communities and surroundings often see ways to take part in solving problems. Inspired by a unit on the environment, seventh and eighth graders at Young Achievers started school-wide recycling and gardening programs. Students also set up a store to offer healthier food choices and launched a successful campaign to convince the Board of Education to upgrade the school bathroom facilities and repair broken doors and equipment.

CO-SEED and other place-based advocates point to successful programs across the country where students not only learn but also make a difference. In California's Bay Area, for example, the students in a place-based program initiated a campaign to protect an endangered species of shrimp only found in the region. Over the past

ing Greek gods.

A number of studies by scholars and education groups suggest that the more students are exposed to hands-on learning, the more they express an enthusiasm for engaging with their communities and taking care of the environment. And they gain critical thinking skills. A study of 400 ninth and 12th graders in 11 schools in Florida compared students' critical thinking skills in place-based and traditional classrooms. The place-based programs significantly raised students' scores on the Cornell Critical Thinking Test. Studies have also shown that students in place-based programs tend to improve their overall GPA, stay in school longer, and receive more scholarships.

And the hands-on learning actually strengthens the students' test-taking skills. In four separate studies, schools with place-based education programs scored higher on standardized tests.

Young Achievers has been the top performer of all 20 pilot schools in the

No. 4

Radical Acts of Education



Teens Talk to 90-Somethings

Teens in Rabun County, Georgia, are tapping into the memories of 90-year-olds in an effort to protect a culture that has often been stigmatized and misunderstood—that of southern Appalachia. They're part of the **FOXFIRE** project, which started in one classroom in 1966 and has grown into a series of publications and programs. Youths interview elders about traditional practices—from weaving to caring for the deceased. Their stories are published in magazines and books, and the skills they learn are revived through community workshops. Teens learn what it means to live without electricity or running water, and gain a deep understanding of the traditions that built their communities. —Sean Rose

Boston district on six of 12 standardized tests. The school is often the most requested destination in Boston's open enrollment system. It has a high success rate in placing kids into prestigious and highly competitive public "exam schools," such as Boston Latin, that regularly prepare kids for admission to top universities.

Drill and Kill

Considering these strong track records, one would expect many schools to jump on the place-based bandwagon. And CO-SEED does have a reach across the country, with programs in places such as Texas, Northern California, and rural New England.

But despite a national consensus that public education in America is in need of an overhaul, Sobel and his colleagues still encounter resistance from teachers and school boards. Besides a normal reluctance to try new approaches, Sobel places the blame squarely on the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The law places enormous pressure on educators to focus single-mindedly on raising school test scores, usually by "teaching to the test" and "skill and drill" (also known as "drill and kill") exercises.

"If schools aren't producing the desired results, they get punished," says Sobel. "This leads to a mindset where people say 'Gee, we'd love to do interesting things, but we have to focus on test scores.' They think the only way to go is drill and kill and more pages in the math workbook."

Sobel insists that test scores are not the most significant indicator of a successful school. "The big goal is to have kids who are actively engaged in learning. That leads to kids who have a sense of agency and a commitment to the environmental, social, and political parts of their community," says Sobel. "They say, 'Hey, I want the zoo to stay alive in Boston' and 'I want cleaner air in my neighborhood.' Ultimately you want kids who feel like they have the capacity to shape the communities they live in as well as

their own lives."

Hard Work—But Worth It

Of course, creating a successful place-based program isn't easy. "It's a lot of work for the teachers," admits Sobel. "It also takes a lot of creativity. You can't just turn to page 19 in the math book."

But the payoff can be tremendous, far beyond the higher test scores and orderly classrooms. "When you provide opportunities to actively engage kids and give them a chance to participate in community activism and concrete projects, you get students who are really excited about education," says Sobel. "They don't just learn about what it means to be a good citizen, they do good citizenship."

Parents at Young Achievers notice the difference in their children's attitudes toward school and the world around them. Outside the recording booth at WBUR, Maggie Lopez's daughter, Abriana, has just finished her radio segment. "Abriana loves the hands-on experiences in her classes," says Lopez. "They make a point of explaining why they're learning what they're learning." Lopez was so impressed by Young Achievers that she took Abriana out of private school to go there.

Crystal Thompson waits for her son, Machai, to take the microphone. She has sent all four of her children to Young Achievers. She especially appreciates the lengths the school goes to help overworked parents stay involved, such as an extended school day, as well as providing food and transportation at evening school presentations. "The teachers really care about the students—your kid is not just a number," she says. **Y**



Daniel Fireside is book editor at *Dollars & Sense* magazine, dollarsandsense.org, and has previously written on housing issues for YES!

www.YesMagazine.org/sobel
Educator David Sobel takes you beyond ecophobia

Students in Hampton, Virginia, and Brooklyn, New York, **LEARN THAT ASKING QUESTIONS** is more powerful than memorizing answers.

The Power of “Why?”



CHERYL COPPER PHOTO

Hampton Youth Commission Chair Brad Knight, left, talks with Hampton Mayor Molly Joseph Ward at a “Meet and Greet” that the Youth Commission set up with the City Council. In Hampton, young people have advisory roles in all aspects of city government.

Andrea Batista Schlesinger

Three years ago, Ross A. Kearney II wanted to build a trade school. Kearney, mayor of the coastal city of Hampton, Virginia, thought a new trade school would curb the high drop-out rate in a community where nearly half the residents live in poverty. He took his pitch to a city-appointed commissioner.

After careful questioning by commissioners, it became clear that the trade school, however compelling a proposal in its own right, would not actually solve the problem it was intended to solve. Young people were dropping out for reasons that could not be addressed by the presence of a trade school. Therefore, a trade school was not a viable solution. The answer was no.

Another day in local politics? Not exactly. The commissioners were not a panel of local business and academic leaders. They were the 24 high-school-age members of the Hampton Youth Commission. And they prepared for the meeting not by memorizing facts and figures, but by practicing how to ask questions.

The Power of Inquiry

“We’re all naturally curious,” says Allyson Graul, who worked with commissioners as director of the Youth Civic Engagement Center at Alternatives, Inc. in Hampton. “But in so many ways our society has shut down our curiosity and replaced it with these right-wrong answers. Our school sys-

tem has created young people who are just about getting the ‘right’ answer without really looking beyond that.”

Schools increasingly focus more on the answer than the question. Teachers are deemed successful if their students answer exam questions correctly, not if they can think critically. Science, civics, art, and other inquiry-based subjects get pushed aside in favor of subjects that are quantifiable. This is a profound irony, considering that what society needs from citizens, and what businesses need from workers, is the ability to inquire, analyze, and discern.

After all, answers change. Information changes. Elana Karopkin, founding principal of the Urban Assembly School for Law and Justice, a New York City public school that in 2008 graduated 93 percent of its first class and sent 80 percent to college (compared to citywide averages of 56 percent and 60.5 percent, respectively), pushes her students to inquire.

“We’re not just teaching content, we’re not even just teaching skills. We’re teaching habits of mind,” she says. Today’s high school graduates are likely to have 11 jobs and move nine times over the course of their lives. Good educators want students to learn to probe deeply so that they can navigate whatever they encounter; they enforce this habit through questioning.

The ability of our citizens to inquire has profound implications for whether we can fulfill the promise of our democracy. If our entire educational system centers on asking students to recall information, they don’t develop the skills to formulate opinions on complicated matters. We shouldn’t be surprised that they grow up dis-

engaged from democracy and make decisions based on the charisma of politicians rather than the substance of their positions.

Democracy can be the perfect laboratory for teaching young people to inquire. When students are encouraged to ask questions about how their communities work, they begin to understand the purpose of education and realize that without it, they cannot be effective change agents in their world.

Questioning Power in Hampton

The unique experiment of the Hampton Youth Commission began in the mid-1990s as a means of lowering the local dropout rate and creating a competitive workforce and an engaged citizenry. The mayor and the city manager brought together youth and community leaders and the heads of social service agencies and told them to come up with a plan.

“It was a very traditional group,” said Cindy Carlson, director of the Hampton Youth Commission. What they wound up with, however, was pretty untraditional: a plan not just to serve youth but also to engage them.

The leaders recognized that Hampton needed new voices around the table if it wanted more than the same old task-force report. First, the city’s planning director hired two young people to serve as “youth planners” in the city’s Department of Planning and help develop the youth component of the Community Plan, a document that sets short- and long-term goals for the city. In 1998, the city decided that a larger group of young people should advise the youth planners, and the Hampton Youth Commission was born.

These two dozen teens are selected by youth and adult commission members and are charged with representing their peers in the city decision-making process. They have, as they put it, four “power plays”: policy, programs, partnerships, and philanthropy. With the youth planners, they set policy by owning a piece of the Community Plan. They recommend and start new programs,



Radical Acts of Education

No. 5



DONNA PRESTI PHOTO

Melia Reschools Herself

Last fall, Melia Dicker, 28, went to her middle-school dance. And to third-grade recess. And senior English. For her one-woman project, **RESCHOOL YOURSELF**, Dicker revisited her childhood classrooms, shadowing students and interviewing teachers to figure out how school had defined her adulthood.

Dicker realized school had led her to overachieve, sacrificing health and happiness for goals that didn’t come from within. She spent the second half of the year learning simple skills she’d never gained in school—like how to slow down, join a community, plant an organic garden, play guitar, and make yogurt. Dicker blogs at reschoolyourself.com and is now working on a book about her reschooling experiences. —Lynsi Burton

www.YesMagazine.org/melia
Melia Dicker offers the *Five Best Ways to Reschool on the Interweb*

The students are engaged. The culture of the town has changed. The turnout of young Hampton voters in the 2004 elections was 29 percent higher than the national average.

» from neighborhood service and diversity promotion to youth-friendly spaces. They form partnerships with organizations throughout the city, and they have \$40,000 that they can allocate each year to support local efforts of their peers.

Asking questions is integral to their ability to exercise their power. So when it came time to prepare for their meeting with the mayor, commissioners worked with Graul to learn how to ask questions. “What if we were to be open to finding out everything about this proposal? What are all of the possible questions that can be asked? I even talked about the different kinds of questions,” she recalls. “A conceptual what, a comparative which, a procedural how, a suppositional what if, an evaluative why. We talked about all of the different kinds of questions, and I just let them go.”

The Hampton Youth Commission asks questions about the kinds of public policies that would best serve their peers, they ask questions of candidates who aspire to office, and they ask questions of other young people who want to create change in the community.

The city is committed to using its own democracy as a laboratory, from the high school students on the commission to the eighth-graders required to engage in Project Citizen, an effort of the Center for Civics Education that challenges young people to seek out and propose solutions to a problem in their community. The students are engaged. The culture of the town has changed. The turnout of young Hampton voters in the 2004 elections was 29 percent higher than the national average.

Asking Why in Brooklyn

The School for Democracy and Leadership (SDL) in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn is one of the small schools that occupies a building that

used to be George W. Wingate High School. In its last year, Wingate graduated 43 percent of its class. SDL graduated 90 percent of its first class. Both institutions served the same students from the same communities.

Although the focus of the teachers and staff of SDL is to prepare students for college, they are also, in the words of founding principal Nancy Gannon, “incredibly steeped in activism. We encourage the students to pick something in the world or the community they want to change and then act on it together.”

SDL students are required to complete a “change project” of their own choice each year. One recent project focused on the inadequate funding of New York City public schools. It started with a question: Why were schools like theirs forced to use outdated science equipment? Students embarked on a year-long effort to understand school-funding inequities. In the process, they learned how the New York City school system is funded, analyzed the state’s tax policy, and decided to raise money for the Campaign for Fiscal Equity, an advocacy organization working to secure additional state dollars for city schools. This organization took the issue of school funding to court and won a historic decision that New York State’s funding system was inequitable. The court required the state to send more money to city schools so that students like those at SDL wouldn’t have to use antiquated laboratory equipment.

Other projects are smaller in scale but still significant in effect: Students wrote a proposal for a school library where there was none, worked with junior high school students on a safe-sex education program, and launched joint poetry readings among the schools that share SDL’s campus.

Gannon believes these efforts are both preparation for and a microcosm

of effective citizenship in our democracy. “To be a good citizen means that you have to be always thinking about your responsibility in the world,” she said. “I think that every school ... should be talking about each of our responsibility to maintain and build responsible community, to look out for those who do not have power and who don’t have voice.”

All but two or three of the school’s first graduates immediately went on to college, some to prestigious institutions such as Brown, Williams, and Sarah Lawrence. SDL received an A on its first New York City Progress Report, for its strong academic performance, high attendance, and positive student and faculty reviews.

Why it Matters

If we start with a vision of the kind of adult we want to produce—not with the test scores we want students to attain—and work our way backward, we will see the value of preparing questioning, critically thinking young people. Engagement in their communities provides students with a context for the importance of a basic education: We must read and write if we are to vote, participate, and effectively advocate for ourselves and our communities. Projects like the Hampton Youth Commission and SDL’s change projects foster critical thinking while imparting in the young participants a sense of agency. They get to see how their engagement can influence their community. They are more confident in themselves and more confident about their democracy. And they succeed. 🔗



Andrea Batista Schlesinger is the author of *The Death of Why: The Decline of Questioning and the Future of Democracy*. She is on leave from the Drum Major Institute for Public Policy.

Radical Acts of Education

No. 6



STERLING COLLEGE PHOTO

What Draft Horses Teach College Students

The students at **STERLING COLLEGE** learn from demanding teachers—like a stubborn, 2,000-pound draft horse or the campus cows, which need water even on a 20-below-zero Vermont morning when the trough is frozen solid. Sterling is part of a seven-school consortium that requires students to take practical jobs, such as working on the college's farm, in its kitchen or offices, or as a mentor to children or seniors. The students gain a connection to the community, feel an investment in the school, and approach their education as equals with the college staff. —Sean Rose

No. 7



BILL ACKERMAN PHOTO

Youth Face the Holocaust

Through an organization called **FACING HISTORY AND OURSELVES**, young people confront tough moral questions. What would you do if you witnessed an act of violence? When should you stand up against a bully or your government? Students meet people who have witnessed injustice, like artist and Holocaust survivor Ava Kadishson Schieber (pictured here telling her story to students at Chicago's Lyons Township High School). They watch films about homophobia and read first-hand accounts of refugees. Facing History provides resources on history and values to more than 25,000 educators worldwide and runs a school in New York City, which just graduated its first class in June. —Lynsi Burton



www.YesMagazine.org/damon

When history came alive for actor Matt Damon



Trade Your Job

The old apprenticeship model of **LEARNING BY DOING** gets new life as people who've been left out of the job market train to meet the growing demand for green-collar workers.

Valerie Saturen

In the last 30 years, wages have dropped for people without college degrees. But in Pierce County, Washington, high school students who aren't headed for college are learning to retrofit houses; they stand to make up to \$50 an hour once they're experienced journeymen. In Lansing, Michigan, unemployed auto workers can get up to \$10,000 to train for new careers in renewable energy. These people, and others nationwide, are part of a rapidly expanding market for green-collar workers.

Since green-collar job training is affordable—usually requiring an associate's degree at most—and since these jobs typically offer good living wages, they represent a pathway out of poverty and into the middle class.

“If a job improves the environment but doesn't provide a family-supporting wage or a career ladder to move low-income workers into higher-skilled occupations, it is not a green-collar job,” says Sam Haswell of the Apollo Alliance, a coalition formed in 2001 to push for a clean-energy revolution.

According to a 2009 report by the American Solar Energy Society, there were 9 million green-collar jobs in the United States in 2007, and 37 million could be created by 2030 if policymakers support renewable energy and energy efficiency initiatives at the state and federal level.

“We must build a 21st century workforce in America to compete in the new clean energy economy,” says

Apollo Alliance Chair Phil Angelides. “This means training a new generation of workers to fill a wide range of skilled jobs in the rapidly growing green sector.”

The need for green workforce development has produced unprecedented collaboration among labor and environmental organizations, government agencies, schools, and businesses. There's a return to the apprenticeship model of learning by doing and a growing acknowledgement that valuable education happens outside the classroom.

In Bellingham, Washington, which NPR's *Marketplace* recently declared “the epicenter of a new economic model,” the Opportunity Council's Building Performance Center is team-



¡YOUTHWORKS! PHOTOS

Young people in Santa Fe, New Mexico, learn trades through the ¡Youthworks! Green Collar Jobs Apprenticeship Program.

ing up with Bellingham Technical College to provide green workforce development. “We feel like this training has to take place on the job and in the field,” says the Center’s director, John Davies. “The training has to include hands-on learning along with the learning that takes place in the classroom.”

The Center is one of 26 agencies participating in a state-run project that sends trainers to teach home audits and energy retrofits in communities across Washington, including those not served by established training programs. Led by experienced peer technicians, these sessions are customized to meet the specific needs of Washington agencies that provide low-income weatherization services.

Sound Alliance, in Pierce County, Washington, matches women, people of color, youth, and members of other traditionally disadvantaged groups with openings in green-collar apprenticeship programs. Like other Industrial Areas Foundation organizations, the Sound Alliance empowers people to create change and become grass-roots leaders. One leader, Steve Gelb, emphasizes the need to train workers in deep retrofitting, which involves not

only simple weatherization, but replacing furnaces and water heaters. Doing so saves more energy and also creates higher-skilled jobs, Gelb says.

When youth and people from disadvantaged communities step into such high-demand, high-salary jobs, it not only gives them an avenue toward a brighter future; it also helps to change community perceptions of them. In Santa Fe, New Mexico, for instance, the group ¡Youthworks! joined with city officials and local businesses to create the Green Collar Jobs Apprenticeship Program in 2008. The program provides valuable training, academic skill building, and job counseling to youth in a city where the dropout rate hovers around 50 percent.

“There’s a lot of racism and discrimination and bad perceptions of young people in Santa Fe,” says Tobe Bott-Lyons, educational coordinator at ¡Youthworks! “Now you see these tattooed kids that people are generally used to being scared of restoring the river and building a house, and they’re retrofitting homes and installing solar panels.”

Lauren Herrera’s life turned upside down when her 6-year-old son passed away last year. She started getting into

trouble, which culminated in drug-related felony charges that caused her to lose her job as a dental assistant. Scarce jobs and a criminal record made it hard to find work, until ¡Youthworks! gave her an opportunity to play a positive role in her community. Now she weatherizes homes for low-income families with the newly launched Energy RX crew. “They’re ecstatic when they find out the weatherization is free,” she says. “It’s very rewarding.”

Young people aren’t the only ones looking for green-collar jobs. Throughout the country, community college programs in alternative energy have been flooded with recently unemployed workers and those simply seeking valuable new skills. In Michigan, which suffers the nation’s highest unemployment rate, the transition to a green economy promises to revive communities that have been devastated by job losses in the auto industry. Michigan’s Green Jobs Initiative is one of the programs made possible by the \$500 million in federal stimulus funds allocated for green workforce development. The money helps workers enroll in new community college programs in green sector fields like alternative energy.

The alternative energy degree program at Lansing Community College, one of the first of its kind, has grown from 42 students in 2005 to 252 in 2008. Starting this fall, the college will offer new certificates in solar, geothermal, wind turbines, and energy efficiency. The college also has partnered with the National Alternative Fuels Training Consortium to develop an alternative energy curriculum for colleges and universities nationwide.

Gelb says that green workforce development has turned on its head the historical divide between labor and environmental concerns. “We call it the ‘triple bottom line,’” he says. “We’re reducing carbon, creating jobs, and saving money for people in the homes we’re retrofitting.”



Valerie Saturen is a freelance writer living in Tacoma, Washington. Her work focuses on politics, the Middle East, and the environment. She can be reached at vsaturen@yahoo.com.

Radical Acts of Education

No. 8



JANICE LORENTZ PHOTO

Citizen Scientists Learn from Flowers

People across the country are learning what plants say about global warming. **PROJECT BUDBURST** sends citizen scientists outside to record the dates when local plants open their leaves, flower, bear fruit, and go dormant or die. As the climate warms, the timing of each event changes. “Scientists can’t be everywhere. We need people to tell us what they see,” says Carol Brewer, a co-founder of the project and biology professor at the University of Montana. Check out budburst.org. —Heather Purser



Volunteers Teach Healing Arts

Gang warfare in Juarez, AIDS in South Africa, homelessness in Cincinnati—survivors of these and other traumas are often left to cope and seek healing on their own. One group, **CAPACITAR INTERNATIONAL**, is offering help.

It began in the 1980s, when Pat Cane was helping paint murals in revolutionary Nicaragua. She took breaks behind a schoolhouse to practice tai chi. One day, locals followed her and posed the question that led to Capacitar. “We like your art,” they said, “but could you teach us this?”

Inspired by Paulo Freire’s work in the 1960s, Capacitar International (from the Spanish “to empower”) has spread to 30 countries. Volunteers (like those above) learn practices such as tai chi, acupressure and mindfulness, which they teach in traumatized communities in places like Guatemala, Israel, Palestine, Rwanda, and Ireland. The simple work nourishes people’s own power to heal and creates so much relief and joy that it spreads, person to person, through families and communities. Check out capacitar.org. —Louise Dunlap

No. 9



AIVEEN MULLALLY PHOTO

No. 10

Climate Activists Dream Up a New Future

In the mid-1990s, a group of indigenous Achuar elders from the Ecuadorian Amazon sought out partners from North America. They were worried about threats to their ancient way of life and asked their partners to help “change the dream” of the north, which they say is driving the destruction of the rainforests. The result was the **PACHAMAMA ALLIANCE** and its Awakening the Dreamer workshops, which encourage a re-examination of the values and assumptions that have led our society into social and environmental crises. Participants often turn their new insights into action. For example, the Massachusetts Climate Summer activists pictured at right are cycling across the state, discussing possibilities for a clean-energy future with those they encounter on the way. Check out pachamama.org. —*Madeline Ostrander*



JAY O'HARA PHOTO



MICHELLE ROGERS PHOTO

No. 11

Seniors Get Busy to Meet Community Needs

Retirement doesn't have to be merely time off; it can be a time to gain new skills or find rewarding ways to give back to your community. Every year, **THE CENTER FOR CREATIVE RETIREMENT** at the University of North Carolina at Asheville gives more than 1,800 seniors and retirees the chance to learn and get involved. At the center's leadership training program, seniors meet with the county's politicians, police, fire chiefs, artists, authors, and business leaders, and visit water treatment plants, community theaters, and commercial developments to find out what the community needs and how they might contribute. The center supports seniors' engagement in activism and service projects like this one, where volunteers helped sort food at a local food bank. Check out unca.edu/ncccr. —*Sean Rose*

Healing Power of Prison Poetry

Writers help teens in jail **LEARN TO EXPRESS
DIFFICULT TRUTHS** by putting pencil to paper.



RICHARD GOLD PHOTO

Volunteers from the Seattle nonprofit Pongo Publishing help youth in detention write about their lives. Pongo has worked with more than 4,000 teens in youth prisons, homeless resource centers, and the two mainstays of the program: a children's psychiatric hospital in Lakewood, Washington, and the nine-year-old program at the King County Detention Center. The poems and stories are published in annual anthologies and are available through pongoteenwriting.org.

Eli Hastings

On a brisk September morning I wait in a dormitory (read: cell block) at King County Juvenile Detention in Seattle as a volunteer ushers in a group of five boys (read: inmates). The young men—three black, a Latino, and a white—have all weathered storms that I can scarcely fathom: born with drugs in their infant bodies, or abandoned by both parents, or traumatized by watching friends gunned down before their eyes.

As they come into the room, they strike a balance between obedience and resistance: hands behind their backs, smirks on their faces. Seeing their peach-fuzzed cheeks, absurd haircuts, and guarded gazes returns me forcefully to my own high school days, which took place less than a mile east of here. I know that many of these prisoners were up to mischief no worse than I got into myself: graffiti, smoking pot, chronic truancy. One of my mother's favorite phrases, there but for the grace of God go I, keeps cycling through my head, but I correct it: There but for the color of my skin, the support of my family, the promise of higher education, there but for all of my invisible privilege, go I.

I had an advantage beyond these things, though—the written word. I started scrawling the first terrible lines of my own poetry at age 13 and found relief from the life events that haunted me, whether simple drama (breakups) or real tragedy (the mental illness of my best friend). So I'm honored to be here among other volunteers as a member of the Pongo Publishing Teen Writ-

Anonymous

I wish I was a better child.
I wish I could take back all the times
 I made my mom cry.
I wish I could take back all the times
 I've hit my little sister.
I wish I had everything I wanted.
I wish I wasn't in Juvenile.
I wish I was still a virgin.
I wish my brother wasn't dead.
I wish my cousin was never born.
I wish that I wasn't a drug addict.
I wish I wasn't an alcoholic.
I wish I went to school when I was younger.
I wish I wasn't in a gang.
I wish there wasn't so many rules
 in this world.

I wish my life was as good as I want it to be.
I wish I could take back all the times
 I made my dad mad at me.
I wish I could take back
 almost killing somebody.
I wish I was still young.
I wish I wouldn't have grown up so fast.
I wish for nothing else to happen to me.
And that's all I wish.
—written by a 15-year-old girl in juvenile
detention

I Wish Someone Had Told Me

I wish someone had told me that life was like this,
and I thought I was not going to end up in here,
and it happened.

I wish someone had told me that love was like this,
intimate,
and no lying, cheating, stealing, robbing and all that,
because it does not have to be like this.

I wish someone had told me that friends were like this,
they turn on you and get you in a lot of trouble,
and I wish I would have known that before I put myself in that predicament.

I wish someone had told me that I was a kid.
I wish that I can start my life over and do what I have to do to better myself.

I know these things are true because it happened all in my life,
and I experienced it, so I think it can be true.

I know these things are true, but still,
I wish someone had told me.
—written by a 16-year-old boy in juvenile detention

www.YesMagazine.org/hastings
More Pongo poetry

ing Project, which assists distressed youths in trading self-destructive and anti-social behaviors for poetic self-expression.

I've been here three times before: once for a stern orientation and twice for a sort of acclimation, during which the other volunteers and I huddled in unused dormitories to write our own poetry, an activity intended to help us identify with the kids and sensitize us to the struggle for creativity in a penal landscape. Parades of jump-suited kids filed past, casting aloof glances at us as if we were very lost tourists.

Today, a kid with a well-kept Afro spots me, grins, and saunters to my table. I am supposed to invite him to open his heart on my very blank pad of paper. I breathe deeply, shake his hand, and present my spiel.

"So, as Adrienne probably told

you, we come in here because we believe that young people who have been through hard stuff have important things to say. We think the most important element of good writing is that it comes from the heart."

Maxwell raises plucked eyebrows and nods at the first page in a stack of prompts. I slide the exercise, "I Am," and a dulled pencil in front of him. Ten minutes later, he pushes it back, and his eyes are different, brighter. This is Maxwell's first time writing with Pongo, but it won't be his last; he employs his rapper's talent to speak from his heart.

I Am Who I Am

Today I'm focused like a lens on a camera

Yesterday I was hard-headed like a hard-head on a hammer

On the street I'm so serious they call me Lil SB (Strictly Bizness)

In my room I'm like a failing quiz, you shouldn't test me

To my mom I'm a little square like a rectangle

To my dad I'm a ghost, I can disappear like Chris Angel

My friends think I'm mean like the wicked witch of the west

Really I'm cool with something big pumping in my chest

THE PONGO PUBLISHING Teen Writing Project was founded in 1992 by a writer named Richard Gold. Gold had spent years teaching poetry at a San Francisco school for special-needs kids, where most of the youths were also patients at a psychiatric clinic. He observed that writing poetry could disarm traumatized and troubled kids' >>>

Students get immersed in the natural high that comes when you abandon the bravado, bluffing, and bullshit and start finding truth and color from within.

» natural hesitancy and help them learn the ability and value of self-expression.

Pongo's writing sessions give youth a chance to express often-difficult truths. The program's small press turns those expressions into anthologies, presenting the teens' voices to the world in a format that conveys respect and dignity. Since 2000, Pongo has worked with more than 4,000 teens in youth prisons, homeless centers, and the two mainstays of the Pongo program: a children's psychiatric hospital in Lakewood, Washington, and the 9-year-old program at King County Detention. Pongo has published 12 volumes of teen poetry, 12,000 copies of which have been distributed to distressed youths, libraries, judges, schools, and social service agencies.

Between 2005 and 2008, Pongo surveyed nearly 300 of the kids who participated in the project. One-third of Pongo youths had never or hardly written before; 100 percent enjoyed writing; 66 percent wrote about issues they normally wouldn't talk about; 80 percent felt better from their writing; and 96 percent claimed they would write more in the future.

Pongo takes kids who have been left out of the educational system at every step and draws them into learning and expression. In the year that I've worked with Pongo, I've watched these kids open up through writing.

Every Tuesday between September and April, the other volunteers and I were allowed to enter a raucous classroom in Detention's public school program to make our upbeat pitch, "Who wants to come write poetry?!" Plastic chairs bucked into odd configurations as the kids leaned back. Some heckled. Many crossed their arms: There were the skinny appendages of a precocious addict or the thick, tattooed ones of a Deuce-8 gang leader. Some days their cool aversion was contagious. Other

days more students raised their hands than we could handle.

Regardless of their initial level of enthusiasm, once each kid sat down at a table across from a Pongo volunteer, heard that the only determinant of "good" poetry for us was honesty, and started writing, he was captivated.

In the vast majority of cases Pongo volunteers are the first to invite a kid to speak about his struggles with the motive of honoring them instead of analyzing them, and on some level each kid realizes that. Pivotal life events that may never come up in counseling sessions sometimes emerge in Pongo poetry. Freed from the judgment of their peers and the interrogations of psychologists, however benevolent, students get immersed in the natural high that comes when you abandon the bravado, bluffing, and bullshit and start finding truth and color from within.

Pongo is only a small part of these kids' weekly education. In Detention, the public schools literally have a captive audience. But the disparity between what happens in class and the lives of the kids could hardly be wider. Algebra and grammar rules are often the last things on their minds.

John, for example, with wild eyes and a honeyed voice, has never learned to write decently because he's been booted out of every high school he's attended. Jeremy squeezes his pencil so hard his knuckles whiten as he recounts the lesson he's taken from his best friend's murder: "That I'd better worry 'bout the bullet coming for me—fuck homework." The bulldog-shaped, quick-to-tears Terry is too busy trying to "breathe right" and manage his anger to pay attention in class.

Why should these kids place education above the gang allegiance that keeps them alive on the street or provides them the family they've never

had? Why should teens that suffer from PTSD due to repeated rapes or a friend's killing embrace the challenge of a textbook instead of the relief of a pipe?

This is the terrain on which Pongo operates—the writing is not just another classroom exercise. The poetry allows these young people to practice self-expression and talk about their experiences in a safe place. Pongo invites them to exchange shame for candor, to witness their truths on the page, to look at their circumstances analytically, and to honor the strength that's enabled them to survive hardship. And perhaps most importantly, Pongo's youths learn to use writing to deal with their memories, rage, sorrow, and trauma, instead of turning to gangs, prostitution, and drug abuse.

It's tragic that these kids had to land in a detention center to receive an education in honest self-expression. But the kids who walk out of Pongo gain a new faith, however nascent, in the power of their own voice, and may be less likely to return to a place like this.

At the end of every Pongo afternoon, we deliver four freshly typed copies of each poem back to its author. This always happens at shift-change hour, when all the kids are locked down in their cells. So as we walk the worn linoleum corridors, past the circular control posts manned by deadpan guards, our footfalls echo. We can't even hear the voices of the kids until we enter the dormitory, and then they are muted behind tons of steel and cinderblock. But when we slide their poems beneath the door of their cells and bump fists through the Plexiglass window, their smiles are plain to see. 7



Eli Hastings teaches creative writing in nontraditional contexts. He is author of the memoir *Falling Room* (Bison Books, 2006). His writing has appeared in more than a dozen literary journals.



ANGELA COLES PHOTO

No. 12 *Radical Acts of Education*

A Community Hands Down Skills

On the streets of Udaipur, India, people learn together: Locals teach each other to grow organic food and herbs, create community art, weave handloom cloth, and harvest rainwater. They make bicycle-powered washing machines and blenders, and construct solar cookers and musical instruments from castoff materials.

Through the work of **SHIKSHANTAR**, an organization devoted to radical education and the Gandhian concept of “swaraj” (self-rule), Udaipur residents swap information and learn with their hands. Shikshantar believes anyone can be a teacher and when people collaborate, they can develop a “culture of learning.” The organization helps support that learning through community media, intergenerational gatherings, and apprenticeships. Check out swaraj.org/shikshantar. —Lynsi Burton



www.YesMagazine.org/swaraj
Watch the video *Regenerating Our Learning Commons*



CAROLINA KROON

No. 13

Parents Learn to Listen

THE MORNINGSIDEN CENTER FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY believes families hold the key to creating a more peaceful world. Parents teach kids the emotional skills that influence their decisions for the rest of their lives.

That’s why Morningside offers workshops in more than 60 New York City schools to equip parents to understand their children’s emotions. One workshop exercise shows how put-downs can take a toll on a child’s self-esteem. A paper heart is ripped to symbolize a put-down either from a bully or a parent. By the end of a bad day, the heart is in tatters. The workshop is part of a program called *Peace in the Family*, which teaches parents to use open communication to handle their children’s emotions. —Sean Rose

**“I have begun
to re-educate myself ...
I need to get my hands
into the soil.”**



JIM FLINT PHOTO

Grounded Learning

Ron Miller

For nearly 30 years as a student, teacher, writer, and editor, I have argued for replacing standardized, industrial-age learning with a holistic education that nourishes the body, mind, and soul, and connects one to community and nature. Because this view challenges the educational agenda of corporate globalism, which demands efficient assessment and allocation of so-called human resources, it has largely failed to significantly influence official education policy.

Now, the imminent end of the era of cheap energy forces us to consider what some are calling “the great reskilling.” Instead of preparing for careers in offices or chain stores, our very survival requires an ability to feed, house, heat, and clothe ourselves using the resources of local communities and bioregions.

I recently realized that even holistic education is inadequate if it remains conceptual and classroom-bound rather than becoming intensely practical, and I had to acknowledge that my own education, as impressive as it might be, leaves me utterly incapable of inhabiting this new/old civilization. So I have begun to re-educate myself by learning real skills in gardening and permaculture. I need to get my hands into the soil, but this is no weekend hobby; my education must now extend from concepts to craft so that I can contribute meaningfully to a more resilient local food culture.

I need to master not just the concept but the application—specific details about plant growth, the relationships between different plant species, and the effects of their cultivation on the Vermont landscape.

I am rediscovering what Emerson observed in the early days of our public school system: “We are students of words: we are shut up in schools, and colleges, and recitation rooms, for 10 or 15 years, and come out at last with a bag of wind, a memory of words, and do not know a thing.” We could afford an education like that for these last 160 years, when we lived off the work of fossil fuels. But the Earth could not afford it, and now, neither can we. 🌱

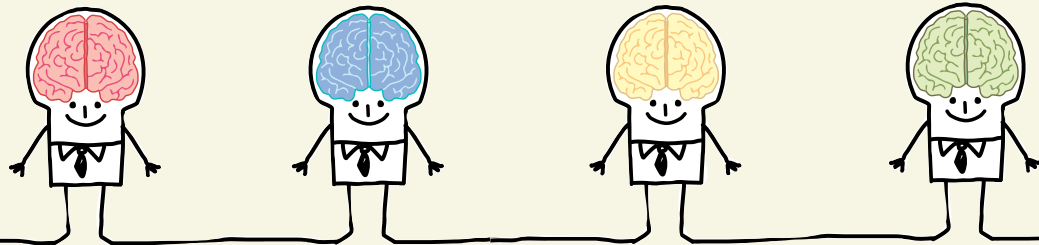
Ron Miller is editor of *Education Revolution* magazine and author of several books on educational alternatives. He teaches at Champlain College in Vermont.

www.YesMagazine.org/prakash

Read “Soil, Seeds, Salt: Education Brought Down to Earth,” an article by Madhu Suri Prakash

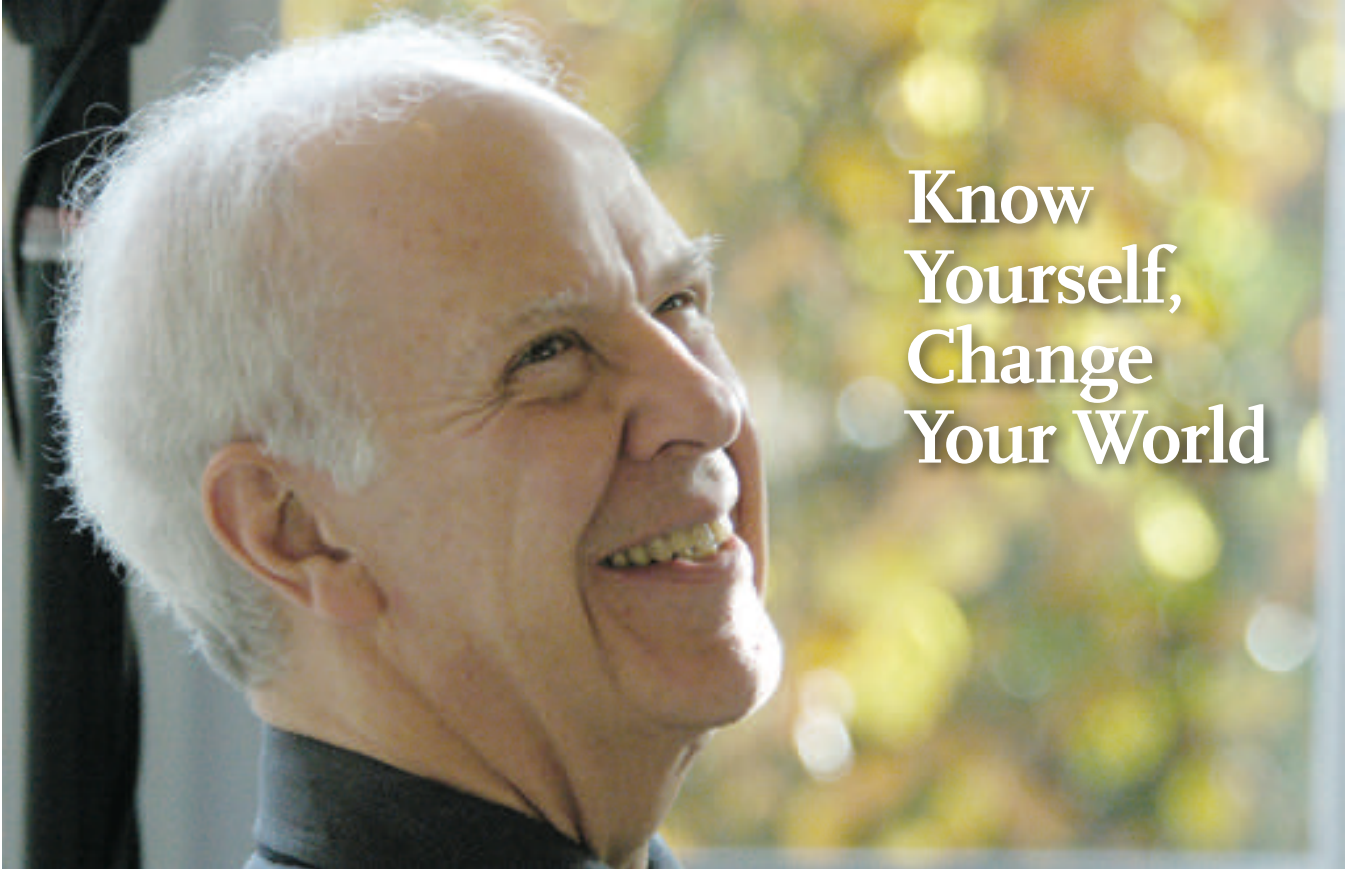
How Do You “Know”?

Each of us has a “Way of Knowing” that filters our experience of ourselves, others, and our relationships. This chart offers a framework based on Robert Kegan’s constructive-developmental theory to understand how each of us, depending on our way of knowing, develops during adulthood. It also includes ideas about how we can challenge ourselves and support each other’s growth. Use the top part of the chart to identify which “way of knowing” best describes you. The bottom part shows some ways you can further your development to incorporate other ways of knowing. —Ellie Drago-Severson writes, consults, and teaches about adult educational leadership at Columbia University.



Stages:	I am rule-based.	I am other-focused.	I am reflective.	I am interconnecting.
<i>The most important thing is:</i>	Fulfilling my own needs, interests, and desires.	Meeting expectations and getting approval.	Staying true to my values, which I generate.	Reflecting on my identity, being open to others’ views and to changing myself.
<i>Concerns:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rules. • Clear definition of right and wrong. • Immediate self-interest. • Other people are either helpful or obstacles. • Abstract thinking has no meaning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authority figures set goals. • Self-image comes from others’ judgment. • Responsible for others’ feelings and vice versa. • Criticism and conflict are threatening. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set goals based on own values and standards. • Self-image based on my evaluation of my competencies and integrity. • Contradictory feelings and conflict are ways to learn. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set goals in collaboration. • Share power. • Find common ground, even with seeming opposites. • Open to exploration, conflict, complexity, and others’ perspectives.
<i>Guiding questions:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Will I get punished?” • “What’s in it for me?” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Will you like/value me?” • “Will you think I am a good person?” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Am I staying true to my own personal integrity, standards, and values?” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “How can other people’s thinking help me to develop and grow?”
<i>Tasks at your “growing edge”:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be open to possibility of new “right” solutions. • Take on tasks that demand abstract thinking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate own values and standards. • Accept conflicting viewpoints without seeing them as a threat to relationships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open up to diverse and opposing views. • Accept and learn from diverse problem-solving approaches. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accept that some differences cannot be resolved. • Avoid insisting on absolutely flat, nonhierarchical approaches.
<i>Learning exercises to try:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogues that offer multiple perspectives and go beyond “right” and “wrong.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogue that helps to generate and clarify one’s own values. • Share perspectives in pairs or triads before sharing with larger groups and authority figures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate dialogue, especially when perspectives are diametrically opposed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affiliate with an authority or an impersonal system. • Commit to a project without a clear purpose. • Appreciate the time it takes to reach a conclusion when others may not move at the same pace.
<i>Ways to support the growth of these folks:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set clear goals and expectations, agree on step-by-step procedures and specific due dates. • Offer concrete advice, specific skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite to leadership roles. • Demonstrate ways to confirm, acknowledge, and accept others’ beliefs. • Model disagreement without threat to relationships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer opportunities to promote, analyze, and critique one’s goals and ideas. • Encourage consideration of conflicting or discordant ideas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage refraining from taking over and rushing a process. • Model sensitivity to those who do not have the same capacity (e.g., for conflict).

Source: Adapted from Drago-Severson, E., *Leading Adult Learning: Supporting Adult Development in our Schools*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin/Sage Publications, (2010). www.yesmagazine.org/51facts for additional citations.



Know Yourself, Change Your World

DAN KOWALSKI PHOTO

Parker J. Palmer

In the work you do each day, how do you distinguish truth from fraud, build community, and speak up for what's right?

Why do bankers make unethical investments, and what makes teachers burn out after a year on the job? Acclaimed educator and author Parker J. Palmer says most of us lack an understanding of our inner lives. If we learned in school how to navigate the inner landscapes of our lives, we might gain the tools to make it through difficult times, and clarify and act on our deepest values. Palmer is the author of *A Hidden Wholeness*, *Let Your Life Speak*, and *The Courage to Teach*, and a founder of the Center for Courage and Renewal. YES! Executive Editor Sarah van Gelder spoke with him about why “reflection” should be the fourth “R” of education.

Interview by Sarah van Gelder

Sarah: Why does learning about the inner life make you a better teacher, or doctor, or carpenter, or citizen?

Parker: Every line of work is deepened by bringing all of our human capacities to bear on whatever we are doing, and that includes our inner sensibilities as well as our externally oriented knowledge and skill.

Doctors who are acquainted with their inner landscapes are better able to help their patients draw on the healing power of their own psyches and spirits. The relation between a doctor's emotional self-awareness and a patient's well-being is so well-grounded in clinical evidence that many medical schools are now making doctor-patient relationships a regular part of a physician's preparation.

Sarah: What exactly do you mean by the inner life?

Parker: The inner landscape has at least three dimensions: a cognitive and intellectual dimension; an emotional, psychological dimension; and a spiritual dimension. My definition of spiritual is that it involves the eternal human yearning to be connected with something larger than my own ego.

So, for example, if you're a great historian, you may be seeking to be

grandfather was a master carpenter. He had a sixth-grade education, but he had Einstein in his fingertips. His inner guidance was so strong that he could build a circular staircase in the middle of a house without using a miter box to cut the complex angles required. He'd cut them freehand and perfectly join that wood in a spiral.

My grandfather's feeling for wood was parallel to the way geneticist Barbara McClintock worked with the biotic materials that led her to breakthrough

If you want evidence of the importance of the inner life in institutional reform, look at the study of school reform in Chicago in the 1990s, done by Anthony Bryk and Barbara Schneider.*

The study asked why some schools do better than others at teaching reading, writing, and math. They found that none of the "usual suspects" made much of a difference in improving kids' learning: not money, models of governance, state-of-the-art curriculum, in-service training, or technology.

Engaging the inner life also makes for a more ethical professional practice. As we look around the professions today—not least in the world of business and accounting—we see why we need people who have an examined inner life to strengthen the ethics of those professions.

connected with the massive story of human development over time, which rescues you from the smallness of your own story. An astronomer or a physicist may likewise find meaning and purpose in the larger story of their discipline's contribution to human knowledge. If you're a seeker on a more traditional religious path, you may find that larger connection beyond your own ego in Allah or Yahweh or God or in the void, in the Godhead, the Buddha, and so on.

My definition of spirituality doesn't prescribe any particular path. Instead, it opens up an inquiry. We need such an inquiry in education because sometimes the answer people come up with in response to their spiritual yearning is the Third Reich, Aryan supremacy, or some other form of racism, sexism, or homophobia. We have all kinds of ways of saying, "My group is superior to your group," and that's the pathological way we get connected to something larger than our own egos.

So putting these questions on the table educationally is not only acceptable, it's critical. When we leave them unexamined, we get a lot of darkness in the world as people fail to examine their underlying spiritual dynamics in relation to their work and other responsibilities.

You mentioned carpenters. My

discoveries in genetic transposition more than 50 years ago, long before we had the scientific instrumentation we have today. Of course, she had all the logical and observational powers you need to win a Nobel Prize in medicine. But she also had a relationship with the maize she studied that she called "a feeling for the organism."

When we bring our inner lives into our work, whatever we're working with ceases to be an object to be manipulated and becomes instead a partner to co-create with. That's what good teachers do with students, good doctors do with patients, good writers do with words, good potters do with clay.

Sarah: What role does an inner practice have in educational settings?

Parker: For starters, if we helped would-be teachers understand their inner lives, we'd have less teacher burnout. Fifty percent of those who enter public school teaching will be gone at the end of five years. Schools are too often places that don't sustain human growth and development. And if you're not supporting that growth in teachers, then you're not doing that for students, because adults who don't develop their own inner lives can't pass those capacities on to the young.

But one variable made a huge difference, a variable the researchers called "relational trust." If your school had high levels of relational trust—among teachers and between teachers and administrators, and teachers and parents—and/or a leadership team that cared about trust, then over 10 years, your chance of raising student performance in basic skills was five out of seven. If not, your chances dropped to two out of seven.

So, what goes into relational trust? I'd argue that it relies on the capacity to do inner work, to go beyond the ego into something larger—in this case, into the shared desire to help children grow up in a way that will give them a chance at good lives.

Doing inner work means grappling with questions such as, "How do I get my own ego out of the way enough to regard you as a collaborator rather than as a competitor? If you step on my toes, how can I forgive you and move on? And if I step on your toes, how do I forgive myself and ask for your forgiveness so we can move on together?"

Engaging the inner life also makes for a more ethical professional practice. As we look around the professions today—not least in the world of business and accounting—we see why we need people who have an examined >>

» inner life to strengthen the ethics of those professions.

Socrates said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” I’d add, if you choose to live an unexamined life, please do not take a job that involves other people! You’re likely to cause real damage if you do.

Sarah: When people get clear on their values, don’t they tend to change the institutions they work with?

Parker: Yes, the inner life is subversive! When you develop an awareness of your inner life, you became aware

were willing to say what they knew—that our markets and financial system had become a house of cards. We need people within these institutions to act as moral agents, watching out for the best interests of those who are supposed to be served and of society at large.

In a recent article I wrote for *Change Magazine*,** I argued that professional education must include the competencies individuals need to work toward change in our very dysfunctional institutions. In other words, all professionals ought to have some of the skills of a community organizer.

power students to learn how to do that.

Sarah: Successful students are often the ones who did fit themselves into the slots within the educational institution that they graduated from.

Parker: That’s an important point. For generations, our schools have replicated the problems of our institutions. If you drive around small towns that haven’t rebuilt their high schools for the last 80 or 90 years, you see schools that were built to look like the factories that their graduates were going to work in. A lot

Institutions are projections of our own inner lives. Yes, they appear to have superhuman powers. But we can call them back to some semblance of humanity by reinventing them, because we invented them in the first place.

of the disparity between your integrity and the way the institutions around you operate. And you may become aware that *you* are part of the problem—that you live a divided life, that the actions your institutions demand of you conflict with your inner values.

For example, a doctor at one of our Center for Courage and Renewal retreats said that the HMO where he works has him on the edge of violating his Hippocratic Oath two or three times a week. And under No Child Left Behind, many teachers are struggling with the demands of a testing system that threatens their commitment to serve the best interests of kids.

At that point, you have to reach deep and ask yourself, “Am I going to continue to live a divided life? Am I going to tuck this under the rug and pretend that I don’t know what’s going on? Or am I going to become a moral change agent within my institution and rally like-minded people around me, coalescing our power to bring about institutional change?”

Part of our problem is that our major institutions are often so complex that outsiders who want to hold them accountable have little access. Wall Street is a horrific example. We all know what happened when so very few insiders

Sarah: In the new edition of your book, *The Courage to Teach*, you talk about debunking the myth that institutions possess autonomous power over our lives.

Parker: I tell a true story in *The Courage to Teach* about a medical resident who was given an impossible load of critical care patients to look after all by herself. She was unable to cope, and one of her patients died.

What do medical schools teach would-be doctors about their responsibilities and powers when they are asked to participate in wrongdoing? Do they teach them to blow the whistle on a system that puts them in an impossible situation? Or do they condition them to avoid getting crosswise with their superiors, and to just hope they make it through the day without anyone dying?

Institutions are projections of our own inner lives. Yes, they get large and complicated and appear to have superhuman powers. But we can call them back to some semblance of humanity by reinventing them, because we invented them in the first place. I think students don’t understand this. They believe that institutions have slots that you must fit into. But those slots are malleable, and those institutions can be rearranged. We have to help em-

of them look like those deadening assembly plant buildings that General Motors used to have, because the whole idea was to condition people to live and work under those circumstances.

But clearly that’s not education. Education was meant to be *liberating* for free men and women, which is where the name “liberal education” comes from.

Sarah: In *Change Magazine*, you proposed that we teach students how to “mine their emotions for knowledge.” What does that mean?

Parker: Fear can be like the canary in the mine. It’s trying to tell us that danger is coming and we need to do something about it. But people need help discerning their emotions, just as they need help discerning facts. We need to help students understand that some emotions come out of neurotic fears that can and must be overcome. But other emotions are pointing them toward external problems that they need to confront.

We do our best discernment in community, where many eyes, ears, sets of experiences, and voices can sort out the wheat from the chaff. That’s how every mode of human knowing proceeds, including science. All of us

together are smarter than any one of us alone—especially if we listen to the dissenters and to the people raising critical questions.

When students work together, they can learn how to move toward provisional conclusions about what's true and false, what's right and wrong, which leads are worth following, and which of them can be laid down and forgotten. If our schools would do that, we would have more community in our lives, better results in the world of work, and deeper discernment by citizens in our political life.

Likewise, institutional change doesn't come about simply through the actions of courageous whistle-blowers. It happens through the formation of communities of people who have a shared moral concern and who can provide encouragement, resources, and protection for each other. That way, the whistle-blower isn't so easily picked off and hung out to dry.

I don't know of any great movement that hasn't depended on base communities to sustain individuals in the demanding work of social change.

Sarah: You ended your new edition of *The Courage to Teach* by saying, "Let us resist the temptation to respond with a fearful 'no' or an elusive 'maybe,' and allow our lives to speak a clear and heartfelt 'yes.'" What does it mean to do that in the times we're in today?

Parker: For the past eight years, we had political leaders who lied to us. They pumped up our fear of terrorism to persuade us to agree to subverting our Constitution and disempowering citizens—strategies that we've seen before in fascist and totalitarian societies.

Now, of course, we have the fear that the American economy has been, and continues to be, a house of cards. A lot of people are suffering, and there is more suffering to come.

Rebuilding is going to require lots of Americans to re-envision what abundance means. I experienced more abundance in the Quaker community called Pendle Hill—where I spent 11 years

living on \$2,400 a year (beginning in 1975) plus room and board—than I have at many other times of my life. This abundance comes from knowing that we're there for one another. If the bottom falls out of my life, I have a support net, and if the bottom falls out of your life, I can be part of the support net for you. That's abundance.

There are not many Americans who live in that kind of milieu, so we're surrounded by fear. And yet, I don't think there's any more important time than this to say a heartfelt "yes" to the human possibility. That sense of possibility disappears when we say "no" or "If I can't have my illusions about the economy and about America's inherent greatness, then I'll give up. I'll hunker down, get what I can for me and my kind, and let the devil take the hindmost." That can very quickly become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

So, we need to make "yes" a self-fulfilling prophecy. But it has to be a "yes" tempered by a clear-eyed knowledge of both what is going on and what we know to be possible.

The challenge is to stand and act in what I call "the tragic gap." This is the gap between the hard facts that surround us and what we know to be possible—not our dreams or fantasies, but what we know to be possible because we've seen the evidence with our own eyes, just as I saw evidence of communal abundance during my years at Pendle Hill.

It's an ongoing journey to stand in the tragic gap and keep acting in hope-

ful ways, holding the tension between what is and what could be. It's so easy to flip out either into cynicism—because the latest wave of bad news has just washed over you—or into a kind of idealism, because something has gone well and you allow yourself to imagine that it will be this way forever. A good example might be the people who thought Barack Obama would get everything right, who are now tempted to drop out of the political process as Obama proves to have feet of clay, the kind that come with being human.

When I think of the great leaders whom I admire—whether it's Nelson Mandela, or Dorothy Day, who started the Catholic worker movement, or Martin Luther King, Jr., or Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar—I think of people who stood in the tragic gap for a long, long time, people who kept moving forward saying "yes" in full awareness of the hard realities around them while never abandoning their vision of possibility.

If more and more of us can hold that tension and keep moving forward by saying "yes, yes, yes" to each incremental step toward the possible, no matter how small, then I think all kinds of good things can happen. ♣

* *Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement*, Russell Sage Foundation Publications, 2004

** *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, November-December 2007



www.YesMagazine.org/tragicgap

Parker J. Palmer on how to move from what is to what we know to be possible



The "Learn As You Go" Resource Guide

The information and links you need to find out more.
www.YesMagazine.org/resourceguide51

The "Learn As You Go" Discussion Guide

Get a group together and have a conversation.
www.YesMagazine.org/discuss51

Weapons of Mass Democracy



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Nonviolent Resistance Is the Most Powerful Tactic Against Oppressive Regimes

Stephen Zunes

On the outskirts of a desert town in the Moroccan-occupied territory of Western Sahara, about a dozen young activists are gathered. They are involved in their country's long struggle for freedom. A group of foreigners—veterans of protracted resistance movements—is conducting a training session in the optimal use of a “weapons system” that is increasingly deployed in struggles for freedom around the world. The workshop leaders pass out Arabic translations of writings on the theory and

dynamics of revolutionary struggle and lead the participants in a series of exercises designed to enhance their strategic and tactical thinking.

These trainers are not veterans of guerrilla warfare, however, but of unarmed insurrections against repressive regimes. The materials they hand out are not the words of Che Guevara, but of Gene Sharp, the former Harvard scholar who has pioneered the study of strategic nonviolent action. And the weapons they advocate employing

are not guns and bombs, but strikes, boycotts, mass demonstrations, tax refusal, alternative media, and refusal to obey official orders.

Serbs, South Africans, Filipinos, Georgians, and other veterans of successful nonviolent struggles are sharing their knowledge and experience with those still fighting dictators and occupation armies.

The young Western Saharans know how an armed struggle by an older generation of their countrymen failed

Aminatou Haidar, center, is a Sahrawi human-rights defender, activist, and former political prisoner (1987-91). This photo was taken in 2006, when Haidar and other political prisoners were released by Moroccan authorities after pressure by human rights organizations. Sahrawi is a term for a group of Hassaniya-speaking Arab-Berber Bedouin tribes traditionally located in Western Sahara and surrounding areas. Haidar won the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award in 2008 and was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize the same year.

to dislodge the Moroccans, who first invaded their country back in 1975. They have seen how Morocco's allies on the U.N. Security Council—led by France and the United States—blocked enforcement of U.N. resolutions supporting their right to self-determination. With the failure of both armed struggle and diplomacy to bring them freedom, they have decided to instead employ a force more powerful.

The Rise of Nonviolence

The long-standing assumption that dictatorial regimes can only be overthrown through armed struggle or foreign military intervention is coming under increasing challenge. Though nonviolent action has a long and impressive history going back centuries, events in recent decades have demonstrated more than ever that nonviolent action is not just a form of principled witness utilized by religious pacifists. It is the most powerful political tool available to challenge oppression.

It was not the leftist guerrillas of the New People's Army who brought down the U.S.-backed Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines. It was nuns praying the rosary in front of the regime's tanks, and the millions of others who brought greater Manila to a standstill.

It was not the 11 weeks of bombing that brought down Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic, the infamous "butcher of the Balkans." It was a non-violent resistance movement led by young students, whose generation had

been sacrificed in a series of bloody military campaigns against neighboring Yugoslav republics, and who were able to mobilize a large cross-section of the population to rise up against a stolen election.

It was not the armed wing of the African National Congress that brought majority rule to South Africa. It was workers, students, and township dwellers who—through the use of strikes, boycotts, the creation of alternative institutions, and other acts of defiance—made it impossible for the apartheid system to continue.

It was not NATO that brought down the communist regimes of Eastern Europe or freed the Baltic republics from Soviet control. It was Polish dockworkers, East German church people, Estonian folk singers, Czech intellectuals, and millions of ordinary citizens.

Similarly, such tyrants as Jean-Claude Duvalier in Haiti, Moussa Traoré in Mali, King Gyanendra in Nepal, General Suharto in Indonesia, and, most recently, Maumoon Gayoom in the Maldives were forced to cede power when it became clear that they were powerless in the face of massive nonviolent resistance and noncooperation.

The power of nonviolent action has been acknowledged even by such groups as Freedom House, a Washington-based organization with close ties to the foreign policy establishment. Its 2005 study observed that, of the nearly 70 countries that have made the transition from dictatorship to varying degrees of democracy in the past 30 years, only a small minority did so through armed struggle from below or reform instigated from above. Hardly any new democracies resulted from foreign invasion. In nearly three-quarters of the transitions, change was rooted in democratic civil-society organizations that employed nonviolent methods. In addition, the study noted that countries where nonviolent civil resistance movements played a major role tend to have freer and more stable democratic systems.

A different study, published last year in the journal *International Security*, used an expanded database and analyzed 323 major insurrections

in support of self-determination and democratic rule since 1900. It found that violent resistance was successful only 26 percent of the time, whereas nonviolent campaigns had a 53 percent success rate.

From the poorest nations of Africa to the relatively affluent countries of Eastern Europe; from communist regimes to right-wing military dictatorships; from across the cultural, geographic and ideological spectrum, democratic and progressive forces have recognized the power of nonviolent action to free them from oppression. This has not come, in most cases, from a moral or spiritual commitment to nonviolence, but simply because it works.

Why Nonviolent Action Works

Armed resistance, even for a just cause, can terrify people not yet committed to the struggle, making it easier for a government to justify violent repression and use of military force in the name of protecting the population. Even rioting and vandalism can turn public opinion against a movement, which is why some governments have employed agents provocateurs to encourage such violence. The use of force against unarmed resistance movements, on the other hand, usually creates greater sympathy for the government's opponents. As with the martial art of aikido, nonviolent opposition movements can engage the force of the state's repression and use it to effectively disarm the force directed against them.

In addition, unarmed campaigns involve a range of participants far beyond the young able-bodied men normally found in the ranks of armed guerrillas. As the movement grows in strength, it can include a large cross-section of the population. Though most repressive governments are well-prepared to deal with a violent insurgency, they tend to be less prepared to counter massive non-cooperation by old, middle-aged, and young. When millions of people defy official orders by engaging in illegal demonstrations, going out on strike, violating curfews, refusing to pay taxes, and otherwise

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Weapons of Mass Democracy

» refusing to recognize the legitimacy of the state, the state no longer has power. During the “people power” uprising against the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines, for example, Marcos lost power not through the defeat of his troops and the storming of the Malacañang Palace but when—due to massive defiance of his orders—the palace became the only part of the country he still effectively controlled.

Furthermore, pro-government elements tend to be more willing to compromise with nonviolent insurgents, who are less likely to physically harm their opponents when they take power. When massive demonstrations challenged the military junta in Chile in the late 1980s, military leaders convinced the dictator Augusto Pinochet

to serious economic, environmental, and social problems, the new leadership is tempted to embrace emergency powers they are later reluctant to surrender. Algeria and Guinea-Bissau experienced military coups soon after their successful armed independence struggles, while victorious communist guerrillas in a number of countries simply established new dictatorships.

By contrast, successful nonviolent movements build broad coalitions based on compromise and consensus. The new order that emerges from that foundation tends to be pluralistic and democratic.

Liberal democracy carries no guarantee of social justice, but many of those involved in pro-democracy struggles have later played a key role in leading

Recent successes of nonviolent tactics have raised concerns about their use by those with undemocratic aims. However, it is virtually impossible for an undemocratic result to emerge from a movement based upon broad popular support. Local elites, often with the support of foreign powers, have historically promoted regime change through military invasions, coup d'états, and other kinds of violent seizures of power that install an undemocratic minority. Nonviolent “people power” movements, by contrast, make peaceful regime change possible by empowering pro-democratic majorities.

Indeed, every successful nonviolent insurrection has been a homegrown movement rooted in the realization by the masses that their rulers were

When millions of people defy official orders by engaging in illegal demonstrations, going out on strike, violating curfews, refusing to pay taxes, and otherwise refusing to recognize the legitimacy of the state, the state no longer has power.

to agree to the nonviolent protesters' demands for a referendum on his continued rule and to accept the results when the vote went against him.

Unarmed movements also increase the likelihood of defections and non-cooperation by police and military personnel, who will generally fight in self-defense against armed guerrillas but are hesitant to shoot into unarmed crowds. Such defiance was key to the downfall of dictatorships in East Germany, Mali, Serbia, the Philippines, Ukraine, and elsewhere. The moral power of nonviolence is crucial to the ability of an opposition movement to reframe the perceptions of the public, political elites, and the military.

A Democratizing Force

In many cases, armed revolutionaries—trained in martial values, the power of the gun, and a leadership model based upon a secret, elite vanguard—have themselves become authoritarian rulers once in power. In addition, because civil war often leads

the effort to establish more equitable social and economic orders. For example, the largely nonviolent indigenous peasant and worker movements that ended a series of military dictatorships in Bolivia in the 1980s formed the basis of the movement that brought Evo Morales and his allies to power, resulting in a series of exciting reforms benefiting the country's poor, indigenous majority.

Another reason nonviolent movements tend to create sustainable democracy is that, in the course of the movement, alternative institutions are created that empower ordinary people. For example, autonomous workers' councils eroded the authority of party *apparatchiks* in Polish industry even as the Communist Party still nominally ruled the country. In South Africa, popularly elected local governments and people's courts in the black townships completely usurped the authority of administrators and judges appointed by the apartheid regime long before majority rule came to the country as a whole.

illegitimate and that the political system would not redress injustice. By contrast, a nonviolent insurrection is unlikely to succeed when the movement's leadership and agenda do not have the backing of the majority of the population. This is why the 2002–2003 “strike” by some privileged sectors of Venezuela's oil industry failed to bring down the democratically elected government of Hugo Chavez, while the widely supported strikes in the Iranian oil fields against the Shah in 1978–1979 were key in bringing down his autocratic regime.

Homegrown Movements

Unlike most successful unarmed insurrections, Iran slid back under autocratic rule after the overthrow of the Shah. Now, hard-line clerics and their allies have themselves been challenged by a nonviolent pro-democracy movement. Like most governments facing popular challenges, rather than acknowledging their own failures, the Iranian regime has sought to blame

outsiders for fomenting the resistance. Given the sordid history of U.S. interventionism in that country—including the overthrow of Iran’s last democratic government in 1953 in a CIA-backed military coup—some are taking those claims seriously. However, Iranians have engaged in nonviolent action for generations, not just in opposition to the Shah, but going back to the 1890–1892 boycotts against concessions to the British and the 1905–1908 Constitutional Revolution. There is little Americans can teach Iranians about such civil resistance.

Citing funding from Western governments and foundations, similar charges of powerful Western interests being responsible for nonviolent insurrections have also been made in regard to recent successful pro-democracy movements in Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine.

However, while outside funding can be useful in enabling opposition groups to buy computers, print literature, and promote their work, it cannot cause a nonviolent liberal democratic revolution to take place any more than Soviet financial and material support for leftist movements in previous decades could cause an armed socialist revolution to take place.

Successful revolutions, whatever their ideological orientation, are the result of certain social conditions. Indeed, no amount of money could force hundreds of thousands of people to leave their jobs, homes, schools, and families to face down heavily armed police and tanks and put their bodies on the line. They must be motivated by a desire for change so strong they are willing to make the sacrifices and take the personal risks to bring it about.

In any case, there is no standardized formula for success that a foreign government could put together, since the history, culture, and political alignments of each country are unique. No foreign government can recruit or mobilize the large numbers of ordinary civilians necessary to build a movement capable of effectively challenging the established political leadership, much less of toppling a government.



Sahrawi freedom fighters in Western Sahara display their flag to celebrate the release of political prisoners in 2006. Use of the Sahrawi flag is forbidden in Morocco.

AFAPREDESA.ORG PHOTO

Even workshops like the one for the Western Saharan activists, usually funded through nonprofit, nongovernmental foundations, generally focus on providing generic information on the theory, dynamics, and history of nonviolent action. There is broad consensus among workshop leaders that only those involved in the struggles themselves are in a position to make tactical and strategic decisions, so they tend not to give specific advice. However, such capacity-building efforts—like comparable NGO projects for sustainable development, human rights, equality for women and minorities, economic justice, and the environment—can be an effective means of fostering international solidarity.

Back in Western Sahara, anti-occupation activists, building on their own experiences against the Moroccan occupation and on what they learned from the workshop, press on in the struggle for their country’s freedom. In the face of severe repression from U.S.-backed Moroccan forces, the movement continues with demonstrations, leafleting, graffiti writing, flag waving, boycotts, and other actions. One prominent leader of the movement, Aminatou

Haidar, won the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award last November, and she has been twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Those in the Western Sahara resistance are among the growing numbers of people around the world struggling against repression who have recognized that armed resistance is more likely to magnify their suffering than relieve it.

From Western Sahara to West Papua to the West Bank, people are engaged in nonviolent resistance against foreign occupation. Similarly, from Egypt to Iran to Burma, people are fighting nonviolently for freedom from dictatorial rule.

Recent history has shown that power ultimately resides in the people, not in the state; that nonviolent strategies can be more powerful than guns; and that nonviolent action is a form of conflict that can build, rather than destroy. ▼



Stephen Zunes chairs the Middle Eastern Studies program at the University of San Francisco. He is principal editor of *Nonviolent Social Movements* and author of *Tinderbox: U.S. Middle East Policy and the Roots of Terrorism*.

The Poor as Customers?

Entrepreneurs contribute lots of money but offer limited social change



Just Another Emperor? The Myths and Realities of Philanthrocapitalism

MICHAEL EDWARDS

Demos, 2008, 106 pages, \$11.95

REVIEWED BY JOHN HARVEY

About a decade ago, a new energy in organized philanthropy began to emerge. Dot-com entrepreneurs from Seattle and Silicon Valley, armed with buckets of money, public relations acumen, and unflinching self-confidence, were asserting themselves where East Coast and Midwest-based foundations such as Ford, Rockefeller, and MacArthur had long dominated. And in a very short time, the upstart West Coast philanthropists became major players.

They are an enormously ambitious lot—most are keenly interested in global issues, for example, and they

bring to the table a very different set of assumptions and theories of change than most of the foundations that came before them.

Just Another Emperor? The Myths and Realities of Philanthrocapitalism is Michael Edwards' short but thorough—and often critical—exploration of this business-oriented trend in philanthropy. Edwards makes a compelling case that, despite a great capacity to throw money at the world's most compelling problems, “philanthrocapitalists” have little capacity to fundamentally address them.

Edwards, a fellow at Demos and

two universities, spent nine years as a program manager at the Ford Foundation. His book explores the language associated with the field—“social enterprise” and “social entrepreneurship,” “venture philanthropy,” “corporate social responsibility”—before examining a few core elements. These include a belief that methods drawn from the business sector are superior to those used by government and civil society, and a claim that these methods will do more than just deliver goods and services: They will also bring about a transformation of society.

To these I would add two more core beliefs, not included on Edwards' short list but made fairly explicit throughout the book: First, it is individuals, not communities or social movements, that philanthrocapitalists believe are the prime catalysts of change. Second, harnessing the power of the marketplace, not taming or transforming it, will achieve the most powerful results.

What's more, these philanthrocapitalists often have different views of the kind of change that's needed. Their strategy is to focus on change within

the existing system, not on upending the system itself. Cure a particular illness, not the conditions that helped the illness thrive.

Peppered throughout the book are rich quotes that help shed light on how prominent voices and practitioners in the sector view progress and their relationship to it: “The most pressing environmental issues of our time will be ... solved when desperate governments and NGOs finally surrender their ideologies and tap the private sector for help” (from Richard Morais, senior editor at Forbes magazine); “The profit motive could be the best tool for solving the world’s problems, more effective than any government or private philanthropy” (Larry Ellison, founder of Oracle); and “We should see every poor person on the planet as a potential customer” (Jacqueline Novogratz, founder of the Acumen Fund).

Edwards notes that philanthropists’ use of the term “social” “usually signifies a target group, not a method of collective action.” This is an extremely important point. Attending one of the sector’s lavish conferences, one comes away with a sense that low-income and disempowered communities are objects, not subjects, done “for” or “to” rather than “with.” Community organizing and movement building don’t appear to be a major part of the sector’s theory of change.

The most important chapters in the book explore the potential of philanthrocapitalism to live up to what it advocates promise, in theory and in practice. From neither standpoint does Edwards see much to celebrate. In fact, he expresses some fear that the field could do more harm than good.

The field is young, he notes, and is not known for humility or self-reflection. What’s more, those who write about it tend to be evangelists who argue by anecdote. The overall evidence, Edwards writes, is that while philanthrocapitalism may make certain goods and services more readily available, few efforts if any have been socially or politically transformative.

He reminds us that businesses are legally structured to make money for shareholders—that’s their bottom line—and that individualism lies at the core of markets. Civil society, on the other hand, faces many bottom lines—opportunity, empowerment, happiness, sustainability—and demands collective action and mutuality. In markets, we are consumers; in society, we are citizens.

Edwards doesn’t deny that business has something to teach the non-profit sector, but he raises a number of red flags. He fears a focus on providing services at the expense of structural change. He also warns of inequality between well-resourced “high-performing” service providers and under-resourced community-based and advocacy groups, whose successes can be real but are hard to measure using business-type metrics.

Ultimately, Edwards sees little hope that philanthrocapitalism will harmonize the domains of business and civil society. He finds an important ally from within the business sector: Jim Collins, author of the widely read *Good to Great*, argues that “we must reject the idea—well-intentioned, but dead wrong—that the primary path to greatness in the social sectors is to become more like business.”

In the final chapter Edwards suggests how philanthropists might better achieve their ambitious and important goals. These include making a commitment to modesty and a culture of learning, and funding structural and systemic change rather than service delivery. Edwards argues that philanthropy has achieved far less than governments committed to equality and justice and strong social movements. Furthermore, “No great social cause was mobilized through the market in the 20th century,” he writes. “Business and markets play a vital role in taking... advances forward, but they are followers, not leaders, ‘instruments in the orchestra’ but not conductors.”

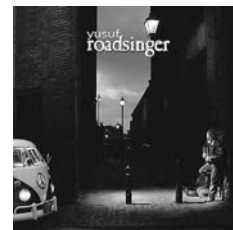
John Harvey is executive director of San Francisco-based Grantmakers Without Borders.

YES! PICKS :: Musical inspiration while putting out this issue



Oh My God, Charlie Darwin

Rhode Island trio **The Low Anthem** offers a bipolar range of elegant Americana balladry singed with a bit of junkyard rock. Harmonium and banjo thrum alongside Tibetan singing bowl and oil drum.



The Roadsinger

Welcome back **Yusuf Islam** (the former **Cat Stevens**) as he returns to the pop world. His music is autobiographical—sleepy and nostalgic, tinged with age.



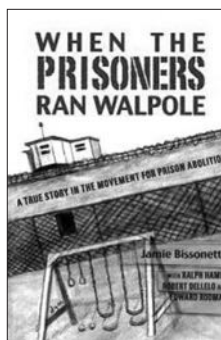
The People United Will Never Be Defeated!

Composer **Frederic Rzewski** hammers home a message of solidarity in his piano masterwork *36 Variations*, based on the rousing Chilean people’s chant *El pueblo unido jamás será vencido*. In performance, it is traditional to play the spoken chant before the piano variations.

Stephen Drury captures that drama on this recording.



Have a listen at
www.YesMagazine.org/music



When the Prisoners Ran Walpole

JAMIE BISSONETTE

South End Press, 2008, 258 pages, \$20

REVIEWED BY CAROL ESTES

On March 9, 1973, the guards at Walpole State Prison in Massachusetts walked off their jobs to protest prison reforms. The governor declared a state of emergency. And the inmates were left in control of the maximum security prison with the highest murder rate in the nation.

What happened during the next three months—or rather, what did not happen—is one of the most important stories in the history of the U.S. criminal justice system.

That story is told in *When the Prisoners Ran Walpole: A True Story in the Movement for Prison Abolition*, by Jamie Bissonette, with former Walpole prisoner leaders Ralph Hamm and Robert Dellelo, and Episcopal priest Edward Rodman.

What did not happen at Walpole was what everyone feared: murder, rape, violence, and chaos. Instead, with the prisoners in charge, incidents of violence dropped to zero. Inmates moved about freely. They got the prison industries up and running again. They created a part-time work schedule so that men could both work and attend the new education programs they started. They invited in outside observers and the media to monitor their actions. And through their union, a chapter of the National Prisoners Reform Association (NPR), they held

ongoing negotiations with the administration for improved living conditions and won concessions that are, in some cases, still in effect today.

But in the end, the prisoners ran the prison too well. Again and again the guards' union was humiliated by the successes of the inmates. Finally, on May 18, the administration succumbed to intense political pressure to “take back control,” and the guards re-entered the prison, this time for good.

What can these three months at Walpole teach us about our predicament today, when one out of 31 Americans, according to the Pew Center on the States, is under the supervision of our criminal justice system?

For starters, Bissonette’s meticulously documented portrait shows prisoners as intelligent, capable, disciplined people quite capable of running their own lives. The “voices” of the prisoners themselves, outside observers, and officials, further challenge the fundamental assumptions behind our criminal justice system, that people convicted of crimes must be “incapacitated.” The enemies of our social order, it turns out, are not just those we’ve locked up.

The authors suggest that our overflowing prisons are, at root, a labor problem, and they may well be right. The unemployment rate in the U.S. is 9.5 percent. What if we were to add to the pool of job seekers the 2.3 million men and women now in prison? Do we need to keep some people in prison, working for 50 cents an hour, so that the rest of us can thrive, so that guards can keep their jobs, and prisons and the industries they support can prosper? Are our prisoners “redundant people,” to borrow sociologist Zygmunt Bauman’s term, people for whom we have no need and no room?

Confronting disturbing questions like these is not fun, but it is the real work of social change. This book takes us firmly by the shoulders and turns us to face them.

Carol Estes is director of University Behind Bars, a program that offers college courses to prisoners in Washington state.



Nowtopia: How Pirate Programmers, Outlaw Bicyclists, and Vacant-Lot Gardeners are Inventing the Future—Today!

AK Press, 2008, 278 pages, \$18.95

REVIEWED BY LAURA KALIEBE

“What do you do?”

It’s a form of introduction. We memorize a name and job title over a quick handshake.

Our society unconsciously evaluates people in terms of their nine-to-five jobs, as Chris Carlsson points out at the beginning of *Nowtopia*. He presents as an alternative a “new politics of work,” profiling people seeking fulfillment beyond the office.

Whether former dot-comers fleeing the “corporate pixel mines” or retired math teachers escaping to the Burning Man festival, Carlsson’s subjects share “a hunger for social experiences outside of the ‘normal’ economic constraints of earning, buying, and selling.”

Carlsson, one of the founders of the Critical Mass “bike-in” movement, tries to place his subjects in the context of capitalism. But he may be trying to accomplish too much—his examination of the proverbial middle class, peppered with references to Karl Marx, often comes off as disjointed and preachy.

That doesn’t detract, however, from his mission: to write about nowtopia, “a sensible, humane, and comfortable life for everyone,” a place that is both nowhere and everywhere, both now and still being built.

Laura Kaliebe is a Seattle-based writer.



VELCROW RIPPER PHOTO

FILM ::
Fierce Light

Directed by Velcrow Ripper, 2008, 97 minutes

REVIEWED BY ELENA JOHNSON

Canadian documentarian Velcrow Ripper was filming a demonstration in Mexico when a friend and fellow documentarian was shot in the melee. The 2006 incident prompted Ripper to question his own ability to continue being a filmmaker and activist in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

Ripper sought the spiritual motivation—or “fierce light”—behind his own media activism, and from there a new film was born.

Fierce Light portrays examples of what Ripper calls “spiritual activism,” ranging from a Los Angeles protest to save North America’s largest urban farm, to thousands of Dalits (“Untouchables”) creating a safe haven in India, to historical events such as the American Civil Rights movement. It includes interviews with figures such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Daryl Hannah, bell hooks, and U.S. Rep. John Lewis.

The political actions featured in *Fierce Light* focus on compassion and inter-connection, and as Lewis, who participated in the civil rights movement, points out, nonviolence and love.

“Hate,” he says in the film, “is too heavy a burden to bear.”

Fierce Light delves into territory that skeptics might consider fluffy or insubstantial, but the political actions it highlights are grounded, community-based, and well thought out. And many, such as the Dalits’ efforts in India, have slowly brought about change.

The film does become a bit repetitive in the middle, and skims over some potentially poignant examples by mentioning them only briefly, such as a scene in Thailand in which protesters stand and pray in the rising waters of a river being dammed.

The film’s breadth could be deemed its main flaw—too many examples, too many voices. But these voices are calling for peace, hope, and compassionate action. Considering the current state of the world, perhaps the more such calls we can hear, the better.

The second film in what will be a trilogy, *Fierce Light* is brave, beautiful, and compelling: food for thought for anyone who is spiritually minded or politically inclined, and a must-see for anyone who is both.

Elena Johnson is a journalist, poet, and researcher based in Vancouver, B.C.

 www.YesMagazine.org/films51
Trailers of our favorite movies

YES! PICKS ::
Maddening and motivating independent films

The Greening of Southie

Bullfrog Films, 2008, 72 min.

A luxury condo project sprouts in gritty, industrial South Boston, aiming to become the city’s first building constructed almost completely of recycled and sustainable materials. Veteran contractors and construction workers skeptically grapple with the challenges of eco-friendly building, while residents overcome their own resistance to the development. Creative cinematography makes the story more compelling.

What’s the Economy For, Anyway?

Directed by John de Graaf, 2009, 40 min.

With its focus on consumerism and profit, the United States falls behind other industrialized nations in terms of health, happiness, and overall quality of life. Documentarian John de Graaf, the film’s writer and producer, explains these comparisons and encourages us to question the value of Gross Domestic Product.

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FROM THE PUBLISHER



No matter how hard we worked during the 2008 election, our voice, our presence, our money is even more important now.

Push Back Against Big Money

IF YOUR EMAIL INBOX IS LIKE MINE, it's full of urgent messages to take action on health care, climate change, war, and plenty more.

It can be annoying. After all, we've got lives to live. But the simple truth is that what is happening this fall in the U.S. Congress and at international meetings is all about how we'll live our lives for a long time to come. While we need to tend to our families, our work, our finances, and even ourselves, we also need to make our voices heard. This is a time for activism like none we have seen in decades. This fall holds lots of opportunities to shift the field of what is possible.

Driving the urgency is the Obama administration's strategy of cramming a host of big issues into its first year. No matter how hard we worked during the 2008 election, our voice, our presence, our money is even more important now.

Legislation, rules, agreements, and treaties are rapidly moving forward that stand to change the very structures of our society. The corporate lobbyists know it, and they've shifted into overdrive. We the people are the only counter to the narrow interests of Big Pharma, Big Oil, Big Ag, Big Nuclear, Wall Street Banks, and the many others that put short-term profits ahead of the well-being of humanity.

That our Congress is even discussing a federal public health insurance

option or how to curtail greenhouse gases, that we have the beginnings of a troop drawdown in Iraq, and that we're funding green jobs programs especially designed to include the poor is a tribute to the tireless work of citizen activists. The big money at the table doesn't want any of those things.

So now is the time when we must take a moment to sign that petition, make that call to our representatives, write that letter to the editor, march in that rally, go to that teach-in, and give money to our favorite causes. We must do it once, then again, and again, and again.

And on the global front, let me note a number of important global/local mobilizations.

October 24: Day of Climate Action. This worldwide campaign focuses on the need to get below 350 parts per million of carbon dioxide in the Earth's atmosphere, the level considered safe by scientists. (We're now at about 392 and rising.) This action follows from the successful Step-It-Up Campaign that Bill McKibben initiated in 2007. See: www.350.org.

November 28 to December 5: Week of Action. This is the 10th anniversary of the Seattle protests that stalled the World Trade Organization. It coincides with the time of the WTO's next ministerial meeting in Geneva. Worldwide there will be protests, teach-ins, rallies, marches, and festivals to say

"Our World is Not for Sale" and push for a future where the needs of people and the planet are respected. You can be part of these activities. See: www.wiserearth.org/group/Seattle10.

December 12: Global Day of Action. The big United Nations climate conference will be held in Copenhagen December 7-18. At that meeting the countries of the world will determine whether we will seriously step up to the threat of climate change or just argue our way right over the cliff. In the middle of that meeting, a Global Day of Action will take place in locations across the globe. See: www.globalclimatecampaign.org.

We'll carry news of these developments on the newly relaunched YES! Magazine website, www.yesmagazine.org.

While big money interests distort our national priorities, robust social movements are pushing back hard. So rather than being annoyed at all those emails, we must be grateful for the nudges. In the end, it is votes that count in our elections, and it is our individual and community actions that shift the field of what can even be voted on. We do have the power, but only if we use it. Here's to one very busy fall.

Fran Korten, Publisher



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At YES! Magazine we work with hundreds of organizations that are building a just and sustainable world. We develop special partnerships with some to help each of us reach more people. Here are two partner organizations whose work we think you'll want to know about.

Small Planet Institute



Living democracy, feeding hope.

Founded by Frances Moore Lappé and Anna Lappé, the Small Planet Institute fosters Living Democracy—a rewarding

way of life in which citizens infuse the values of inclusion, fairness and mutual accountability into all dimensions of public life. The Lappés' books include Frances' *Getting a Grip: Clarity, Creativity, and Courage in a World Gone Mad* and Anna's forthcoming *Diet for a Hot Planet*. They speak frequently and produce a range of media, from blogs to videos. www.smallplanet.org

Bainbridge Graduate Institute



The Bainbridge Graduate Institute is a leader in the movement to make business and business education a force for environmental restoration, social justice, and planetary survival. One of the first graduate schools in the United States to offer an MBA in Sustainable Business, BGI is ranked first in preparation for ethical and socially responsible leadership by Net Impact, the association of MBA

students seeking to transform their schools in the direction of greater social responsibility. www.bgi.edu.org

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YES! PICKS ::

OneWebDay

September 22. OneWebDay asks communities worldwide to take the future of the Internet into their own hands. This year's theme is "One Web. For All." It focuses on the promise of true digital inclusion. Events include a week of technology service, an Open Hot Spots Project, and a call to action for universal Web access. www.onewebday.org

Seattle + 10: Global Days of Action

November 28–December 5. 2009 marks the 10th anniversary of the historic Seattle WTO protests. Local and global days of action will focus on the economic crisis, the '09 WTO ministerial conference in Geneva, and the U.N. Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen. Non-violent street demonstrations, teach-ins, and seminars will address interconnected economic, social, and environmental issues. Visit wiserearth.org/group/seattle10 for a directory of groups and events, plus tools to assist with your own local organizing. Also check www.yesmagazine.org and www.facebook.com/yesmagazine for updates about YES! co-sponsored events.

Say YES! Saturdays on Twitter

Each Saturday we ask our Twitter friends, "What are you saying yes to that helps build a more just, sustainable, and compassionate world?" Join the conversation! hashtag: #sayyessat

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More upcoming events



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TOXIC BEAUTY

I hear that a lot of beauty products have harmful ingredients. But what are they, and how can I avoid them?

The FDA does not require cosmetic companies to test their products for safety. As a result, you could find just about anything in your makeup drawer: mercury in your mascara, coal tar in your hair dye, or lead in your lipstick. Several harmful ingredients are toxic, prone to contamination, and linked to cancer, allergies, and birth defects. You don't want lead in children's toys or mercury in your seafood—so why would you apply them to your skin, hair, and face?

Since the Environmental Working Group's (EWG) 2004 launch of Skin Deep, an online database that offers safety information on 42,421 products and 8,363 ingredients, momentum has grown to fight the use of toxins, carcinogens, and other harmful substances in personal care products. Groups such as Teens For Safe Cosmetics, tweenBeauty, Campaign for Safe Cosmetics, and Best in Beauty promote consumer education about product ingredients and have taken the issue to their legislators. In 2005, California passed the California Safe Cosmetics Act, which requires the manufacturer to provide the California

Department of Public Health with a list of all cosmetic products containing ingredients known or suspected to cause cancer, birth defects, or other harm. Action has yet to be taken at the federal level, but EWG is collecting online signatures for a petition to Congress.

What can you do? Minimize your exposure to harmful substances by cutting back on some items or eliminating them from your routine altogether. Also, read labels to ensure the validity of often-gimmicky claims such as "natural" and "fragrance free." Products so labeled may, in fact, contain fragrances to produce a more neutral scent, while so-called "natural" products may contain toxins, too.

Visit the EWG's Skin Deep cosmetic safety database online at skindeep.wg.org to see what's in your products. You can find safer products at safecosmetics.org, biggreenpurse.com, greenlivingnow.com, and goodguide.com.—L.B.

ECO-MAIL

Can I reuse envelopes I get in the mail? How do I do it correctly?

You can not only mail envelopes again, you can also use them to help make your life more organized and eco-friendly.

Planet Green (planetgreen.com)

Our Issue 51 researchers

Lynsi Burton is a writer and Washington State University alum. She thanks YES! for making her a storehouse of quirky information on everything from oysters to envelopes. **Heather Purser** has a creative writing degree from Western Washington University. She has developed an appreciation for research while at YES!, but vows never to attempt such an act again once her internship is complete.



Heather Purser

Lynsi Burton
(with oyster)

discovery.com) and the solution-oriented folks at ehow.com have some ideas. To keep an envelope fit for mailing, carefully turn it inside out or unfold it completely and glue it back together with the inside facing out. This not only conceals the addresses, but also the barcodes that could send a recycled envelope in the wrong direction. If you're not so handy with the folding, use a label to cover the addresses and black permanent ink to cover the barcodes at the bottom. You can also cut out images from old magazines to cover addresses and repair torn flaps.

One way to preserve the flap while unsealing is to microwave the envelope for

30 seconds. This can also save stuck envelopes sealed shut due to moisture, so you don't have to buy new ones. Reseal the envelope with new glue or a warm iron if the glue is preserved.

Old envelopes have other uses, too. Write your shopping list on the outside and tuck coupons inside. Use envelopes as page markers or for seed storage. Throw them in the paper shredder and use the shreds as packing material or gift-bag stuffing. Or organize your tax files by keeping receipts in your envelopes.

As for those envelopes with plastic windows, these can be recycled with the rest of your paper because post-consumer paper mills can remove small

YES! PICKS ::

Homegrown Dog Food

Tracy Loeffelholz Dunn and her husband Paul were tired of searching for the best dog food for their 4-year-old German Shepherd, Penny Lane, who'd suffered a serious case of itchininess since she was a puppy. When Penny's veterinarian suggested a dietary allergy could be causing the symptoms, the owners tried to isolate the problem.

"One \$50 bag of food after another—salmon only, chicken only, no grain. Nothing worked. A year later she was still an itchy dog," recalls Tracy, YES! Magazine's creative director.

As carnivores and a sub-species of wolves, dogs are designed to eat animal protein and fat by consuming bones and raw meat. In the wild, the stomach contents of animal prey provide nutrients from grains and vegetables. Enter the modern raw-food plan, which provides a variety of fresh meats, pureed vegetables, and fruits.

YES! Web Managing Editor Lilja Otto switched her Appenzeller Mountain Dog, Bounty, to a raw-food diet, and within two weeks, Bounty had a soft, fluffy coat (minus the shedding), naturally clean teeth, and a much-improved disposition. Once willful and rambunctious, Bounty became more obedient and easygoing.

Penny Lane seemed to sniff out the new diet herself. For months, she'd been snatching fresh chicken eggs from the Dunns' coop and sneaking kale and almost-ripe tomatoes from the garden. The Dunns decided Penny Lane should eat as well as they do. Says Tracy: "Penny can't believe her luck," and she's not so itchy anymore.—H.P.

contaminants such as those bits of plastic.—L.B.

MOSS pHREE

How do I remove moss from my rooftop, lawn, and driveway without using chemicals?

In our Summer 2001 issue, we recommended sweeping your sidewalk, driveway, and roof regularly with a stiff broom to prevent moss growth. But to remove the moss that's already there, a trusty colleague reports success with applying wood ash, which kills the acid-loving moss by making the pH more alkaline. Then your moss will wash away. But, if applying wood ash to kill rooftop moss, make sure the residue in

the downwash won't kill any acidic plants in your yard. If you have garden lime on hand, which is often used to reduce acidity in soil, applying this on your unwanted moss will have the same effect.

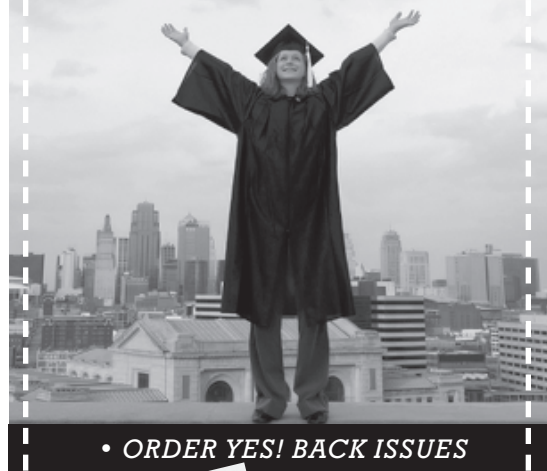
Moss does no harm to your garden or lawn, but it can wear down your rooftop. Thick moss growth retains moisture on roofing materials, advancing wood rot and eroding asphalt in shingles.

Killing or removing moss will not prevent regrowth unless the conditions that foster its growth are changed. Improve water drainage, increase direct sunlight, or add competitive plants such as grasses.—L.B.

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UPDATE

HAS THE PROMISE OF THE STORIES WE'VE PUBLISHED TURNED INTO REALITY?



RICH AWN PHOTO, GREEN AIR MEDIA

The River Project conducts oyster experiments and other research at Pier 40 in New York City. riverproject.org



www.YesMagazine.org/oysters
See the new oyster reef off Tribeca/West Manhattan

Hudson River Serves Up Oysters Redux

Ten years ago in YES! ... We shared the December 1998 discovery of a dozen oysters that a fisherman hauled out of the Hudson River near Yonkers, New York. The catch was significant because by the 1940s most of the Hudson's once-massive oyster population had died out due to overharvesting and pollution. The oysters' resurgence indicated that the Hudson's water quality had improved, partly due to the closure of nearby copper plants and cleanup efforts that removed industrial pollutants.

Today ... The Hudson's water quality has indeed improved, but those oysters likely didn't get there by themselves. Oyster restoration efforts started in 1997, when N.Y./N.J. Baykeeper did studies on whether oysters could live in the Hudson-Raritan Estuary again. Though the water wouldn't yield edible oysters, it was good enough for them to survive. Meredith Comi, Baykeeper oyster program manager, credits the improvement to the Clean Water Act of 1972 and the installation of wastewater management systems.

By about 2000, oyster gardening efforts were underway to help re-establish oyster reefs in the estuary, and this project is still growing. Through

the New York City Oyster Gardening Program, volunteers with access to the estuary grow baby oysters in a net. After a year, the oysters are planted on restoration sites located around the mouth of the Hudson River. The Electric Oyster Project and the Cornell University Center for the Environment are among other groups working to establish new oyster reefs in the area.

Now that the river is clean enough for oysters, the oysters are helping to further clean up the river. Oyster reefs can support more than 200 species of plants and animals and help filter suspended solids out of the water. A single oyster can filter up to three liters of water per hour.

Chris Anderson, marine-science educator at The River Project, says that while the meager oyster population has grown, oyster repopulation efforts have yet to establish a thriving reef.

Comi estimates that the NYC Oyster Gardening Program hands out about 50,000 oysters per year, and about 300,000 of the program's oysters reside in the restored reef sites of the Hudson-Raritan Estuary today.—*Lynsi Burton*

Check out the YES! archive: See our original story at www.yesmagazine.org/oyster-update. It's one of more than 3,000 searchable YES! Magazine articles in our archives.