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ISSN 1729-8997

(Online Edition)

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Children Speak

Vol 8, No.32/33, October '08 - January 2009

A Newsletter of the Organization for the Protection of Children's Rights

Message from the President

Sustainability and Education are inextricably linked. We humans are thinking, learning creatures. Our actions are guided by values and ethics which we learn throughout our lifetime. These are often imbibed in the school where children spend a vast majority of their time. It is thus incumbent on schools to envision and imbibe in their curriculum the idea of sustainability.

Our major concern at this stage is the global depletion of natural resources. For years since the commencement of the industrial civilization, we have extracted and used these resources as if they are unlimited. It is only now we see the short-sightedness of these acts and the need to sustain ourselves is now guiding the world economy.

The article on 'Education for a Sustainable Future' by Dr. Carlos Hernandez and Mr. John Nevin, outlines a five-point program to transform the current model of education. The authors argue that only when education is people-centric can it be sustainable and meaningful. And therefore, 'New pedagogical technologies say that college exists everywhere. . . . And that the teachers must go to where the people are rather than insisting that the people come to where the teachers are. It is a political technology that is beginning to take hold and which will have, as one of

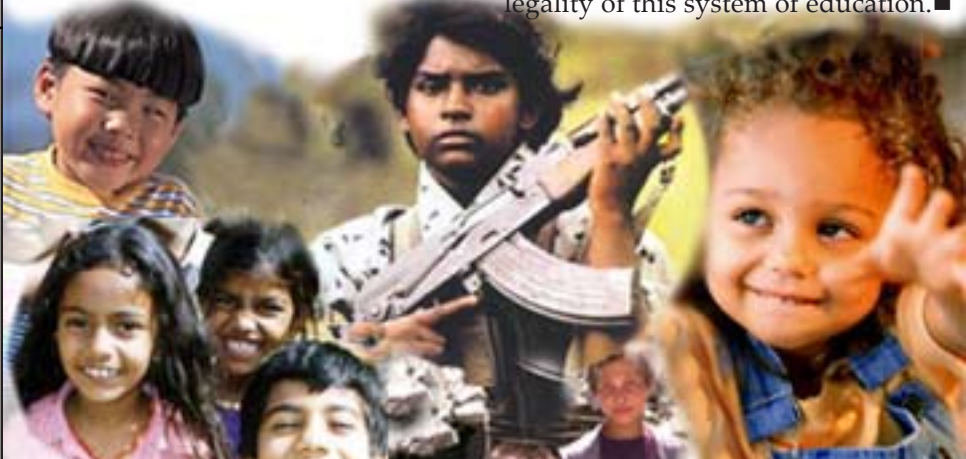
its outcomes, a global movement towards sustainable development.'

The other item of focus in this issue is the learning process itself. Educators such as John Holt who laid the foundations of home schooling have

questioned the present universal education systems' credibility in enhancing the skills and creative abilities of children. In his 1964 book, *How Children Fail*, he criticizes traditional skills and points out that the academic failure of school children is caused by the pressure placed on them in schools. One of the assertions of the home-schooling movement leaders was that the bonds and emotional development made at home with parents during early childhood are cut short by enrollment in schools and can neither be replaced nor afterward corrected in an institutional setting. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, states in his book, *'My Experiments with Truth'* that 'the education that children naturally imbibe in a household cannot be imparted in hostels.' Roshni Udyavar in her article on 'Growing without Schooling', has outlined the history of 'Home-schooling' and dealt with the resources required as well as the legality of this system of education. ■



Riccardo Di Done



Education for a Sustainable Future

By Carlos Hernandez and John Nevin

In 1984, Norway's Prime Minister, Gro Harlem Brundtland while heading the UN Commission on Environment & Development, gave voice to a concept she called "sustainable development", linking programs for economic improvement with the state of the natural environment. This concept had an odd effect, rebounding back on the industrialized world, suggesting that development was as much a problem in the developed nations as it was in those called "developing".

In the Third World, the guiding perspective was that illiteracy with its link to ignorance – sustains underdevelopment – and that education gives people the private, personal means of improving their economic circumstances. Thus, international assistance embarked on a massive effort to eliminate illiteracy on a global basis. Schools were built, teachers were trained, and classes begun in towns and villages on three continents. The education provided by these programs was modeled on that which had proved so successful in the industrialized world. From Bolivia to Botswana, this education offered the standard curriculum – reading and writing, grammar, arithmetic, civics, geography, science.

In time, questions arose as to whether this course of study was appropriate to societies very different from those in which the curriculum had originated. The concept of sustainable development raised a new question – could there be an education for development? These concerns raised questions about education back home in those countries where the liberating concept of universal schooling had first been applied. Was it

possible that the standard curriculum might be out of date? After all, it has persisted without fundamental changes for the last 150 years or so since universal education was established. In 1995, formal education was still patterned as a classroom experience, just as it was in 1850. Children still sat in rows of desks under the stern, authoritarian eye of the teacher up there in the front of the room. Was this the appropriate education in a world almost totally transformed from what it had been only 150 years ago?

An Essential Instrument:

The idea that education can serve as an essential instrument in the drive toward a bountiful, beautiful and protected environment appears through this haze and clamor like a door opening on a garden

At the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1994, the subject of education for development seemed suddenly to come to life. Questions were being asked - Can education be shaped to serve as a direct tool of sustainable development? As a result, we as educators have found new grounds in saying that education, both formal and informal, will not only prove to be essential to the achievement of sustainable development but we are suggesting that without the right kind of education, the goal of sustainable development will encounter overwhelming obstacles.

But what is the right kind of education?

Our once reliable system of public education – in the United States and in other developed countries – seem recently to have come up against enormous problems. On a daily basis, we can read in the newspapers that our schools are no longer serving our young people. In the U.S., the dismal performance of many big-city school systems has led to reviews and reconsiderations of every aspect of the educational process. The idea that education can serve as an essential instrument in the drive toward a bountiful, beautiful and protected environment appears through this haze and clamor like a door opening on a garden. It suggests new roles for education in human life and in the life of our times. New attitudes and ideas inevitably lead to experiments and pockets of experiment in education are now seen to be taking place in many places throughout the world.

These changes are proceeding alongside tectonic shifts in attitudes toward economic development. The old model – centered on building factories, on transplanting the Western model of the consumer society to other cultures – has largely been abandoned. Development experts have come to the remarkable conclusion that the recipients of development assistance, those who will have to live with the programs, should have some say in what is to be done – that is, if projects are to succeed. The expertise of "the natives" has at last come to be recognized.

Opposition and Support

What is sustainable development? By one



A Computer lab sponsored by Philips India in rural India helps children bridge the technological divide

definition it means that the economies of the world must learn to meet the needs of today's generation without compromising or stealing from future generations. One of the things we, as a race, have to realize is that unless we pay very careful attention to the needs of sustainable development, the earth's resources will be depleted and future generations will be bankrupt – not only in debt for what we have borrowed against them, but bankrupt in all of the five major biological systems - Croplands, forests, grasslands, oceans and fresh water - that support the planet and therefore the economies of the planet. Sustainable development is such an obvious necessity that resistance to it may seem hard to understand.

A Five-Point Program

If we were to draw up a five point plan, it might look something like this: First. We must recognize and encourage the innumerable grass-roots movements working toward sustainable development and be sensitive to the enthusiasm, sensitivity and creativity that these grass-roots movements can bring to bear on the issues. Second, we must bring pressure on governments to support educational programs that will ensure that populations are adequately informed. Third, we must assist teachers to find new ways to incorporate the issues of sustainable development into the standard subjects. Fourth, we must learn to apply new technologies to get enough information to people to enable them to make informed judgments and to take informed political action. And fifth, we must find ways to educate teachers and professors to accept their responsibility to develop the whole person. Informed and integrated personalities can be expected to take the political action necessary to sustain the world while helping people emerge from poverty and destitution.

Reaching out – to the ends of the Earth

This kind of education need not occur only within the confines of educational institutions. There are great moralists and there are great ethical thinkers who are plowing fields, who are working with children, who may not even

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The Father of Home Schooling: John Holt

John Holt was born on April 14, 1923 in New York City, the oldest of three children, and raised in the New England area of the US. He went to private schools, but he chose not to reveal the names of the schools he attended because he felt that was irrelevant. He said, "... the things I'm supposed to know so much about I never learned in schools." He served on a submarine in the Pacific during World War II and worked for World Federalists after the end of the war.



He taught in private schools for many years before writing his first book, *How Children Fail*, in 1964. This book and *How Children Learn*, 1967, have sold over a million and a half copies and have been translated into fourteen languages. Holt's clear writing and empathic understanding of children has made these books favorites of many teachers, parents, and homeschoolers.

Holt became a sought-after speaker and supporter of school reform. He was a visiting teacher for the education departments at Harvard University and University of California, Berkeley. Throughout the next decade, Holt's books explored education theory and practice (*What Do I*

Profile

Do Monday?), children's rights (*Escape From*

Childhood), and alternative schools (*Freedom and Beyond*), as well as many social issues related to schooling (*The Underachieving School*) in his subsequent books. Some reviewers have termed Holt a "social critic" or "public intellectual" while others have called him a "school reformer".

Holt eventually decided that schools could not be reformed and spent his remaining years thinking about, supporting, and writing about places where and people from whom children could learn without conventional schooling. *Instead of Education: Ways to Help People Do Things Better* (Dutton, 1976, Sentient, 2003) called for an underground railroad to help children escape from compulsory schooling, which Holt felt hindered more than helped children's learning. Some people who read *Instead of Education* wrote to Holt to tell him you could teach your own children instead of sending them to school. Holt almost immediately worked to support homeschooling. He started the magazine *Growing Without Schooling* in August, 1977, making it America's first magazine about homeschooling.

In 1979 *Never Too Late* was published. Subtitled "My Musical Autobiography," it is a wonderful portrait of Holt's experiences as an adult learning to play the cello, with no particular musical background. Holt's only book about homeschooling, *Teach Your Own*, came out in 1981. It was revised by Holt's colleague, Patrick Farenga, and published in 2003 by Perseus Books. John Holt died on September 14, 1985. *Learning All the Time*, left unfinished at the time of Holt's death, was completed using material he wrote for *Growing Without Schooling*; it was published in 1989.

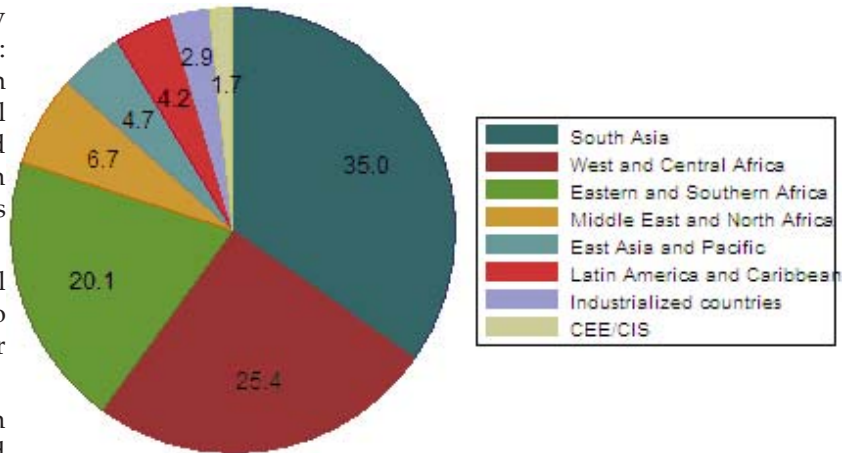
(www.motherearthnews.com)

'Childinfo' website to monitor the situation of children and women

UNICEF has launched a new Childinfo website: www.childinfo.org, which presents the latest statistical information on children and women - including data from 'The State of the World's Children 2009'.

Starting in March, the site will provide access to 'Childinfo News', a web-based newsletter with regular alerts on:

- New data available from 'Childinfo', as well as recent and upcoming publications
- UNICEF's leadership role in monitoring the situation of children and women, particularly in relation to the Millennium Development Goals
- Results of UNICEF's data analysis and methodological work



Number of primary-school-age children not in school, by region (2007)

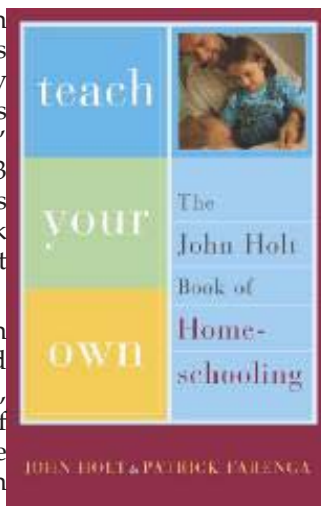
- And progress made towards implementing the fourth round of UNICEF-supported Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys programme, also known as MICS4.■

Teach Your Own

The John Holt Book of Home Schooling

The Boston Globe Magazine in March 2004 wrote that the book is "A homeschoolers' bible written by the late, outspoken Massachusetts education reformer John Holt." while the Austin Family July, 2003 reported: "For many parents this book is an indispensable handbook for educating their children at home."

The book is a classic work on teaching children at home, updated for today's new laws, new lifestyles, and a new generation of homeschooling parents. Today more than one and a half million children are being taught at home by their own parents. In this expanded edition of the book that helped launch the whole movement, Pat Farenga has distilled John Holt's timeless understanding



of the ways children come to understand the world and added up-to-the-moment practical advice. Rather than proposing that parents turn their homes into miniature schools, Holt and Farenga demonstrate how ordinary parents can help children grow as social, active learners. Chapters on living with children, "serious play," children and work, and learning difficulties will be of interest to all parents, whether homeschooling or not, as well as to teachers. This new edition is supplemented with legal advice as well as a guide to cooperating with schools and facing the common objections to homeschooling.

Teach Your Own not only has all the vital information necessary to be the definitive reference for parents teaching their own children, it also conveys John Holt's wise and passionate belief in every child's ability to learn from the world that has made his wonderful books into enduring classics.■

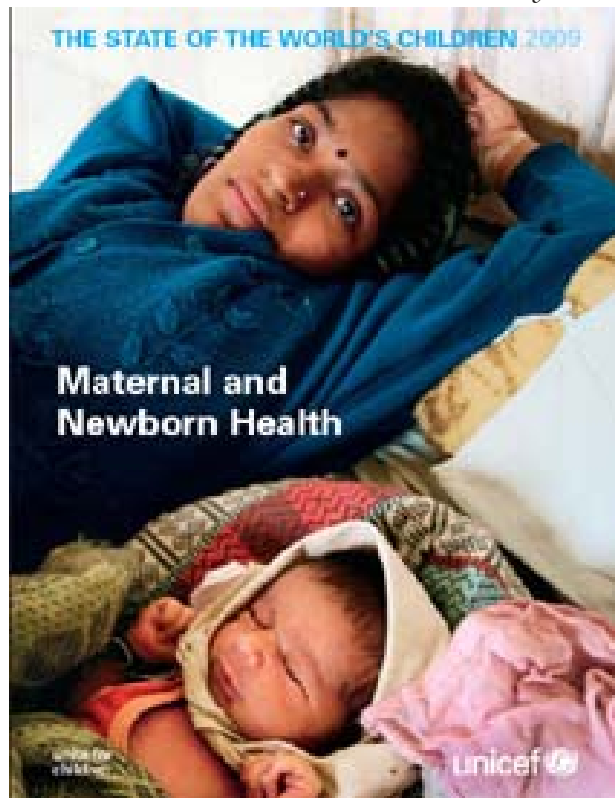
Book Review

(www.amazon.com)

Maternal & Newborn Health

State of the World's Children 2009

By Elizabeth Kiem



Report

UNICEF's flagship publication, 'The State of the World's Children 2009' – launched in South Africa on 15 January 2009 – addresses maternal mortality, one of the most intractable problems for development work.

The report calls attention to the fact that women in the world's least developed countries are 300 times more likely to die in childbirth or from pregnancy-related complications than women in developed countries.

"Every year, more than half a million women die as a result of pregnancy or childbirth complications, including about 70,000 girls and young women aged 15 to 19," UNICEF Executive Director Ann M. Veneman said at the Johannesburg launch. "Since 1990, complications related to pregnancy and childbirth have killed an estimated 10 million women."

The health of these mothers is inextricably linked to the health of their babies, the new report points out. A child born in a developing country is almost 14 times more likely to die



UNICEF Executive Director, Ann M. Veneman

during the first month of life than a child born in a developed one.

'The State of the World's Children' also highlights the difference in pregnancy risk between women in developing countries and their peers in the industrialized nations – a gap often termed the greatest health divide in the world.

The 10 countries with the highest lifetime risk of maternal death are Niger, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Chad, Angola, Liberia, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea-Bissau and Mali. A woman's lifetime risk of maternal death in these countries ranges from 1 in 7 in Niger to 1 in 15 in Mali. That's in stark contrast to the risk for mothers in the United States, where it's 1 in 4,800, or in Ireland, where it's just 1 in 48,000.■

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Education for a Sustainable Future

have formal education, but whole life experiences are such that they have in fact developed excellent ethical and moral systems for the planet. We believe that the revolution will come - and is coming - in the technology that is allowing people to come together in ways they could not have come together in the past. Computer based distance learning allows people to interact over thousands of miles regardless of what their habitats are like and how different their societies might be.

So we have these new electronic technologies that allow us to interact – with the machine and with the farthest reaches of our planet. There are the new political technologies for breaking down the barriers of inertia and opposition. New pedagogical technologies say that college exists everywhere. That you can teach on a street corner. And that the teachers must go to where the people are rather than insisting that the people come to where the teachers are. It is a political technology that is beginning to take hold and which will have, as one of its outcomes, a global movement towards sustainable development.■

(Dr. Carlos Hernandez is President, New Jersey City University and co-author of 'Pedagogy of the Earth: education for a sustainable future')

Growing Without Schooling

By Roshni Udyavar

Although primary education – schooling in a classroom - is now made compulsory in most countries of the western world, the origin of formal schooling can be traced back to the late 17th and early 18th century in the German states of Gotha, Calenberg and Prussia. Up until the 18th century, the majority of people in Europe lacked formal schooling. For most of the developing world, education until the beginning of the 20th century was in the form of home schooling by parents or tutors. In India, 'gurukuls' are known to have existed where children went to live with a guru or teacher during their early years and learnt the skills necessary for life. These schools had no formal curriculum, and therefore, more than the maths and physics, focused on teaching its pupils, ethics, values and codes of social conduct.

Homeschooling:

Almost thirty years ago, the idea of education without formal schools developed in the United States of America with pioneers such as John Holt leading the movement. With nearly 101 million children of primary school age out of schools in the world, as the UNICEF reports, it is time to reconsider this alternative schooling system. In many countries of the developing world, formal schools are not only out of reach of the large mass of poor people, but for those who do attend them, are proving insufficient in meeting the learning needs of children; as a result, many children often come of schools feeling alienated, filled with self-hatred and bottled-up anger.

Homeschooling refers to instruction given at home under the supervision of parents or a tutor. In some cases, this may be monitored by a public school system. Also referred to as Home education or Home learning, it provides an alternative to formal education. Mainly prevalent in the developed countries, it is preferred by parents who do not want their children to attend schools or those located in isolated rural locations.

The movement of homeschooling was started by John Holt, who in 1964 published his book titled 'How Children Fail' which criticized traditional schools. Holt's book was based on the theory that the academic failure of school children was caused by pressure placed on children in schools. Having served in the Navy during World War II and having worked with the World Federalists for 6 years against the

proliferation of atomic weapons, in his first teaching assignment at the Colorado Rocky Mountain School, he observed that teachers often put the blame on students who didn't fare well, while Holt strongly felt that it was the responsibility of the teacher to figure out a way to explain the subject so that students would understand it!

Motivations for home schooling:

According to a survey conducted by the US Department of Education - "Home-schooling in the United States 2003"- 85% of home-schooling parents cited "the social environment of other forms of schooling (including safety, drugs, bullying and negative peer pressure) as an important reason why they home-schooled; 72% cited "religious or moral instruction" as an important reason, while 68% cited "dissatisfaction with academic instruction at other schools".

Legality:

Home-schooling is accepted legally in countries such as Austria, France, Ireland, Slovenia and UK in Europe; Australia, Indonesia, New Zealand in South Asia and Australia; Canada and the United States in the North Americas. It is illegal in countries including Germany and Hong Kong. In most countries in the world including China and India, the status is not clear or is disputed.

Home-schooling and college admissions:

In most countries where home-schooling is legal, home-schooled children can take a high school equivalency exam and earn a secondary diploma, and can even get into a college if she or he scores well in the Scholastic Aptitude Test. Surprisingly, most home-schooled children are found to deliver higher scores in the aptitude tests as compared to conventionally educated children. They also show great results further because of the interest which drives them to colleges after the home-schooling period.

Last words:

Home schooling is not a threat to the school system as most parents are unlikely to dedicate time and resources which the school now provides. However, as John Holt stated: "For people who are smart enough to design their own home, alternative fuels such as solar, raise your own food, then you are sure as hell smart enough to teach your own children!" ■