

Learning Cooperatives Quarterly

The Newsletter of Life-Long Learning

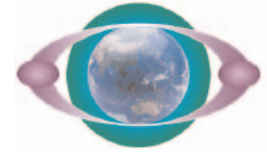
Vol. 2 No. 1

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The following paper was produced by an ad hoc group of concerned citizens. It has been widely distributed within the alternative education community and has had very positive feedback. It is available at the links provided for all who find it useful.

Life-Long Learning

A project of A Coalition of Self-Learning



Life-Long Learning

In the past three decades, there has been a growing movement to reinvent the way citizens learn and how young people are introduced into society. Homeschooling, charter schools, cyber-schools, unschooling, life-long learning, Waldorf schools, and Sudbury schools are just a few of the elements of this movement. The movement has been growing exponentially each decade since 1980. It has become a challenge to the traditional school/teach/educate system. Life-long learning has been promoted by management guru Peter Drucker in "Post Capitalist Society" on one end of the spectrum and, on the other end, by Elise Boulding in "Building Global Civic Culture," and by many scholars in between.

The bottom line in this movement is to provide the freedom, opportunity and resources for self-learners of all ages, with their families and in community, to choose to learn what they want, when they want and how they want -- to self-learn.

Recognition

In spite of the rapid growth of this movement, it has drawn little positive attention from governments. Professional educators and their unions have shown concern that the proliferation of homeschooling will draw funds away from the public school system. A few public school systems have accepted the challenge and established special programs to provide would-be homeschoolers and other self-learners more

autonomy within the public school system. Some have established parent-teacher programs that depend on parental involvement and give parents greater autonomy in the learning process. But, as parents are increasingly recognizing that personal liberty and private protection from control by majority rule applies to their children's learning, none of the existing systems have completely incorporated that concept. Nor do they fully meet the needs of our information society which requires a life-long learning system to provide for each individual's continual learning processes, as detailed in the work of writers and thinkers from John Holt and Alfie Kohn to Daniel Pink and Howard Gardner, among so many others.

They urge that schooling, and life, be convivial and vernacular. That is, that learning and work should be carried out in joyful collaboration with family, friends and neighbors.

Foundations, likewise, have been slow to rise to the challenge and opportunity that is unfolding. The millions of dollars for public schools, coming from all levels of government, is followed by millions more coming from private foundations. But little, if any, of this private funding is available for the many non-public school experiments being undertaken. A search of the philanthropy databases with words like "homeschooling" comes up with no program in any foundation. Whereas a search under "schools" or "education" comes up with many thousands. Individual appeals to hundreds of foundations by "homeschool support groups," "learning co-ops" and other forms of nonschool learning communities are regularly returned with the words "this proposal does not fit into our current program of support."

Motivation

Motivations for moving toward self-learning and abandonment of traditional public schooling are many. Perhaps the most prevalent is parental concern about the loss of control of the learning of young children. Many families want to take direct responsibility for their curriculum, approach to learning, and the principles and values upon which these are based. Some parents believe that the public school system instills values which run contrary to those of their family. Some are explicitly guided by their religious beliefs to direct the education of their children. Others have had disturbing experiences with schoolyard bullies, unfeeling teachers, or misdirected bureaucracies. A few hold that government support is inherently controlling, and that their tax dollars are binding families to a failing system.

Self-learners are also influenced by education critics, philosophers and religious leaders. Some, like Ivan Illich, believe our current life, including school, is based on the principle of work now for future rewards. They urge that schooling, and life, be convivial and vernacular. That is, that learning and work should be carried out in joyful collaboration with family, friends and neighbors. And that it should be embedded in the local culture, ecology, and friendships.

With Paulo Friere, some see schools as perpetuating the socioeconomic rich/poor status quo and preventing the natural social evolution that would occur if future citizens were given more freedom to self-learn in their own families, communities, and nature.

Following John Holt and others, many believe that every brain, that is every student, is unique and no two are

Continued on next page

prepared to learn the same thing at the same time in the same way. They believe that schooling is not an efficient way to learn, nor for future citizens to be introduced into society.

Most great philosophical traditions, including those embodied in Gandhi, Tagore, Aurobindo and Krishnamurti, recognize a spiritual component to learning, teaching that knowledge is more than a way to get a job or score well on a standardized test; that it is the purpose for living, it is being human. Rabindrnath Tagore started his learning community, Santiniketan, to transform the human mindset from self-interest, competition and materialism to mutual aid, cooperation, and the love of learning. Growing out of a variety of personal, philosophical, educational, or religious motivations, the life-long self-learning movement continues to expand.

Proofs of Effectiveness

It is impossible to measure the success of self-learning with tests, grades, and scores. Perhaps the most interesting successes are found among those learners who do not flourish in a traditional setting with standard measurements of success. These individuals are free to blossom in their own ways and do -- anecdotal evidence abounds about happy and successful learners who have traveled a non-traditional path to their own personal success.

Self-learners are equally honored among our greatest leaders. Thomas Edison, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Abigail Adams, Benjamin Franklin, the Wright Brothers, Helen Keller, Albert Einstein, and Margaret Mead are only a few of those who have learned without school. The newspapers are filled with stories of less well-known successes. Ryan Abradi, of Maine, showed an interest in numbers at an early age, so his parents let him stay home and self-learn; by age 10 he was working his way through second-year college calculus. Caitlin Stern of Haines, Alaska, stayed out of school and became a recognized expert by studying bald eagles in the wild. Jedediah Purdy, a self-learner from West Virginia, graduated summa cum laude from Harvard University; in 1996 he was selected as a Truman Scholar and as West Virginia's nominee for the Rhodes Scholarship. He then went on to Yale Law School and, in the meantime, wrote a best selling book.

The growth rate of self-learning is a partial measure of its success. From a few scattered homeschoolers in 1980, perhaps 20,000, the number has grown, according to Newsweek Magazine, to over 200,000 in 1990, and into a broad integrated network of an estimated 2,000,000 today.

Considerable research has shown that students learn much more easily when they self-learn. As long ago as 1930, the "8 Year Study" of 30 special schools demonstrated that: "The most effective schools used a different approach to learning. Instead of organizing learning by subjects, they organized it around themes of significance to their students." There



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seemed to be an inverse relationship between success in college and formalized education as opposed to student selected learning.

A recent Cornell University study confirmed this and showed that schooled children become "peer dependent" while those who learned with their parents have more self-confidence, optimism, and courage to explore. A Moore Foundation study of children of parents who had been arrested for truancy found that their homeschooled children ranked 30 percent higher on standard tests than the average classroom child.

Providing possible insight into the reasons behind these successes, a UCLA project showed that the average schooled student receives 7 minutes of personal attention a day but the self-learner receives from 100 to 300 minutes of attention daily. Following this, a Smithsonian Report on genius concluded that high achievement was a result of time with responsive parents, little time with peers, and considerable time for free exploration. Standardized tests reflect self-learner success as well. Time Magazine reported that "the average home schooler's SAT score is 1100, 80 points higher than the average score for the general population."

Dr. Lawrence M. Rudner, conducted a study in 1998 that included 20,760 students in 11,930 families. He found that in every subject and at every grade level (K-12), homeschool students scored significantly higher than their public and private school counterparts. Some 25 percent of all homeschool students at that time were enrolled at a grade level or more beyond that indicated by their age. According to the study, the average eighth-grade homeschooler was performing four grade levels above the national average. The average ACT score was 21 out of a possible 36 for public schooled children. It averaged 23 for self-learners. This qualifies the average college-bound self-learner for the most prestigious universities.

Vision

This movement is not only addressing the why, how, when and what all citizens learn, but is also rebuilding the foundation for the society in which we all live. How we learn determines the kind of society we build. Authoritarian, hierarchal, undemocratic schools prepare future citizens for an authoritarian, hierarchal, undemocratic society. A life-long learning system based in family, community, society and nature could be the foundation for new democracies of freedom, equity and justice.

The movement continues to promote the concepts of life-long self-learning, in all its complexities, to a wider audience, to address critics on the issues of accountability and credibility, and to raise funds to help those working to bring its ideals to fruition.

Available at:
<http://www.creatinglearningcommunities.org/resources/lifelonglearning.htm>
<http://www.creatinglearningcommunities.org/resources/Life-longLearning.pdf>

Coalition for Self-Learning

Mission Statement:

The Coalition for Self-Learning envisions and co-creates a world of cooperative life-long learning communities.

Composition:

The Coalition is a matrix of individuals and groups, networking freely and acting in concert in mutual support of the Mission Statement.

Principles and Goals:

- (1) Life-long learning communities are diverse, open places where individuals develop meaningful ways to enhance, enrich, honor and celebrate each other, families, communities and society, acting as a significant element in an emerging cooperative commonwealth.
- (2) The Coalition promotes ideas and actions for creating learning communities.
- (3) The Coalition expands and advances the relevance of learning to societal change.
- (4) The Coalition explores, develops, disseminates and implements new concepts for organizational systems that result in the equitable sharing of power and wealth, well-being and self-sustaining conviviality of the Earth and all its life forms.
- (5) The Coalition demonstrates that the Internet is a powerful tool for organizing actions, learning creative concepts and engaging constructive discussion.

Tools:

To aid the Mission of the Coalition, we have developed the following tools :

Creating Learning Communities

Website:

www.creatinglearningcommunities.org/

Discussion Lists:

www.onelist.com/community/LearningCommunitiesforConcepts

www.onelist.com/community/CCL-LLCsforStrategy

Books available:

"Creating Learning Communities" (\$21.95 or online) -

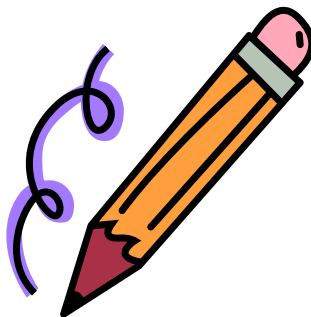
"Guidebook for Creating Learning Communities" (\$4.00)

<http://www.creatinglearningcommunities.org/book/book.htm>

Learning Cooperatives Quarterly:

<http://www.creatinglearningcommunities.org/newsletter/index.html>

In Brief ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●



B.A. Degree in Social Activism and Ecology

Burlington College in collaboration with the Institute for Social Ecology (ISE) offers a B.A. degree in the field of social ecology. Students interested in this program may pursue a self-designed major in many areas of study, including: sustainable design, building, and land use; social and political theory; activism, organizing, and community development; alternative agriculture and food systems; and popular education.

Students enrolled in the Independent Degree Program (IDP) will design their semester in accordance with Burlington College's requirements, combining hands-on and project-oriented study with theoretical seminars and workshops.

ISE and Burlington College studies are rooted in the understanding that every student is an individual. Rather than the standardized learning offered by traditional colleges and universities, we believe in an alternative education model that is flexible and interdisciplinary. We also hold that the most rigorous and meaningful education results from a collaborative process.

About the ISE

The Institute for Social Ecology was established in 1974 and incorporated in 1981 as an independent institution for the purposes of education, research, and outreach in the field of social ecology. For over a quarter of a century, ISE has inspired individuals involved in numerous social change movements to work toward a directly democratic, liberatory, and ecological society. The educational programs of the Institute for Social Ecology have served more than 2,000 students around the world.

For more information
<http://www.social-ecology.org/jump.php?id=173>

Outdoor Education Research & Evaluation Center

Outdoor education engages students in nature and concepts which emerge from the interactions between humans, nature, and adventure.

Closely related topics are adventure therapy, outdoor leisure and recreation, and environmental education.

Outdoor education is based on experiential education principles, wilderness and nature philosophy, and the concepts of risk, challenge and safety.

For more information visit:
<http://www.wilderdom.com/research.html>
or contact: James Neill at james.neill@unh.edu.

McEducation for All

A dialogue, hosted by Shikshantar on their "Resisting the Culture of Schooling" pages, in response to the remarks of John Daniel, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO.

<http://www.swaraj.org/shikshantar/mceducationforall.htm>

From GrantsAlert.com:

Across our nation nonprofits are struggling to find the resources they need to meet the increasing demands of their missions. For many nonprofits these are truly tough times to find money and it may get worse before it gets better.

This website has been created to help all nonprofits, with a definite leaning toward those involved in education, secure the funds they need to continue their important work.

Our number one goal at GrantsAlert.com is to make life a little easier for those who devote their time to searching for and identifying new funding opportunities for their organizations. And we will strive to provide this information to you in a timely and concise manner.

For more information, contact: Joe Mizereck jmizereck@grantsalert.com or visit the website at <http://grantsalert.com/>

Help Wanted

The LCQ is seeking to expand and needs a reliable volunteer to build a new column. This column will consist of inspirational quotes, new and old, on the various subjects related to learning and learning communities.

If you are interested in collecting these quotes for a monthly column, please contact Nance at marbleface@aol.com.



Bill's View *Book Review by Bill Ellis*

Paths of Unlearning" Escape to Humanity -- Escape to "Belonging"

Manish Jain and his Peoples' Institute for Rethinking Education and Development, Shikshantar (21 Faethpura, Udaipu, Rajasthan 313004 INDIA), have taken another quantum leap toward deschooling society. Manish invited seven young people, 20 to 40 years old, to write their own personal stories of how they came to unlearn all of the values and life styles of their cultures, and to give up the life of material accumulation that that entailed. He circulated these stories to a number of more senior and well-known activists for their comments and reflections. Below are my own reflections on those reflections.

"Unlearning," "deschooling," "deculturizing," and even "learning" all have the same goal, to help people think outside-of-the-box. To help them transcend those beliefs that we don't even recognize we have because they are taken for granted within our cultures. In the dominant EuroAmerican culture those beliefs are centered around materialism and the social/economy of measuring a person's worth by material ownership.

The seven young people who wrote for "Path of Unlearning" have moved beyond this cultural pattern in both word and lifestyle. Their stories are about an American graduate of Harvard on the verge of a \$100,000 law career who chose to go to India, her ancestral home, to live among and be one of the poor; a privileged native of Uganda who chose to forgo success in the industrial world to create his own "vision of reality" from the history and culture of his African tribe and serve the youth of his country; a proclaimed American "geek," hooked on the forefront of computer hacking, who sees the spread of free software bringing civilization out of the dark hole of secretive competition for material greed; a young oil company executive who witnessed the major Exxon/Valdez oil spill and changed sides to work toward a pollution free sustainable world; a London-born product of the industrial school system who broke from the "upward" climb to express his inner thoughts in writing and in action with

the "Pioneers for Change;" and other authors, from all parts of the world and many diverse backgrounds.

Individually and together they remind me of the stories of Buddha, Gandhi, the Dali Lama, Jesus, Martin Luther King, Einstein, Lao Tse, and others people of wisdom who chose a life of service to humanity rather than the material self-interest dictated by the "dominator paradigm." These wise people, the elder leaders and the seven young story tellers, are among the few humans who have escaped the dictates of the Western Culture. Perhaps they have not unlearned as much as they have just never learned the inhumanity inherent in that EuroAmerican culture.

The dominator paradigm, in which this culture is rooted, has a long history. It grew from the Jewish creation myth that held that the Earth was created for the use of man. It was strengthened by Greek philosophy with its postulate that "man is the measure of all things." It took on the St. Thomas doctrine of a "chain of being" that placed man at the top of a ladder with only a few celestial beings above. Below, in descending order, were women, children, other races, animals, plants and the Earth. Each there to serve and be dominated by the rungs above. These beliefs were stamped in the minds of Europe by the thousand year Inquisition that burned some one million people, mostly women, at the stake for believing that the Earth is our creator. It was perpetuated and spread worldwide by the sword (technology), the cross (Christianity), and the flag (nationalism), during the age of "discovery" and colonization. It was fixed in our moral system by the acceptance of Adam Smith's economy that claims that human "self-interest" should, and does, dictate all human actions. This dominator paradigm, an abomination of the essence of humanity, now rules the world.

The customs, tenets, and mores of this culture are accepted as truisms for our values and lifestyles. From our birth, and throughout our most formative years in our schooling, competition, materialism, ownership, money, individualism, and other tenets of the dominator paradigm are drilled into us as cultural norms not to be questioned. Somehow people of wisdom, including our seven

story tellers, escaped and are able to transcend the culture in which they were born.

This unnatural dominator civilization has not always been so. Almost, if not all, other cultures had social and economic systems based on "reciprocity" or "gifting." They held the belief that we were created by Mother Earth. That each of us "belongs" to the Earth and one another. That there are laws of nature that dictate that if we don't live together as one, we will die separately. In these reciprocity cultural systems everyone produces for the well being of all. Many cultures have no words for "ownership," "exchange," "money," or "self-interest." The purpose of life is to produce, and to help others produce, so that all people, including oneself, can continue to exist. We live so that others can live, and they live so that we can live.

In a reciprocity economy, goods and services are gladly given without thought of a 'quid pro quo' exchange. Whoever gives the most is honored with abundant gifts from others. Mutual aid and cooperation are the natural laws that make human existence possible. A few such cultural norms still exist. But in the main they have been dominated and suppressed by the dominator paradigm.

Modern science has revealed interdependence as natural law. Chaos, Complexity and Gaian theories have shown that the cosmos is in fact one. It exists and evolves as a unit. It is holonistic. That is, each entity of the cosmos is a holon, a whole system composed of other whole systems embedded in other whole systems. It is a network of being. It is holons within holons. All holons, including every human being, is interlinked and interdependent on all other holons. The Gaian theory of the Earth shows that life on earth is dependent on life on earth. The temperature on Earth, the percent of oxygen in our air, the amount of salt in the ocean, the radiation reaching the Earth, and all other conditions necessary for life are kept constant by physical/biological processes. Gaia, the Greek name for the Earth goddess, was taken as a name for this theory. It has also been suggested as a name for a new social paradigm. The "Gaian Paradigm" is replacing the long-standing "Dominator

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Bill's View *Continued*

Paradigm" as the foundation for new emerging cultures based in "belonging."

Humans "belong" to Gaia (the Earth and all life on Earth) in a very deep way.

All that is is webs-of-being.

We belong to the webs-of-being -- to Gaia.

Belonging is the protovalue from which all other values derive.

We belong to the physiosphere, to the biosphere, to the noosphere. We belong to Gaia. As the aboriginies said it we are the "ownees" of the land not the owners of the land. As Chief Seattle said it, "we can not own the land, we are part of the land."

We belong to and are inseparable from the Earth and from our culture -- from one another -- from Gaia. We are interdependent with all that is.

Belonging is scientific fact; and, belonging is more than scientific fact.

Belonging is not merely "being a member of," but it is being subject to -- being in partnership with -- being responsible for. We belong to -- are responsible for -- the webs of being -- the universe -- to Gaia (the Earth and all life on Earth).

Belonging-to-Gaia means recognizing that we are enmeshed in the webs-of-being and that our well-being is dependent on the well-being of Gaia. If we destroy Gaia, we destroy ourselves.

Belonging implies "cooperation" -- working with what is -- with Gaia--the webs of being.

Belonging implies "community." In our face-to-face relationships with people we form community -- we belong to community.

Belonging implies "responsibility." We are responsible for Gaia. We are responsible for one another.

Belonging implies "Love." We can not separate love (agape) from the fact that we belong to Gaia. We love because we must love to preserve the webs of being -- to preserve Gaia -- to preserve ourselves .

Cultures built on values other than belonging are doomed to self-destruct. A culture built on domination of the earth, and all the animals therein is doomed to disappear. A culture based on "self-interest" is doomed to disintegrate. A culture based on competition will destroy itself.

To be stable and sustainable a culture must be based on cooperation, community, responsibility, love, honesty, caregiving, and the other values which are implied by and intertwined with one another and with belonging.

We can no more separate ourselves from belonging -- from Gaia, and remain a viable culture, than an oxygen atom can separate itself from hydrogen atoms and retain the qualities of water.

These, my reflections, are not the only concepts that emerge from "Paths of Unlearning." Every story and every reflection is uniquely different. The unifying message that comes through is that life is not meant to be getting and spending. There is a spirituality within every human trying to rise above the mundane. We each have a different path to follow, and a different story to tell. The world will be better when we all let our own personal stories run our lives.

100Fires.com recently became the online distributor of Shikshantar's extraordinary publications in North America. We feel privileged to have been handed this responsibility.

http://www.100fires.com/cgi-bin/shikshantar_sale.cgi?cart=1066576123

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 by spreading the word.

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 for pricing, info and purchasing of the fine
 products shown above.



Profile on Creating

LIFE Learning Center in Anderson, Indiana

The Learning Cooperatives Quarterly uses this space to highlight those who are moving from discussion to practical application – those who are "doing something."

We will include articles from those starting or continuing learning centers, small or large.

We urge readers to contribute information about your own experiences in starting and maintaining a learning center. Send a writeup to marbleface@aol.com (we're aiming at 100-200 words) to be included. Do not feel limited by the term learning center either – if you have an ongoing or planned activity that is not exactly a "center" but puts some of the Learning Communities ideas into action, we want to hear about it!

Reading how others have made something happen in their communities is very encouraging to all of us and sharing ideas about overcoming obstacles, philosophical struggles, financial issues, the ins and outs of really "doing something" will be a big help to those embarking on the journey to creating a learning center.

LIFE Learning Center in Anderson, Indiana

It's an April Monday morning and the robins are chirping in the green fields and woods of this small city in the Midwest. Mothers, cars loaded with children of varying ages and sizes, and books and bins of learning materials, park in the small lot across from the Wilson Boys & Girls Club in Anderson, Indiana. They pile out and hurry into the old two-story school brick building, some carrying folders and books, some pushing strollers with baby sisters and brothers and all smiling and laughing in the spring sunshine. As they enter the building, you can hear the sound of children talking and laughing ringing through the old hallways.

There are clusters of mothers gathered talking and greeting each other. Some children seem to know exactly where they are supposed to go and they head off to classrooms and meeting areas, others mingle in the halls and the gymnasium, content to visit with friends for a while before they decide what they want to do that day. LIFE Learning Center is finishing up its spring term and some mothers are setting up a pitch-in luncheon on long tables in the hallway. Other mothers rush off to "teach" or lead classes and activities, and several mothers are cleaning the preschool play room. All around there are people engaged in conversation, discussion, and learning.

Some of the learning is occurring in teacher-led classes, such as the Jason Science Project, where the mom/teacher is demonstrating a science experiment involving kelp, with other mothers assisting at different kelp stations set up around the room. The children, ages 9 to 14, appear interested and involved. Conversation is lively and loud as they rotate around the room trying the variety of activities. One group is building a kelp model and then observing how it withstands the force of a fan simulating ocean waves. They laugh as their model topples to the floor and they discuss how they could have constructed their model differently and why real kelp forests function well. They take their model back to the building area and add more components. In other areas of the room, other groups are talking, trying new activities, laughing and learning together. In one corner, two mothers are looking over the curriculum and discussing an upcoming group assignment on a related art project that each child is preparing to present to the group.

Down the hall, a group of mothers and elementary-aged students, 8 and under, are working in the art room. Two of the mothers are designated leaders for the day and they have brought in musical instruments to demonstrate how sound works. There is a

short lecture followed by lots of experimentation with the different instruments. Another mother gets out art supplies and the kids gather around a large table to put together a related art project on sound waves. Like all young children, there are varying levels of involvement in the activity. Some are chatting about the horns. Two little girls are showing each other their bracelets, giggling and poking each other. One little boy is quietly watching everyone and picks up his crayon to color part of his project. He occasionally looks up and smiles at someone and then returns to his paper, appearing content to be in the room and with everyone. Two mothers are bouncing young toddlers on their laps and discussing handwriting textbooks. All around the room, there is joyful conviviality as friends chat and play and learn together.

Downstairs in the large gymnasium, three young boys, ages 11-15, are shooting basketballs. They are sweating and joking with each other as they run up and down the gym floor, chasing the ball, shooting over and over. A mother, who appears to be occasionally monitoring the boys, sits on a bleacher reading a book. In the computer technology room down the hallway, a mother and her son are looking through computer learning games and they choose a mathematics program. They take it over to one of the computers in a long line and sit together while the mother demonstrates how to turn the computer on and start up the program. The little boy, about age 5, smiles and takes over control of the mouse as the program begins running. He and his mother sit side by side, talking and playing the learning game for about 30 minutes, before he becomes bored and gets up to walk out of the room. They put away the disk and amble out the door, running into another mother and little boy. The two boys greet each other and start playing as the two mothers chat. In the game room, two girls are sitting at a table playing a card game; they are talking and laughing and appear very interested in their game, oblivious to the hustle and bustle of people in and out of the room, gathering for lunchtime.

This is a typical "school" day at LIFE Learning Center -- people of varying ages and skills gathering in a friendly manner to study, learn, and work together. LIFE stands for Learning is for Everyone and the organizers of the innovative, fledging learning cooperative are determined to prove that true. This group of homeschooling mothers, in cooperation with Bruce Rhodes, the Chief Professional Officer of the Wilson Boys & Girls Club, have formed an elected democratic steering committee to develop the learning center homeschool programming.

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Profile on Creating *Continued*

LIFE began as an idea in the spring of 2002 between Betty Malone, Mr. Rhodes and Pam Filbrun, leader of a local homeschool support group, Home Schools United. Mr. Rhodes and Mrs. Filbrun, a longtime homeschooling advocate in Madison County, IN, had arranged to let her homeschool support group use the Boys Club facilities during the day when club members were traditionally in school and the building sat idle. After one year of such use, Betty Malone became convinced that a true learning center could develop with increased organization and pulling in more participants to utilize the developing program. She and Mr. Rhodes developed the LIFE Learning Center format and, in the summer of 2002, offered the learning center concept to all area homeschoolers. The response was slow but steady and by the spring of 2003, over fifty families were members of the new learning center; some utilizing many of the programs, others just a few.



As in any new venture, much is learned by trial and error and the organizers and steering committee of LIFE Learning Center have learned how difficult it can be to successfully initiate and start a new venture such as this. The homeschooling movement is a grassroots network that has slowly grown to encompass varying sociopolitical viewpoints and educational theories. Attempting to develop a program that allows for such wide-ranging belief systems can be a daunting effort at times. But slowly the steering committee has seen that this can also be a positive attribute of this type of learning community. As different viewpoints have developed, there is plenty of space and opportunity for those groups to develop their own uniquely suited activities and learning opportunities.

A good example is the JASON science project. While some mothers and students enjoyed the strong academic slant that this class offered, others felt it was too structured and they stated that they preferred a less challenging JASON study. This year the JASON project will be available to parents to utilize in whatever manner they wish. One group is considering a more co-operative use of the curriculum with different parents and students choosing a chapter to organize and present, some parents will have access to the curriculum to have a more formal study with written work and full experiments.

This ability to immediately listen to and react to the demands and needs of their members, without the bureaucratic hoops that large school systems have to jump through to enact any significant change in their offered programs, is only one demonstration at LIFE of the true strength of lifelong learning centers.

LIFE Learning Center is situated in a traditional urban setting and most of the Boys & Girls Club regular members come from homes surrounding the Club. The homeschool members of LIFE Learning Center are from a much wider socioeconomic status, from suburban families to rural farm families. Many members travel in from the small communities surrounding the city of Anderson. The public school system of Anderson has been strongly challenged by a wide variety of problems in the last decade, stemming from loss of jobs and changing demographics. Many homeschooling converts have fled the school system or never entered it and LIFE Learning Center is primed to be of

service to these families as their educational needs grow. It is the goal of the steering committee to continue to offer a wide range of cooperative learning activities that will assist those families and the present membership.

While the initial programs of LIFE Learning Center have focused on developing the homeschool component, the eventual goal of the Wilson Boys & Girls Club LIFE Learning Center is to increase the academic offerings and activities of the club for all its members. This year, Project Learn and Book Club attempted to do that by offering after-school tutoring and mentoring to over 65 students on a daily basis. The club technology center is staffed with 20 internet accessed computers and offers over a hundred high quality educational software programs. A fully stocked library and volunteer tutors entice all members in to read as a free choice.

In addition to the Boys Club regular play and sport activities, these new learning adventures seek to empower the students living in this urban environment to increase their desire to become life-long learners. While the primary members of LIFE and the Boys Club are juveniles, new programs being developed seek to encourage adults to become part of the learning community, through mentoring, and having access to the technology center and gymnasium. It is this unique approach that sets LIFE Learning Center and the Wilson Boys & Girls Club apart from other community institutions in Anderson. The desire to encourage life-long learning as a positive choice for all of its members requires a unified volunteer effort that focuses on funding, staffing, and building maintenance as well as high-quality programming.

The development of programs for LIFE requires several varying methods. While the homeschool program expects all of its members to cooperatively develop and provide programming activities, the community program needs to be staffed by both volunteers and by professionals. It is the development of a solid after-school program and community learning programs that will receive much of the focus of the Wilson Boys & Girls Club professional staff and Betty Malone, LIFE Learning Center facilitator, in the coming year.

This past year, 2002-2003, can be considered a success in many ways. There was an increase in student membership. A strong mission statement was developed and implemented. Several grants were applied for and fundraising projects developed. There was increasing acceptance and awareness of LIFE in the local homeschool community as well as the community at large. The Boys & Girls Club board is in support of the program as it develops and there have been increased numbers of volunteers working with all levels of the LIFE Learning Center program. The coming year will hold new challenges and much learning will occur on all levels, from the kindergarten student learning to take turns with his friends, to the steering committee members learning how to function in a grassroots democracy, to the program facilitators who learn along with their students how to continue the process of life-long learning in our emerging information age.

For more information, contact: Betty Malone, LIFE Learning Center facilitator at bmalone444@hotmail.com.



Self-Learning has grown from the lone action of a few autodidacts to a major movement in the United States. Homeschooling, charter schools, voucher programs, virtual schools, Independent Study Programs, and many other new forms of learning have demonstrated the failure of the current school system and the need for change. The major innovations of the nation's learning

Worcester Lyceum

The Worcester Lyceum is an association of diverse Worcester area people who organize conversations and share experiences. It is devoted to opening new possibilities for social connections and personal relationships by providing an inclusive forum within our community. By bridging differences among people who might otherwise not get to know one another, we enrich our community.

The Worcester Lyceum is an independent association initiated by Dynamy (a non-profit experiential education organization in Worcester). The Lyceum continues to have a mutually supportive relationship with Dynamy. In 2001, Dynamy held a pilot Conversation Series to explore interest in a 21st-century Lyceum, with a focus on building human connections across social barriers. Members who completed that 4-session Series wished to continue their conversation, and thus was born the idea of an ongoing association devoted to inclusion across lines of age, class, ethnicity, physical or mental ability, and other dimensions of human diversity.

As of June 2003, over 100 people have become Lyceum members, nearly all of them by joining one of six Conversation Series held to date. We intend to offer several Conversation Series each year. One may also become a member simply by attending three Lyceum events, organized by the members. Most of these are open to guests and the public as well as current members. Monthly conversations at Dynamy address varied topics of social and cultural importance. Other events allow for social and creative expression for all ages. Smaller topic circles may be held in members' homes or in public area locations. Field trips explore local points of interest. Annual conferences democratically chart the Lyceum's course, and elect a Steering Circle, whose monthly meetings are open to all members.

See <http://www.worcesterlyceum.org/About/> for more information.

Donate to the Cause

system is taking place outside of the government education system.

In spite of the growing strength of the nonschool cooperative community lifelong self-learning movement, it has receive little attention from foundations and philanthropists. Many members of this Coalition and other local family groups have embryonic self-learning projects underway that need financing now. This LCQ newsletter, and other projects of the Coalition, could be more effective with small grants for outreach.

THEY NEED YOUR HELP!

The Coalition has been accepted as an autonomous project of TRANET, a 501(c)s tax exempt organization since 1976. This means that you can make tax exempt donations for education proj-

ects.

Please place the Coalition on your list for regular donations. \$10, \$20, \$50, \$100 gifts would help make Self-Learning become real.

You may send you checks to:
TRANET - A Coalition for Self-Learning
Bill Ellis, General Coordinator
PO Box 567
Rangeley, ME 04970 USA
Tel: (207)864-3784
E-mail: <tranet@rangeley.org>

Or make a donation through PayPal at this link:

https://www.paypal.com/xclick/business=tranet%40rangeley.org&item_name=Coalition+for+Self-Learning&no_note=1&tax=0¤cy_code=USD

Another World Is Possible! Let's Build It!

People's movements across the world are working to demonstrate that the path to sustainable development and social and economic justice does not lie in neo-liberal globalisation but in alternative models for people-centred and self-reliant progress. Since 2001, the World Social Forum process is questioning the rules of investment and governance dictated by the World Economic Forum. It proposes a democratic, people-centred alternatives to imperialist globalisation. The WSF is a response of the growing international movement that is challenging capitalist-led globalisation and the neo-liberal economic policies pursued by most countries. Firmly committed to the belief that Another World Is Possible, the WSF is an open space for discussing alternatives to the dominant neo-liberal processes, for exchanging experiences and for strengthening alliances among mass organisations, people's movements and civil society organisations. As the clock moves forward to the 4th international forum, WSF-India invites you to the city of Mumbai to discuss and design our visions of another world.

World Social Forum 2004 • January 16-21, in Mumbai, India

For more information, please write to us at: wsfindia@vsnl.net

Got time?



A Coalition for Self Learning is actively seeking volunteers to help with the newsletter and web support of **Learning Cooperatives Quarterly**. Be a part of a project that offers the world a venue to reach the movers and shakers in alternative education, bringing them all together.

Email kolleen@optonline.net or marbleface@aol.com for more information



Another Bill's View *Book Review by Bill Ellis*

"Creating a Life Together" by Diana Leafe Christian

Creating learning communities is as much about creating communities as it is about transforming learning, just as Illich's Deschooling Society is more about transforming society than about deschooling. Christian Leafe

Christian's "Creating A Life Together" (New Society Publishers, 2003, \$22.95) gives us the last and the most comprehensive word on creating communities.

The central concern of this book is stand alone ecovillages and intentional communities. But this only means that it is more comprehensive than if it were about either communities of learners, or learning about communities.

But both perspectives are of interest to Learning Cooperative Quarterly. Because, the purpose of a learning co-op is not only to transform learning but also to transform society by creating a cooperative world of learning communities.

If Patch Adams's, the renowned MD clown, Forward had used "learning communities" instead of "medical communities" this review would not be needed. Adams went through 30 years of the growing pains in creating his

own medical community. For those

working to create learning communities this book can prevent Adams's long learning process, and prevent the high failure rate, some 90%, for unprepared communities.

Much of this book is about buying land, not a high priority for learning communities. But if buying a building for a learning resource or learning center is in your future even these chapters will be relevant. But just selecting the many key chapters that are immediately relevant makes this a must read book.

The first three chapters, for example, are about the early days of forming a community. Having regular meetings of a small number. Seeing all the elements that make up community, avoiding the failure pitfalls of the 90%, and learning from the successful 10%, will help any reader think through the task they face.

Chapter 4 and 5, and a recurring theme in other chapters, emphasizes the need for clearly written vision and mission statements. Don't start off without them. There is nothing more important than every member agreeing on just what you want to do. The book has numerous examples of those that have been the rock on which successful communities have organized.

Chapter 6 is perhaps the most important to communities of all kinds. It is on decision making processes. There are many. Perhaps the most important, consensus, is emphasized. Consensus is a mind set as much as a process. One enters a consensus decision making process with the idea of working on a compromise -- "let's work it out" NOT "here is MY idea." Rather than voting an idea up or down, participants can "approve," "stand aside," or "block." If any one blocks, the proposal on the floor is not approved. But participants can continue to discuss and try to arrive at an acceptable compromise with the blockers. When all members are close to a compromise those who don't fully agree may "stand aside." This registers their minor disagreement but does not stop action from happening.

Chapters 8, 15 & 16 covers another topic that has to be on the agenda when any group thinks of becoming a learning community. That is, becoming a legal entity. LLDs, Corporations, Subchapter S Corporations, Partnerships, Cooperatives



and other optional legal forms are described. The difference between "non-profits" (state function) and "tax exempt" (a federal function) is explained, and appendix 3 gives some guidance on gaining a 501(c)3 status. Among other legal issues needing consideration are: limiting liability, ownership, tax advantages, decision making, and outside financing. Financing plays a bigger role for intentional communities than it does for

learning communities so it is a significant part of the book. Large loans for buying land and building houses are less important to learning communities or co-ops than are membership fees, small loans, and grants. These are covered briefly but not in the detail that you may need.

The current surge of interest in communities matches that in deschooling. They are both part of the broad social change movement(s). They both envision a new society of democracy, peace, justice and equity. Beyond that the two have many common interests. Many intentional communities are driven by the desire to be learning communities. And many learning communities have in their future vision of being a model for a future global cooperative commonwealth. That is, being a force for social transformation in their neighborhoods as part of a broad network of similar communities around the world. This book can be a great help in creating your own local group as well as building the broader community movement toward this vision.

Upcoming Conference

The "Unfolding Learning Societies 2" conference, organized jointly by Shikshantar, Abhivyakti, IDSP, Multiworld Network, Arab Education Forum and UNESCO Collective Consultation of NGOs, will take place from January 15-21, 2004, in Mumbai alongside the World Social Forum and Mumbai Resistance. Please see this link for more information:
http://www.swaraj.org/shikshantar/activities_whats_new.html#1

Call for Papers

2nd International Conference on Politics and Information Systems: Technologies and Applications (PISTA '04)
July 21 - 25, 2004 - Orlando, Florida, USA

<http://www.confinf.org/pista04>

PISTA '04 Organizing Committee invites authors to submit their original and unpublished works, innovations, ideas based on analogical thinking, problems that require solutions, position papers, case studies, etc., in the fields of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). ICT researchers are invited to present their research results. Practitioners and consultants are invited to present case study papers and innovative solutions. Corporations are invited to present political information systems and software based solutions. Public servers are invited to present case studies, information systems developed for specific purpose, and innovative ideas and designs. Political and social scientists are invited to present research or position papers on the impact and the future possibilities of ICT in Societal systems and political processes. Politician and political consultants are invited to present problems that might be solved by means of ICT, or solutions that might be improved by different approaches and design in ICT.

All are invited to organize panel or invited sessions. Panel sessions with panelists coming from both: ICT researcher/practitioners and political consultants or politicians are highly encouraged.

Submitted papers must describe work not previously published. They must not be submitted concurrently to another conference with refereed proceedings.

Watershed School

We are confronted today with a multitude of complex social issues and problems whose solutions require new and innovative ways of thinking. The way we think is shaped by the way we learn, so new approaches to schooling are called for. The Watershed School offers a promising new approach that seeks to educate great citizens and bold thinkers.

The mission of The Watershed School is to provide a meaningful high school education that challenges students to know and care for themselves, their community, and their world.

Our approach equally values the pursuit of knowledge and the responsibility to use that knowledge for the benefit of others. We offer an education that helps students to understand in new ways the place in which they live. We value students' questions as much as their answers. And we believe that imagination, courage, and compassion are vital to an education for a better world.

How is The Watershed School different from other high schools?

The Watershed School's most unique characteristics are its use of "place-based education" and "learning expeditions." Place-based education "provides students with opportunities to connect with themselves, their community, and their local environment through hands-on, real-world learning experiences. It is rooted in the integrated core curricular activities of science, social studies, communication arts, and fine arts, and is expanded upon and applied by extending the classroom into the schoolyard and the neighborhood. This approach enables students to see that their learning is relevant to their world, to take pride in the place in which they live, to connect with the rest of the world in a natural way, and to develop into concerned and contributing citizens." (quote by Jack Chin)

Learning expeditions are semester-long projects that weave together several different disciplines and explore rich topics or themes that provide students with a real-world context for their learning. Learning Expeditions focus on the Boulder Creek Watershed community, giving students an opportunity to understand and come to know their human and natural environments. Learning Expeditions meet for several hours each day, often at locations throughout the community that pertain to the theme of the current expedition. This schedule of intensive classes allows for in-depth learning to occur.

Other unique aspects of The Watershed School which are less apparent, but no less important, are our emphasis on community responsibility, sustainable lifestyles, and a commitment to diversity. To promote community responsibility, students are involved in a wide range of stewardship activities that may range from participating in the governance of the school to helping to maintain our facilities to sharing with others in the community the skills and knowledge they have acquired. To promote sustainable lifestyles, we expect students to help us in our school-wide commitment to take care of our natural resources, and we aim to foster in students a balanced approach to life, that honors not only the intellectual, but also the emotional, physical, and spiritual elements of our lives. Our commitment to diversity is reflected in our efforts to make the school a safe and welcoming place for a wide variety of beliefs, lifestyles, ideologies, and cultures.

For more information, see: <http://www.watershedschool.org/index.htm>

Learning Cooperatives GUIDELINES:

ARTICLES

Learning Cooperatives Quarterly invites readers to submit articles for publication.

Articles should cover any subject of interest to groups and individuals worldwide involved in or researching learning cooperatives, learning communities, learning centers and all issues relating to self-learning.

These articles should be no more than

2000 words and should be accompanied by a short biography of 40 words or less.

Learning Cooperatives Quarterly reserves the right to edit for reasons of clarity, but articles will not be edited for content without permission of the author. Please send articles through email to
marbleface@aol.com

NEWS BRIEFS

As part of LCQ's commitment to networking, we welcome short updates and informational news briefs from learning cooperatives, learning communities, and

learning centers. We also encourage information concerning conferences or other organizational functions and activities that might be of interest to our readers.

Please limit these entries to 400 words or less and include contact information. Learning Cooperatives Quarterly reserves the right to edit for reasons of clarity. Please send news briefs through email to
marbleface@aol.com

All material submitted to LCQ are the property of LCQ and may not be published without the editor's written permission.