

Editorial: Community-based learning

It is a tremendous privilege to be associated with the World Education Fellowship in the year of its eightieth birthday. Much has changed since 1921 when the Fellowship was founded by a small group of humanitarian educators with an international outlook. Their principles, reproduced on the back cover of all recent volumes of *New Era*, have carried WEF through the heights and depths of the massive historic changes of the twentieth century.

It is an extraordinary feat for an international organisation to have weathered the many forces acting against international co-operation throughout the century: the nationalism of the thirties, the conflagration of the second world war, the paranoias of the cold war and the bitter legacies of colonialism. Almost as remarkable is the survival of an institution which was founded long before anyone had conceived of the wonders that communications technologies would bring, from computers to the internet and digital television. It is a measure of the scale of technological change that in 1921 the wonder of the age, radio, was still being developed. While political and technological changes are clearly visible for all to see, the revolution in social and environmental thinking over the last eighty years has been equally impressive. Discrimination on grounds of race, sex or wealth are all still evils to be fought, but there are now few regimes where such discrimination can take place as overtly as was the case in 1921.

The world has changed, but the principles of the early founders of WEF live on, echoed in UNESCO and other positive organisations concerned with a global future for all humankind. Eighty years on, there are thriving WEF sections in Japan, in Australia, in Africa and across the world. All are independent, organised by dedicated teachers and educators in each location, but all share the fundamental principles which have been carried in *New Era* since those early years.

While it may be fashionable to deny the validity of terms like “truth” and “progress”, and to adopt a cynicism dressed in the academic cloak of Postmodernism, good teachers and educators have continued to seek imaginative ways to enhance the learning experience of children and learners of all ages.

The articles in this issue celebrate the success of innovative community learning projects from disparate communities world-wide. Together, they show that there are good teachers and educators everywhere who have the dedication to invest their

energy and time in recognising the real problems which face children and adults trying to learn, and who are looking for remedies at a community level. We can all learn from the inspiration, persistence and innovation that are displayed by the participants in these projects.

Nothing could be further from the well-ordered school learning that so many who live in thriving cities and leafy suburbs may take for granted, than the conditions of neglected and homeless street children in the shanty towns of various parts of the world. Doctors Hill, Brack and Direko have examined a project which epitomises the humanitarian and eclectic view of learning reflected in the principles of WEF. Their article on “Human Modelling” identifies the potential of innovative ideas in putting street children from the transition camps in South Africa’s North-West Province on the road to becoming self-respecting, confident and responsible members of society.

The second article in this issue looks at another innovative project, this time in rural Mexico. In “Education as the Missing Link”, Dr David and Guadalupe Turner report on their evaluation of the efficacy of a scheme to mobilise the personal motivation and creativity of children and adults to the benefit of the rural community. The Post-Primary education project which they describe is a refreshing reminder that the real purpose of education is to meet people’s actual learning needs.

In our third article, “A Social Support System in Portugal”, Carolle Kerry describes the way in which the Portuguese fishing community at Sesimbra is taking responsibility for the management of their own lifelong learning needs, with remarkable results for those with special learning difficulties. Her article has been included in a forthcoming book “*Working with Support Staff*”, from Pearson.”

These three articles report on projects which provide hope and encouragement for all who believe in the principles of WEF. But they also show that there is no room for complacency. Eighty years after WEF was founded, the needs of those who have been traditionally underprivileged remain paramount. The three projects described in these articles suggest inspirational yet firmly realistic ways ahead.

But our fourth article, “Adolescent Behaviour and Political Conflict”, reminds us of the context and reality of learning in one of its most hazardous

settings. Salem Abuateya looks at the learning experiences of Palestinian adolescents, and provides a reminder for all of us who may sometimes verge on complacency that education is a privilege, and not one that is enjoyed by all.

Finally, Beth Rankin offers an interesting case study of the way that Marimba music, which has spread around the globe, can provide enjoyable educational experience at the same time as fulfilling a valuable social and cultural role.

Taken together, these five articles illustrate how the principles of the early founders of WEF eighty years ago are still being translated into effective action. Each of the focal topics represents relatively small-scale concerns among very different types of communities to tackle their learning needs through mutual support. But all these community-based learning projects have something to say for anyone who shares the founding principles of WEF, whether concerned with the local or with the big picture.

Dr. Dave Hinton

Call for Papers

South Africa Special Issue

The next issue of *New Era in Education* will be a Special Edition devoted to the **World Education Fellowship Conference in South Africa**. There will be reports about the conference and contributions about the Fellowship's history, as well as some of the papers from the conference which we feel deserve a wider audience. It is still not too late to send photographs and short pieces for this issue. Please see the notice on page 28.

The **December 2001** issue will focus on *Learning in the New Millennium*, and will cover previously announced topics such as: *Peer Assessment*, *Transferable Skills* and *Who Needs Schools?*

If you would like to contribute an article on one of these or another topic which you think would be relevant to the theme of learning in the new millennium, send your articles to the editor as soon as possible and no later than 1st November 2001, please.

It is intended that Vol. 83 of New Era in Education will cover specific themes of global importance. Two of these will be:

Education for Sustainable Living

It can have escaped few people's notice that globalisation is not a universally welcome development. Delegates and protestors at world summit meetings have recognised the importance of measures which need to be taken now to ensure that there will still be a globe called Earth in the future. The environment we live in, whether an industrialised city or a rural area, is becoming a major cause for concern in terms of resources and quality.

The problem for educators and learners in the new millennium is to find ways of educating young people's awareness of these issues, and indeed of awakening the older generations to the urgency of the problems. If you are involved in a project on education for sustainable living, which you think would be useful to share with other like-minded people around the world, please send an article or a report, or contact the editor on the usual e-mail address.

The Problem of Bullying

That we are all entitled to be treated with dignity is a major tenet of all human rights legislation. School bullying is a global problem, and has been causing concern ever since there have been formal institutions for educating young people. More recently, recognition has been given to the problem of bullying in staff rooms as well as in the playground. We welcome contributions to the debate about bullying, for a special issue on this subject in 2002.