

WEDNESDAY MEETING

newsletter

THE LEARNING FARM

4 Oct 76

2690 Valewood, Carlsbad CA 729-9095



AGENDA

Pot-luck dinner is at 6 o'clock and the meeting begins at 7 on Wednesday.

These are the items on the agenda:

- History of Farm and Other Schools (Eileen L. & John R.)
- Decision-Making (Ernie Bassener)
- Histories of Families and Children (Robert Nuase)
- Library Books At Home (Wind)
- The New Owner (Eileen)
- Insurance and Mobility (Mike)
- Math Books (Mike)
- Anything Else That's Wanted To Talk About
- The Next Meeting (Ernie)
- Family Conferences (Wind)

FARM SOLD

For all but the final papers, the Farm has been sold. It will go to court for about a month, and then the new owner must give a 30-day notice if he intends to evict us or raise the rent. The rent is now \$150/mo., a token rate.

Recently the Learning Farm became a legally recognized non-profit institution. There's a possibility a raise in rent could be donated by the new owner and then subtracted from his income tax.

The new owner came by to look at the place on Friday. He said to Eileen that he had no plans to move us out in the "foreseeable future" and seemed to be a friendly, straightforward person.

SWANLANS GONE WITH INSPECTOR

JoAnne received a letter from her ex-husband's attorney saying that if she would place her son in a more traditional school, then they would ~~not~~ press to get the Learning Farm inspected and closed down.

Her former husband visited about two weeks ago and although he felt the school was probably a better learning environment than the public schools, he found the school unsafe and unsanitary. Among other things, he found a tick on one of the kids.

DUE PROCESS

Some of the parents were disappointed in the lack of clarity and process at the last meeting. Decisions seemed to be made by proposals that seemed to have been announcements as the agenda drifted to the next topic or went off on some tangent.

At this meeting we'd like to explore some ideas for better meetings in the future. Here are some thoughts that have been put forward:

1. Have one teacher and one parent work together on planning each meeting.
2. State questions clearly and make decisions by voting.
3. If consensus is to be the modus operandi, then let's at least have a clear idea that that's how we operate.
4. Have someone take notes on the meeting.
5. Report in a newsletter or something after each meeting.
6. Send out an agenda before each meeting.
7. Have some open means for agenda input during the interim between meetings.

BY-LAWS

The by-laws were drafted by Wind, Colleen, and Bruce last June. They were written to put the Learning Farm on legal corporate footing in the simplest way possible and don't have much to do with the functioning of the school. All parents are on the Board of Directors. At this point, we're trying to locate a copy, so everyone can have one.

MATH BOOKS

Mike F.

Some of the parents, teachers, and kids thought it would be a good idea to get math workbooks. These turned out to be difficult to find in a store--most schools order them through publishers' representatives. For the future, we are trying to locate these people.

At a store near San Diego State we found a few copies of some very fine texts. It's amazing the advances in presenting math that have been made in 15 years. There were 3 or 4 main series, and we brought home some samples. They were paperback and cost \$5 and we thought they were workbooks.

The kids who wanted them chose the kind they liked best, and we went to L.A. to buy them. We went to the largest off-the-shelf distributor in California and they and the smaller stores as well were sold out. We also discovered that what we'd been calling workbooks were actually textbooks and that in all those series the grades 4-6 (and beyond) are hardback books and cost \$10.

FIELD TRIPS

Robert N.

One of the best ways of learning things, and certainly a fun way to spend time, is to go places, to see people doing and making things. If any of you have interesting houses, farms, places of employment or special activities which might interest some of the kids, you might invite us for a visit or tour, perhaps we could participate. There might be activities in which the

FIELD TRIPS (Continued)

kids and teachers could be quite def inately useful. Also, you might have ideas ab out places or events we might be inter-ested in visiting. Please submit them.

MATERIALS

We are in need of many materials, particularly lumber. Anything better than firewood---we'll come and haul it. If you can locate a house being torn down, you're an angel. (We have a 24 hour scam line.)

OUR BEST DAY -Mike F.

The fear of health inspectors was upon us and we joyously packed off to the beach and the library on Tues., in the sunny break after the long cloudy weather.

The beach was great fun, you'd almost call it delicious. At the library in the afternoon with the little kids, a funny thing happened. I went off to read magazines and came back to the children's section---older kids were rreading to younger ones, math workbooks were out, new readers poring over phonics books and tapes, and a puppet show going on.

Our best academics day yet, and also the funnest. It took no salesmanship, no encouraging, no special scheduling (other than the health inspector). I thought of how Mary and I spend a lot of our own free time---our most common destinations: the beach and the library!

The day gave us thoughts about becoming a mobile school, operating out of trucks and daypacks. We could even become 100% legal!

ONE ON ONE AND THE OTHER WAY AROUND - Mike F.

Some of the kids wanted to build a fort and asked for help. First I was helping Joe one-on-one and things went fine. I tried to have Joe do as much of the work as possible, pulling out nails and measuring the boards to be cut and policing the scraps.

Robert later helped 3 of them at once. All 3 had hammers and wanted to hammer nails, so that they did. Their cooperation in design was low and they'd independently hammer on pieces of wood that might later need to be cut. If a piece struck out, well, they might want to add another room on.

By great persuasive efforts Robert would explain to them rudiments of design and cooperation, but he said it felt like the cart leading the horse most of the way.

"They could learn to build by just hammering at forts any old way, but much slower, I think, than if we first practiced with hammering, and learned about hammers and nails, and started with smaller projects, and learned about design and cleanup, and then started building structures. And the Farm would be better off, we might get a bicycle shed, or a house for new teachers, besides avoiding the dangerous litter of nails sticking out of scraps and having our wood tied up and the misuse of tools."

DRAMA CRITICS ADORE - Mary S.

Last year Cory and Dylan had conflicting stories of some pushing and shoving between them on the back steps. Barbara had them re-enact the scene. Each took the part of the other, about which they seemed so expert.

Dylan reacted to Cory-playing-Dylan the same way Cory had reacted originally. He ran off yelling and crying with new insight into the affair.

A COOL EXPEDITION

At the beach John took a lunch bag and threw it in the ocean. When he walked back to the towels Mike asked him why he threw the bag in the water and what was in it. He said there was an apple and some other food in it. He didn't know whose lunch it was.

"It made me very angry," said Mike, "I picked him up over my shoulder and said, 'John! We better go look for that lunch!' We waded around looking high and low, John screaming and crying the whole time. Other kids ran up and asked what was going on. I told them about the lunch we were looking for and they ran back to see if it was theirs.

TOMATO CITY

April wandered around the house eating from a plate and dropping tomato bits and grated cheese in a regular trail. About the time she lost interest in eating the mess was discovered underfoot.

"April, pick up this food you dropped!" Mike said.

April shook her head, "No---I don't want to."

"Come on, April! I'll help you." He reached around her and held her hands gently but firmly and reached them down to the tomato bits and over to the abandoned plate, and then walked her, screaming and crying all the way, into the kitchen and reached up to put the plate on the counter together.

TALK, TALK, TALK - Mike F.

The Re-enacting idea looked good. If every infraction and complaint was brought to the school court, we'd need 30-hour days.

We're trying to get away from the revenge and restriction justice that's so familiar, but sometimes the only-verbal approach ("Was that a nice thing to do? Is that the way you usually act?") doesn't seem vivid enough. Tomato City and A Cool Expedition are good examples of Re-directing. The point is to proceed with action in a good direction. If I had gripped April's wrists painfully hard or been vengeful or mad it would just distract. The physical contact makes a good opportunity for conversation. Some sorts of misbehavior could be a puzzle to re-direct---for example, someone slugging or throwing rocks to injure. Maybe this would be it: "You feel like slugging? Let's slug these pillows for a while, and that won't hurt other people." Or part of it. Stealing a telephone pole? And the big kids?

9/25/76 REPORT FROM THE SNOW WHITE READING CIRCLE
AND COLLOQUIUM by Mike Fellows

Today I read Snow White to a circle of young thinkers---
Ernie Jr., Rebecca, John G., Mary, and Eric.

Snow White was to be awakened by "Love's First Kiss."
At this point Robert walked in and inquired whether she would
settle for "infatuation's first kiss."

Later, just as the Prince was leaving his kingdom after
hearing the travelers' reports, Mike interjected, "I don't think
this is a true story!"

"Yeah!" said John, "It's not a true story!"

"It doesn't say it's a true story! It doesn't say that,
does it?" said Ernie.

"No, it doesn't say that," said Mike.

"Snow White dreamed the story," said Rebecca.

"It's just a fairy tale," said Eric, "it's not true!
If you're such a good book---what can you prove? You think you're
such a good book! What can you prove?" he shouted and waved a
stick at the window.

"Snow White dreamed it!" yelled Rebecca, pulling on my
arm.

"But the book says they rode off to where Dreams Come
True," I said.

"I don't think it's a true story," said John.

GET YOUR HANDS CLEAN - Barbara

Laundry detergent does a good job of getting grease
off your hands.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT THE FIGHTS - Mike F.

For the first two weeks the youngest group of boys
were getting into a lot of fights, including a scarp for control
of a kitchen knife and some rock-throwing.

We considered some kind of mandatory supervision, but
opted for one teacher to follow the young ones around and work
with their interests. I wish I'd relaxed and been more curious
about them the first weeks, and not been wandering around so
much with phonics and math books (and ideas) feeling lost.

DR. DICHOPTOMIE'S CORNER

"Children should be provided an environment where they
are free to do what they want---following their natural interests,
you may be sure they will learn enough."

"Teachers should be provided with an environment where
they are free to do what they want---following their natural
interests you may be sure they will teach enough."

"What have the kids been doing in math?"

"What have the adults been doing in math?"

+ + +

"Have you been writing in the student evaluation books?"

"How about the teacher and parent books?"

SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL - Mike F.

An economics book of this title by a man named Schumacher is reviewed by the Whole Earth Catalog crew as the best exposition of an alternative to the corporation dominated business landscape. The subtitle of the book is fit for meditation: "Economics as if people mattered."

How about science? "Science as if people mattered." What would that be? An awareness of the factual controversies and curiosities we each and all have?

"Literature as if people mattered." I can see this in Barbara's idea of let's-write-our-own-books, teaching reading by helping kids write books. The wall newspaper is sort of "News as if people mattered."

"History as if people mattered." One of last year's greatest hits was Mary's journals. What if everyone kept journals? Bud Schulberg in What Makes Sammy Run? (a sort of sociological novel of modern money and status climbing) speculates that we will continue to have Sam Glicks and Adolf Hitlers until history becomes personalized, and people are normally accessible to one another with depth of understanding.

WHERE TO NOW? - Wind

The Learning Farm is an experimental school in the process of setting up a system within which it can work and it is an alternative to public school education... it will hopefully be open to much experimentation and innovation... now here is the first difficulty I see... before we can even begin to set up a system of operation we first had better have some clear-cut ideas as to the purpose of our existence... if we fail to define this purpose then how are we ever going to be able to measure the effectiveness of our experimental programs? no amount of work or well-meaning effort is going to prove effective if indeed we don't even know what it is we are trying to effect...

perhaps it can be said that we already "know" our purpose (to educate, etc.) and that further discussion is a mere intellectual bantering---a waste of our time... on a general level the whole concept of "to educate" and what that actually means has been under debate from the time of the earliest Greek & Roman scholars and is a question still raging in your contemporary public schools in America (the recent takeover of the schools in the ghetto by the community is an example of the need of the individual culture to define his/her own educational goals)... the question has been answered many times (usually by a special interest power group [i.e. Church, industry, various ethnic groups]) but has never been more than temporarily solved... and I don't know if there can be any more than a temporary solution... each individual and every community has its own personalized needs and therefore its own purpose of education... (educational philosophy I like to call it)... no institution, school, community, or group of scholars can measure the effectiveness of its education processes unless they have first developed a purpose (or philosophy) to measure it by ...

WHERE TO NOW? (continued)

on a more specific level what about the Farm... in the past our purpose as stated in our brochure has been more of a non-system of education (our purpose being neither defined by standardized tests nor limited by a rigid practical philosophy) for the most part the main purpose of our school was to exist as an alternative to the public school system... although it has been almost a week since I have read the answers of the parents to our questions I would bet that for the most part people who have been with the school for many years (the old-timers: Colleen, Eileen Lafferty, Bruce, Suzy...) answered our questions with statements such as "realize their own potential", "to develop on their own", "to grow", "to not be forced"... within this context perhaps you can begin to place in perspective my concern for setting up structures even experimental ones and systems that are mandatory, academically oriented, or parallel to the public school structure... now understand this: I feel that with our expanded enrollment our very purpose has come into question... now people necessitate a new philosophy of education... however, many of these people familiarized themselves with the old running and philosophy of this school before they enrolled their students (at the very least on a verbal basis)... I feel that our immediate need is to discover (or perhaps uncover) the basic educational philosophy(ies) of these people... until we do this no program of study or system of teaching can be judged effective or non-effective... we just don't know... and in the mean-time what of our day-to-day existence... I believe that the best thing we can do for our kids is to leave them alone as much as possible and to avoid radically changing the previous structure/philosophy/purpose of the Farm... to impose or even forcefully suggest an arbitrary structure now is to run the risk of having to do some heavy de-programming when we do get our shit together... it has become obvious, however, that some amount of supervision/interference is necessary to maintain the general health and well-being of the kids and ourselves during this period of transition... strangely enough, with all our talk of organizing I don't believe we are even fulfilling this purpose... I have several suggestions that may help maintain ourselves during this period of discussion with the parents and studying on our own: set up a loose system of classes (as we have tried to) that is based on the specific requests of the students (as long as these requests do not interfere with our own personal freedom) those who are in tune with these classes will attend... those who are not won't...

because of the special needs of the little ones and the fact that often they are the ones to go under when chaos hits set aside one person daily (as we have) to be aware of the whereabouts of the little people... because many of them have never been through public school conditioning we can even perhaps begin studying and watching how they pattern their day so that when we do help them set up a structure (if we choose to) it is a real outgrowth of their personal needs in conjunction with the desires of their parents...

MORE WHERE TO NOW?

third set aside at least one teacher daily to be aware of (supervise when necessary) the daily activities of those students who are easily interacting with each other and are showing little interest in the scheduled activities... this can include sitting around on the back porch and listening to the level of noise/pain in any given afternoon and even organizing (suggesting) a group project (building, hike, etc.) or game (baseball, races, etc.) when it seems that the energy can be bordering on violence... in simplest terms maintaining a level of awareness of what's happening at the school in the "play" or non-structured areas and perhaps even recording our personal observations on a regular basis...

fourth use this time to teach/show the resources of the farm/school to the students/parents... perhaps some experiments that are of high interest (making gunpowder, stink-bombs, microscopes work, optical illusions, etc.) to familiarize the kids with the lab area and its potential... group building projects to teach kids use of various tools that are available (from carpentry tools to sewing machines [perhaps we can design and sew a flag])... special art projects that show the students what we have available in the area of artx and crafts...

THE UNDERGROUND -Mary Silber

Among freeschool people it is considered taboo to say "You must do this." And yet ^{some} will do everything short of that, aimed at the same results.

I get the impression that some think my job is to solicit students for interests. "Remind them that they want to do math now." As if I'm to get them to do academics without letting them know that's what I'm doing.

In order for a freeschool to be effective the same attitudes expected of the Farm must be established at the home. Is this true?

SPARE THOUGHTS - Nony Mouse

Before 20 or 30 people can come to a basic understanding about the way they want to run their school they have to come to a basic understanding about the way they want to run their own lives. How likely is that? Maybe tolerance is the common denominator... Why is everybody here?

1. hate public school
 - a) overdisciplined
 - b) depersonalizing
 - c) picked on
 - d) can't keep up
 - e) don't like their emphasis
2. crazy about the free school idea
3. want to have a chance to let my learning soar
4. don't care about learning
5. more varied class offerings
6. like the content of public school, not the method
7. like the vibes here

SPARE THOUGHTS (Continued)

Are you here to get away from public school or going toward a free school? It seems that there are a variety of interests to be served here.

If everyone is to agree on a given purpose, what about the people who do not share that purpose? Are they then to change their purpose; for instead of insisting that all must agree to one purpose, it might be best for everyone to define and express their purpose, even though the school charter may read---

Purpose: 1. To emphasize academics. @ 2. To de-emphasize academics.

Each person will act from their own purpose anyway.

To the kids: What is your Purpose in learning. Maybe it's just as important for the kids to define their hopes for what this school will do for them as it is for the adults to decide what it will provide for them.

OUR FAMILY - Mike F.

What is our purpose at the Learning Farm? Can we have several different purposes? What range of learning philosophy can we accomodate?

Many of us, teachers and parents, are exploring freeschooling for the first time. One of our greatest resources are the students and parents who have been freeschooling many years. We could concern ourselves more with what has been going on, and less with comparisons to Brand X.

We need to talk a lot, and get to know one another, and this will take some time. As we share our ideas and values, in the hope of enriching ourselves* and making the Learning Farm a better place, we should steady the school with appreciation of the good things it has been, and how it has been those things. The teachers feel a great need to get to know the families.

*Or at least a free meal. I, at any rate, am ready at any time to accept an invitation over for dinner.

MORE FROM DR. DICHOTOMY - Mike F.

I am opposed to compulsory education. I leave my children free to learn what they want.

I am opposed to compulsory behavior. I let my children do whatever they want.

? ? ?

Are the kids learning academics?

Are the teachers happy?

REVIEW: TOOLS FOR CONVIVIALITY By IVAN ILLICH

"The industrial era has proceeded on the assumption that machines can replace slaves---the end result of this logic is enslavement to machines."

In an earlier book, Deschooling Society, Illich argues that schooling is a basic expression of the industrial mentality. In schools, knowledge is treated as a commodity, as some sort

REVIEW: TOOLS (Continued)

of stuff, to be imparted to children by the process of some system.

In Tools he presents a vision of a convivial society and sees three conditions necessary for its development:

- 1) the demythologization of science
- 2) the recovery of language
- 3) the recovery of due process.

A FOLLOWUP ON THE DISCUSSION ABOUT ACADEMICS

There are a variety of ideas and possibilities and opinions afoot. This is just a list of them.

1. Children in a free environment can be expected to learn reading and math at least as well as in the public schools.
2. Comparisons with the public schools are irrelevant.
3. Comparisons with the public schools are relevant because our kids will be in a common world eventually.
4. I don't care if my children learn math or the metric system.
5. Learning Farm children are slower in the early grades and ahead of public kids in the later grades.
6. The level of public school math and reading is not the same as its textbooks would indicate---it's really somewhat lower.
7. Freeschools are like Chinese handcuffs. The more uptight you are about learning something, the less you learn. Or teach.
8. Learning Farm children are more mature than public school children.
9. Learning Farm children know less math but more philosophy.
10. Academic and social skills run parallel. Less math and verbal ability = less maturity.
11. I'm concerned that my children can be able to transfer back to public schools and be socially functional.
12. I'm concerned that my children can be able to transfer back to public school and not be in remedial courses.
13. The Learning Farm is becoming too structured.
14. The learning Farm needs more structure and discipline.
15. Kids fresh from public schools need to blow off institutional steam for a couple of months.

16. My children need to be prodded about academics.
17. The kids have enough people worrying them about their future, the best thing you can do is leave them alone about it.
18. I avoid ever saying to anyone, "You ought to learn this...".
19. Learning Farm children are generally falling behind their public school peers in academics.
20. If everyone does some reading and math every day, we can go to the beach as much as we want. As long as everyone does some academics, the parents will be happy.
21. Public school children are pumped with a lot of information they just forget.
22. The Learning Farm ought to articulate an ideology of its teaching style and principles.
23. To the extent that communications are good, we can dispense with setting up an ideology.
24. The ideal school would be parents as teachers, the community as school. Wherever the school is differentiated from the community, and to that extent, you will end up with production criteria.
25. We need to program the kids to be self-motivated.
26. Children need to be reminded about what they want to do.
27. Soliciting kids for classes and studies is a suspicious way for a teacher to operate.
28. It's hard to be a good freeschool parent unless you're a teacher.
29. It's hard to be a good freeschool teacher unless you're a parent.
30. Kids appreciate what needs to be done and learned if communications about it are good.
31. The idea of freeschools is that kids will want to learn what they need to learn in order to grow to their best potential. What if they don't?

QUOTES AND COMMENTARIES

Spring rain patterns earth
 sprout emerges... flower unfolds
 a lone child applauds...

haiku/Learning - Wind

"When you find yourself in the majority---it's time to change your opinion." - Mark Twain

school = Gr. skolá discussion

"Enough people now believe in learner-directed, non-coercive, interest-inspired learning so that we should be seeing in education far more widespread and profound change than we have. Only a very small number of those people who would truthfully say that in theory they accept these new ideas about learning, have made a strong effort to put them into action. Too many of those who have tried to make change have been ineffective, frustrated, disappointed, and even defeated. This book has grown out of many talks with such people, in which we have tried together to understand why the things we believe in so often appear not to work, or at any rate not to work very well. . . . More and more it appeared that a large part of our problem is that few of us really believe in freedom. As a slogan, it is fine. But we don't understand it . . . we have had in our own lives so little . . . "

- John Holt, Freedom And Beyond, p.3

"Free School teachers, in the effort to avoid the domineering presence of the standard brand of classroom tyranny that is identified so often with the formidable figure of the NEA professional in the public system, often make the very great mistake of trying to reduce themselves to the position of an ethical and pedagogical neuter."

-Jonathan Kozol, Free Schools, p.68

pedagogy: how you go about saying---

"I think you ought to know . . . "

"One group of words, that twist and hide truth and understanding, is 'structured---unstructured'. . . . There are no such things as 'unstructured' situations. They are not possible."

- John Holt, p.9

"Our greatest natural resource is the minds of our children." - Walt Disney.

Evening Classes

Yoga With Sara - Tues. at 7pm; Wed. 7:30AM

Oriental Massage and Acupressure

First Aid with Michael Turk

Thursday at 7. Bring towel and

notebook.

*Join us for yoga each morning 7:30-8:15