

# INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION NEWS ROUNDUP

Volume 3 Number 6, November 2009

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## EL SISTEMA: AN EDUCATION PHENOMENON GOES GLOBAL

### Australia: ACMF Announces New Orchestra and Choral Music Programs

Our programs are based around the hugely successful Venezuelan music education program - "El Sistema", the brainchild of Jose Antonio Abreu, a Venezuelan musician and economist who created the program to provide joy and hope through music to the poor children of Venezuela – to relieve their situation and take them away and off the streets of violence and gangs, by teaching them intensively in the skills and passion of orchestral classical music.

The characteristics of our "Sistema" programs are as follows:

- Inclusive - no one who wants to participate misses out.
- Free music lessons and instruments for those who cannot afford to pay.
- Supportive, positive and affirming music programs designed to be fun-based.
- Excellence in music - this is about serious fun.
- Competent tutors trained in children's music education.

Read more at <http://www.acmf.com.au>

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### Canada: El Sistema Comes to Canada

*Orchestras Canada, 18 September 2009*

Last week, the New Brunswick Youth Orchestra (NBYO) announced that it will be launching Sistema New Brunswick, a program designed to bring about transformational social change through music, this fall with a prototype children's orchestra centre in Moncton.

The program, which will eventually be rolled out to a number of communities across the province, will be modelled on an internationally renowned Venezuelan program.

The National System of Youth and Children's Orchestras of Venezuela, known locally as "El Sistema", brings together the country's most disadvantaged youth and nurtures their personal development and talent through free instruments

and instruction.

“During a tour of Venezuela to investigate their program, we concluded that it was indeed something that was needed here in New Brunswick,” said NBYO president Ken MacLeod.

Read more at <http://orchestrascanada.org/?p=2368>

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### **England: In Harmony**

In Harmony is a community development programme aimed at using music to bring positive change to the lives of very young children in some of the most deprived areas of England, delivering benefits across the wider community.

The programme encourages participation in music – in the form of the Symphony Orchestra – which can have huge personal benefits for the children involved, providing opportunities to grow and develop, both socially and musically.

In Harmony is inspired by the hugely successful Venezuelan project El Sistema and is chaired by world renowned cellist, Julian Lloyd-Webber.

Read more at <http://www.inharmonyengland.com/>

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### **Scotland: We are on a mission to transform lives through music.**

Sistema Scotland is a charity set up to break the cycle of social blight which sees children in many areas at risk of growing up to be involved in crime, substance abuse and anti-social behaviour. We believe these afflictions, all too common across urban Scotland, often stem from a loss of self-worth in childhood. An answer can lie in making music within the structure of a symphony orchestra.

We take the Sistema name from the orchestra movement established in Venezuela in 1975 by Maestro José Antonio Abreu.

We are very proud of our close links with Venezuela. We seek to benefit from the South Americans' expertise, while adapting their methods to suit conditions in Scotland.

Deprivation takes many forms, and we live in a very different country from Venezuela, but the circumstances which can lead to the alienation of a child, and the attributes of playing in an orchestra which can counter them, are essentially the same.

Sistema Scotland exists to develop orchestra centres on the ground in Scotland. These are known in the community as Big Noise. The first is in Raploch, Stirling. We have plans for further centres across Scotland.

Read more at <http://www.sistemascotland.org.uk/>

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### **USA: Famed Venezuelan music education program adopted**

*Geoff Edgers, Boston Globe, October 23, 2009*

It didn't take Stanford Thompson long to realize that his fellowship at New England Conservatory was anything but normal.

This is because Thompson is a musical pioneer of sorts, one of 10 students chosen as the first wave in the United States of a revolutionary Venezuelan program called El Sistema.

El Sistema - officially known as the National System of Youth and Children's Orchestras in Venezuela - is unlike any other music education program in the world. Since its founding in 1975, the program has taken more than a million

children between the ages of 2 and 18, many of them poor, and provided them with instruments and free lessons, creating a new class of young musicians.

Wowed by the program's success, music educators outside Venezuela have been trying in recent years to adapt parts of it to their countries. El Sistema USA is the first unified effort stateside.

Read more at

[http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2009/10/23/famed\\_venezuelan\\_music\\_education\\_program\\_adopted/](http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2009/10/23/famed_venezuelan_music_education_program_adopted/)

See also the El Sistema USA Website: <http://elsistemausa.org/>

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## **El Sistema: the film**

*released on DVD & Blue Ray October 2009*

The multi-award-winning documentary film shows the gripping way 'El Sistema' functions on a daily basis in a typical núcleo: the 'La Rinconada' núcleo is located adjoining the barrio of the same name. The area around the núcleo is considered as one of the most dangerous and poorest areas in Caracas. Up to 300 children find their daily destination here.

In the film, three selected young people from the núcleo are accompanied through their daily lives for a whole year. The kids come from different backgrounds, family circumstances and stages of personal development. There are correspondingly few overlaps in their biographies – up until the day when they become part of the 'system' and are confronted by their own instruments, as well as the love, persistence and patience of their teachers.

One of Jose Antonio Abreu's key goals is to broaden young people's horizons and encourage them to organise their own lives in a meaningful, responsible way. The film documents the personal development of the children and teenagers, few of whom will be crowned by a successful musical career. This is, however, not what the system aspires to.

The film explores the central question: what can the system accomplish by connecting young people with classical music, and to what extent can it change their lives?

Read more at [http://www.el-sistema-film.com/el\\_Sistema\\_The\\_Film.html](http://www.el-sistema-film.com/el_Sistema_The_Film.html)

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## **INTERNATIONAL ROUNDUP**

### **Canada: It's time to teach parents the benefits of closing half-empty schools**

*Marcus Gee, The Globe and Mail, 26 October 2009*

'Groups weigh fate of underused Toronto schools.'

If that recent headline rung a bell, it's no wonder. Officials have been trying for what seems like forever to close under-populated Toronto schools.

Though around 100 of the city's 550 schools are half empty – a scandalous waste of space and resources – the Toronto District School Board has managed to close only one or two in recent years.

Nobody wants to take on the legions of parents who invariably fight to save the dear old local school, no matter how shabby.

But now, at last, there is a real chance of progress on this hoariest of school-board issues – a rival of the endless school-pools debate for its Groundhog Day repetitiveness.

The board has a dynamic new education director, Chris Spence, who successfully closed underused schools in his last post as director in Hamilton. The board's articulate chairman, John Campbell, is speaking out persuasively on the need to close some schools. So is one of its most vigorous trustees, Josh Matlow, who is leading an effort to roll out a series of committees to consult residents in reluctant neighbourhoods.

Read more at <http://www.globecampus.ca/in-the-news/article/its-time-to-teach-parents-the-benefits-of-closing-half-empty-schools/>

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### **Canada: Student-led learning at Calgary school draws interest from Down Under as “the education of the future”**

*Sarah McGinnis, Calgary Herald, October 28, 2009*

There are no bells at Bishop Carroll High School ushering students on to their next class. There are no classes, for that matter, no timetables telling students where to be and what to study.

For almost 40 years, the southwest Calgary high school has embraced self-directed learning by allowing its students to individually decide how they'll tackle their high school studies.

Now, a team of Australian and New Zealand educators is visiting Bishop Carroll in hopes of transforming their schools in its image.

"We were truly amazed at what is happening at Bishop Carroll and astonished that a system could work so well with so much flexibility and be so aware of being tailored to student needs," said Brian Brennan, senior education officer with a Catholic school diocese in the Australian state of Victoria.

Read more at

<http://www.calgaryherald.com/news/Student+learning+Calgary+school+draws+interest+from+Down+Under/2152405/story.html>

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### **Finland: Helsinki seeks to counteract social differentiation of schools**

*Special support to stem “white flight” from immigrant-dominated schools*

*Helsingin Sanomat, 5 November 2009*

The City of Helsinki is budgeting more than EUR 1.5 million in the ongoing school year for special support aimed at preventing a division of the city's schools into “good” and “bad” ones.

The subsidies primarily affect schools in the east and northeast of Helsinki, where the immigrant population is highest. Schools receiving the additional aid also contain large numbers of children of native-born Finns seen to be in danger of being marginalised.

Criteria for the additional funding include the average educational and income levels of the parents, and the proportion of the pupils who have a foreign language as their mother tongue.

The subsidies are a way to way to diminish the “white flight” phenomenon, familiar in many large European countries, in which families of the native born population start avoiding schools and areas where the proportion of immigrants is high.

Read more at

<http://www.hs.fi/english/article/Helsinki+seeks+to+counteract+social+differentiation+of+schools/1135250316955>

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### **India: Lockers needed in schools to protect students from overloaded school-bags**

*Nikhila Henry, Times of India, 13 September 2009*

HYDERABAD: City schools may have air-conditioned classrooms but not many have lockers where students can keep their books. The school education department is now flooded with complaints from parents saying that their children and being made to lug bags that weigh much more than the "permitted weight limit" of 2.5 to 3.0 mg – and officials promise they will now make a "compulsory Cupboards" rule for schools.

"There should be at least one cupboard in each classroom. Schools which charge a handsome amount as fee should be able to build a cupboard to keep students' books," said Victoria Kumari, district education officer (DEO), Hyderabad.

She said that the department had received over 1,500 complaints from parents complaining that schools were making their children carry more weight than allowed by the education department.

Last academic year, the school education department had fixed the weight of the school bag as 2.5 to 3 kg but parents say that children are being made to carry much heavier bags, some weighing over 5-6 kgs. And primary school children are carrying the heaviest bags, say parents.

But parents wonder whether schools would agree to the official command on cupboards. They say they have been pleading with schools for locker facilities but most, including some corporate schools, have declined to give this facility.

Read more at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/news/city/hyderabad/Lockers-to-be-made-a-must-in-schools/articleshow/5004948.cms>

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## **Ireland: Teachers are trying to make maths add up**

*Irish Independent, October 07 2009*

Last weekend, second year maths students at Castlenock in Dublin were busy studying the Leinster-Munster rugby match on television.

They took down the number of scrums and line-outs won and lost, and they counted penalty kicks. They later collected the information on Excel spreadsheets and analysed them in class.

At other times, they might be carrying out surveys of punctuality in different classes in the school, or finding out which is the most popular computer game console.

It's all part of Project Maths, the practical, hands-on approach to the subject, which is being piloted in 24 schools across the country.

Instead of processing dry statistics from text books, students are being encouraged to use real life situations for their work.

Read more at <http://www.independent.ie/education/features/teachers-are-trying-to-make-maths-add-up-1905891.html>

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## **Israel: Will Israeli schools hop on the anti-obesity bandwagon?**

*Jonathan Lis, Haaretz, 4 Nov 2009*

The state should combat obesity among the young by better monitoring of the food served in schools, community centers and youth clubs and banning vending machines in schools that offer sweets and carbonated drinks, according to a bill proposed by Likud MK Danny Danon.

The Knesset Research Center says that more than 30 percent of all adults in Israel struggle with obesity, and the figure keeps growing.

More than 10 percent of Israel's young people are obese, the center says, and eight out of 10 obese teenagers will become obese adults.

The purpose of the bill is to combat obesity among young people," MK Danon said. "Obesity has been declared an epidemic by the World Health Organization, and it exists in Israel as well. Indeed, Israel is ranked third in Europe for obesity among children."

Read more at <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1125704.html>

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## **Kuwait: Teachers may strike, take legal action over unpaid allowances**

*Kuwait Times, 29 October 2009*

The Kuwait Teachers' Association (KTA) is considering taking industrial action and, if this fails, possible legal action against the Ministry of Education (MoE) and Deputy Education Minister Tamadher Al-Sdairawi over the non-payment of previously agreed allowances to teachers for invigilating in examinations and marking exam papers.

KTA head Ayed Al-Sehali revealed that the association has already submitted an official letter of complaint to the education minister Dr. Moudhi Al-Humoud, enquiring about the reason for the failure to pay the agreed allowances, despite months having passed since they were due.

Al-Sehali also drew attention to a memorandum issued by the Civil Service Commission (CSC) indicating that the suspension of the payments had been authorized by Al-Sdairawi.

He also insisted that if the deputy minister was proven to have directly intervened to suspend the payments, she should be held accountable for her "arbitrary actions regarding the issue," reported Al-Qabas.

Read more at [http://www.kuwaittimes.net/read\\_news.php?newsid=MTI5NjA0ODM0Nw==](http://www.kuwaittimes.net/read_news.php?newsid=MTI5NjA0ODM0Nw==)

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## **Lebanon: Teaching methods must change to promote social cohesion**

*Farah-Silvana Kanaan, Lebanon Daily Star, 19 October 2009*

Experts warned over the weekend that current educational practices in Lebanon are failing to promote social solidarity and reconciliation among various sectarian groups and leave young people at high risk of being pulled into new cycles of violence.

The observation was made by several participants in an international conference, "Education for Social Cohesion in Lebanon," which concluded on Saturday.

Several workshops focused on the issue of producing relevant materials that could be distributed in Lebanese schools such as the development of a "Religion and Education" book as a platform for religious dialogue and making use of diversity in Lebanon, as it is currently not taught as such.

In such a book, each religion and sect would be described, including its beliefs and practices, and emphasis would be placed on stressing the similarities in common values without ignoring the differences. Ideally, the textbook would be accompanied by visits to holy sites and other cross-cultural activities.

Another focal point was the education and training of teachers and implementing social cohesion-building teaching methods. Lee Jerome, who is currently researching the implementation of citizenship education policy in English schools, said that "Teaching is always political. We live in a society of inequality and as teachers we are part of a mechanism that produces and reproduces these inequalities."

Read more at [http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition\\_id=1&categ\\_id=1&article\\_id=107686](http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=1&article_id=107686)

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## **New Zealand: Mentor programs could help retain the 25% of NZ students who quit early**

*John Hartevelde, Stuff.co.nz, 10/09/2009*

More than a quarter of Kiwi teenagers quit school early, new figures show. New Zealand has the second-worst drop-out rate in the developed world.

The New Zealand Council for Educational Research yesterday hosted a conference in Wellington to discuss ways of engaging young people in learning.

Professor Sandra Christenson, of the University of Minnesota, said pupils needed to be shown the relevance of school.

"Students have to be able to say, 'I can do that work, I want to do the work, I value the school work, and gee, I belong here'," Christenson said. "When that happens, students want to come to school."

An American scheme, Check & Connect, allocated a mentor to those pupils losing interest at school. One mentor checked on about 20 pupils, across three or four schools. They checked on a pupil's attendance, academic performance and behaviour, and then worked to help the pupil.

The scheme was not focused on truancy, but on a range of indicators.

"Not all students are disengaged from school for the same reason," Christenson said.

Read more at <http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/education/2849608/Quarter-of-NZ-students-quit-early>

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## **Thailand: "Right To Play" initiative fosters new learning experience by integrating games into lessons**

*Bangkok Post, 13/10/2009*

With programmes in 26 countries, RTP is an international non-governmental organisation that deploys sports and games to develop life skills, improve health, teach conflict resolution and instil hope in children affected by calamities like war, poverty and disease.

The organisation first arrived in the southern part of Thailand in 2006 to help rehabilitate children affected by the December 2004 tsunami.

It was the first phase of its southern Thailand initiative. RTP has now entered the second phase, which consists of teacher training and other activities in Phuket, Trang, Satun and Songkhla provinces.

The aim is to assist and collaborate with Thailand's Ministry of Education (MOE) to enhance teacher capacity and motivation in social and emotional learning through experiential learning methodology, develop teachers' skills to effectively apply child-centred pedagogy, foster an environment for child-centred learning and social development, and evaluate the alignment of RTP's experiential learning technique with the social and emotional learning achieved by the MOE's national curriculum.

"It is a different approach from just simply playing games and sport; we actually use games as a way of teaching the new thinking methodologies, so that teachers can apply them in the classrooms," says Michael Bedford, the recently retired former Asian regional director and a main activist of RTP initiatives in Thailand.

Read more at <http://www.bangkokpost.com/life/education/25542/academic-enjoyment>

For more information on Right To Play, visit <http://www.righttoplay.com>

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## **UK: Review backs formal lessons starting later**

*Hannah Richardson, BBC News, 16 October 2009*

Children should not start formal learning until they are six, a review of primary education in England says.

Instead the kind of play-based learning featured in nurseries and reception classes should go on for another year, the Cambridge Primary Review says.

There is no evidence that an early introduction to formal learning has any benefit, the review says, but there are suggestions it can do some harm.

Ministers say a starting age of six would be completely counter-productive.

Most children start primary school in England aged four, and a large proportion are taking advantage of free, part-time pre-school places in local schools and privately-run nurseries from the age of three.

The kind of learning that goes on there follows the government's "Early Years Foundation Stage", which currently runs to the age of five and is a play-based curriculum which includes some early literacy and numeracy goals.

Continuing this informal but structured learning for a year or so would bring children in England in line with many European countries, where school starts at six or even seven, and standards are often higher.

Read more at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/education/8309153.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/8309153.stm)

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### **UK: Grammar: let me spell it out for you**

*Patricia Carswell, Telegraph, 27 Oct 2009*

Potato's. Tomato's. Six items or less. If there's one thing guaranteed to drive a law-abiding, mild-mannered citizen to swivel-eyed fury, it's poor grammar.

Pillars of the community who would no more pinch a toffee from the pick 'n' mix than dance naked down Oxford Street will happily resort to casual vandalism, cheerfully defacing public signs to make their point.

Tales abound of children coming home from school with letters about "you're child" or being given misspelt words to learn. Shocking as it is, it's a widespread problem; many teachers were given scant tuition in the intricacies of the English language so it's small wonder they sometimes get it wrong.

Even the privileged aren't immune: the websites of several leading public schools contain basic schoolboy errors.

Linda Jones, 41, who has 10-year-old twins, has been known to send back slips with rogue apostrophes corrected, but is anxious not to undermine a "lovely" school and tries to temper her pedantry with praise.

"At the end of last year, when they asked for feedback, I said that I loved its community and caring ethos, but I would hope the people teaching my children, particularly in literacy, would have a fine grasp of grammar and that it was disappointing to see letters home from school littered with stray capital letters and apostrophes."

Read more at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/6440734/Grammar-let-me-spell-it-out-for-you.html>

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### **UK: 1 in 4 teachers have had false allegations made against them by pupils or their parents**

More than a quarter of teachers have been victims of false allegations by pupils, a study suggests.

They are increasingly afraid to discipline troublemakers because they fear the child will make something up, the Association of Teachers and Lecturers union found.

It blamed a 'hysterical' child protection culture for claims which typically involve inappropriate physical contact or even sexual behaviour.

Some of those surveyed said they had become paranoid about even a placing a reassuring hand on a child's shoulder.

The poll of 1,155 teachers found that 28 per cent have had a false allegation made against them by a pupil. One in six - 17 per cent - has been falsely accused by a member of a pupil's family.

Disturbingly, half said bogus allegations had been made in their current school against either themselves or a colleague.

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1222989/Half-teachers-false-allegations-pupils-parents.html#ixzz0VyxOyp7w>

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### **UK: Teacher of the Year does Pythagoras the pacy way to engage students with mathematics**

*Janet Murray, the Guardian, 27 October 2009*

Dan Walton, who teaches maths at St John's Roman Catholic school in Gravesend, Kent, is the UK winner of the Award for the teacher of the year in a secondary school.

He's been "flattered, but a bit embarrassed by all the fuss" since finding out he was a regional Teaching Awards winner back in June

Gambling is generally discouraged in schools. Not in Dan Walton's classroom, though, where bets and cash prizes are all in a day's work.

This morning, one of his year 10 students is having a flutter on whether he can solve a trigonometry question. He has already won 20p for answering an earlier question.

But it's all in good fun and, according to his pupils, so are all of Mr. Walton's lessons. "He's a legend," says year 10 student Jodie Barnet. "He's completely mental, but in a good way."

Walton's students look forward to the end of his lessons, not because they've had enough of maths, but because, if they've worked well, they might get to try their luck on Walton's makeshift dartboard.

Read more at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2009/oct/27/teaching-awards-secondary-school-teacher>

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### **UK: Parent backlash at school that keeps unruly pupils in isolation room to calm down**

*Daily Mail, 29th October 2009*

A school which puts unruly pupils in a store room is facing a backlash from furious parents who are planning a protest.

Disruptive children are sent to the 8ft by 4ft room, which has no handles on the inside and only a window in the door, until they calm down.

But mothers and fathers have compared the punishment to 'something from the dark ages' and are threatening to keep their children out of classes and picket the main gate until the school changes its policy.

Coppins Green Primary School in Clacton-on-Sea, Essex, has refused to back down, however, saying it is necessary to control 'extreme, disturbed children in a safe way'.

Mother of three Michelle Evans, 37, has had her daughter Rebecca, nine, locked in the room three times last week after being disruptive in class.

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1223585/Parent-backlash-school-locks-unruly-pupils-isolation-room-calm-down.html#ixzz0VyvXS3Ny>

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## **UK: How to solve the growing problem of truancy?**

*Lucy Tobin, Guardian, 3 November 2009*

According to the latest government figures, pupil absences are rising, despite schools taking a hard line on truancy.

Philippa James, a PhD researcher at Cardiff University's school of social sciences, thinks she knows why: "The more schools improve methods of detection, the more children work out better methods of deception."

James has researched student truancy for several years and is about to publish a year-long study of 60 teenagers, aged 13 and 14, including Hayley, in which she checked to see whether the teenagers were truanting, for how long, and why. James says her findings reveal many of the assumptions that underpin government policy on school absenteeism are false.

"The statistics are unhelpful," she says. "It's more important to look at the reasons for truanting."

More radically, her research shows very little evidence of a correlation between truancy and socio-economic background, or criminal activity. "The main social concern about absences from school is about what young people are doing when not in lessons. My findings suggest it's not fair to say that truancy causes crime," she says.

Read more at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2009/nov/03/bunking-off-school-pupils-truancy>

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## **UK: Ed Balls's insane education policies make school gate cheats of us all**

*Judith Woods, Telegraph, 03 Nov 2009*

The lack of decent schools has driven parents to desperate lengths.

Did I say "parents"? I actually meant "thieves, brigands and liars". For this, effectively, is what we have been branded as we scramble to educate our children in a state sector where two in five pupils leave primary school unable to read and write properly.

Middle-class families are accused of theft, because they are taking up places at good schools. How dare we! Anyone would think we paid taxes specifically to fund state education and had as much right to school places for our children as anyone else.

Hang on a minute, we do – so how, exactly, can it be theft?

Yet this is the finding of the chief schools adjudicator, Ian Craig, who has declared that tougher sanctions are needed to deter wicked mothers and fathers who "played the system" to get their offspring a place at a school where they might have a fighting chance of emerging literate enough to campaign for their parents to be released from Wormwood Scrubs.

Read more at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/6496152/Ed-Balls-insane-education-policies-make-school-gate-cheats-of-us-all.html>

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## **UK: The problem with equal opportunity for all**

*Deborah Orr, The Guardian, Thursday 5 November 2009*

Some years ago, while I was at the local one o'clock club with my toddler, I was approached by a young lady with a clipboard.

She was involved with a new government initiative called Sure Start, she explained, and wondered if I would mind answering a few questions.

She didn't ask many, because after I had responded to her early query about my postcode, she explained politely that my child wouldn't qualify for the programme anyway.

That was fair enough, except that my street has a very broad socio-economic mix. While my own household is certainly not "deprived", there are a lot of families on the street who are in a quite different position.

When I pointed this out to her, she flicked her eyes down her list, and confirmed that on my short road there were indeed a lot of postcodes that did come within the ambit of the project.

I found this level of detail to be impressive and reassuring.

As I say, this was a while back, and Sure Start has changed since that time. It now offers universal as well as targeted services, and the present plan is to have a Sure Start children's centre in every community by next year.

Yet this week Iram Siraj-Blatchford, who is a professor of early childhood education at the Institute of Education, warned a parliamentary inquiry into Sure Start that expansion of the programme would dilute its progress. "If you improve quality for everyone," she said, "you can actually extend the gap."

Read more at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/nov/05/equal-opportunity-education>

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## **Uruguay: Roll-out of laptops to every state primary school student**

*Verónica Psetizki, BBC News, 16 October 2009*

Uruguay has joined the small number of nations providing a laptop for every child attending state primary school. Over the last two years 362,000 pupils and 18,000 teachers have been involved in the scheme.

The "Plan Ceibal" (Education Connect) project has allowed many families access to the world of computers and the internet for the first time.

Uruguay is part of the One Laptop Per Child scheme, an organisation set up by internet pioneer Nicholas Negroponte. His original vision was to provide laptops at \$100 (£61) but they proved more expensive.

The Uruguay programme has cost the state \$260 (£159) per child, including maintenance costs, equipment repairs, training for the teachers and internet connection.

The total figure represents less than 5% of the country's education budget.

Read more at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/8309583.stm>

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## **USA: 21st Century Skills: The Challenges Ahead**

*Andrew J. Rotherham and Daniel Willingham, Educational Leadership, September 2009*

A growing number of business leaders, politicians, and educators are united around the idea that students need "21st century skills" to be successful today.

It's exciting to believe that we live in times that are so revolutionary that they demand new and different abilities. But in fact, the skills that students need in the 21st century are not new.

Critical thinking and problem solving, for example, have been components of human progress throughout history, from the development of early tools, to agricultural advancements, to the invention of vaccines, to land and sea exploration.

Such skills as information literacy and global awareness are not new, at least not among the elites in different societies. The need for mastery of different kinds of knowledge, ranging from facts to complex analysis is not new either.

In *The Republic*, Plato wrote about four distinct levels of intellect. Perhaps at the time, these were considered "3rd century BCE skills"?

Read more at

[http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational\\_leadership/sept09/vol67/num01/21st\\_Century\\_Skills@\\_The\\_Challenges\\_Ahead.aspx](http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/sept09/vol67/num01/21st_Century_Skills@_The_Challenges_Ahead.aspx)

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## **USA: Turning against bullies**

*Rose Marie Scott-Blair, San Diego Union-Tribune, October 29 2009*

"Have you ever been punched, tripped, kicked, shoved or had a rumor spread about you?" filmmaker JC Pohl asked students at Escondido's Bear Valley Middle School at a special assembly last week. About 350 seventh-graders in were the room, and they all stood up.

"Now, if you have ever done that to anyone else, sit down," Pohl said.

Five students remained standing.

In three years of taking his Teen Truth Live assemblies on bullying to about 350 schools in 20 states, Pohl said that 99 percent of the 400,000 students his group has reached say they have been bullied or have bullied someone else.

Pohl, a San Diego native who lives in Los Angeles, and his partner, fellow filmmaker Erahm Christopher, were prompted by the 1999 Columbine High School massacre in Littleton, Colo., to create a message for children.

Read more at <http://www3.signonsandiego.com/stories/2009/oct/29/turning-against-bullies/?education&zIndex=190969>

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## **USA: Policies Target Teacher-Student Cyber Talk**

*Katie Ash, Education Week, 2 Nov 2009*

Teachers in Louisiana may soon think twice before sending a text message or e-mail to a student from a personal electronic device.

A new state law requires all Louisiana districts to implement policies requiring documentation of every electronic interaction between teachers and students through a nonschool-issued device, such as a personal cellphone or e-mail account, by Nov.15.

Parents also have the option of forbidding any communication between teachers and their child through personal electronic devices.

Similar policies exist in many school districts across the country, and at least one other state has considered such legislation in recent years.

But critics question the measures, saying they will likely restrict appropriate communication between teachers and students and discourage the use of new technologies.

Read more at

[http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2009/11/04/10communication\\_ep.h29.html?tkn=MSQFrvxJ9Qigz6ZCzzewv5s7jskhyBW98d%2BY](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2009/11/04/10communication_ep.h29.html?tkn=MSQFrvxJ9Qigz6ZCzzewv5s7jskhyBW98d%2BY)

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## **USA: Survey shows young people are feeling the stress factors**

*Sharon Jayson, USA Today, 2 November 2009*

Americans young and old appear resigned to the stress in their lives: 75% of adults feel moderate to high stress, a survey reports today.

And, children and teens are plenty stressed, too, even though their parents may not realize it.

The American Psychological Association's annual Stress in America survey not only asked 1,568 adults 18 and older about their stress, but for the first time, 1,206 young people ages 8 to 17 were asked about theirs.

"Children absolutely sense parents' stress," says pediatrician Kenneth Ginsburg, associate professor at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine.

The online survey over the summer by Harris Interactive found 42% of adults reported that their stress increased in the past year, vs. 47% in last year's survey. This year, 44% said their stress remained about the same as in 2008; 14% said it decreased.

But 36% of kids surveyed said they worried more this summer than last; 30% said they worried about family financial difficulties.

Read more at [http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2009-11-03-kids-stress-parents\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2009-11-03-kids-stress-parents_N.htm)

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## **USA: No Child Left Behind**

*Wall Street Journal, 4 November 2009*

Opponents of school choice are running out of excuses as evidence continues to roll in about the positive impact of charter schools.

Stanford economist Caroline Hoxby recently found that poor urban children who attend a charter school from kindergarten through 8th grade can close the learning gap with affluent suburban kids by 86% in reading and 66% in math.

And now Marcus Winters, who follows education for the Manhattan Institute, has released a paper showing that even students who don't attend a charter school benefit academically when their public school is exposed to charter competition.

Mr. Winters focuses on New York City public school students in grades 3 through 8. "For every one percent of a public school's students who leave for a charter," concludes Mr. Winters, "reading proficiency among those who remain increases by about 0.02 standard deviations, a small but not insignificant number, in view of the widely held suspicion that the impact on local public schools ... would be negative."

It turns out that traditional public schools respond to competition in a way that benefits their students.

Imagine that. Competition works.

Read more at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703574604574499592392782438.html>

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## **Vietnam: More engaging lessons keep students at school**

*Hong Thuy, Vietnamese News Service, 27 October 2009*

A group of children were so bored by classes they wanted to drop out. They found every day was similar - copying down notes and doing exercises. However, their plan quickly faded when they were given a new way of learning, such as being taught to make toys, using such things as cut-out figures to illustrate subjects, role-playing situations, playing games, and dividing into groups to speak out their thought to teachers and friends.

Instead of listening to the same old lessons and writing down the content of lectures, Hang and her classmates have confidently uncovered new knowledge and expressed their findings before teachers can summarise lessons.

"The method has attracted more children to school," said Le Thi Tuyet Van, director of Vi Xuyen district's education and training bureau. She said the number of students going to school had increased by 4.5 per cent this school year.

Le Tien Thanh, Director of MoET's Primary Education Department, said the new teaching method, which is small-group centred and emphasises active learning, has been recommended to schools by the Education and Training Ministry.

Read more at <http://vietnamnews.vnagency.com.vn/showarticle.php?num=01OWN271009>

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- Languages Education : <http://www.languageseducation.com/news.htm> (monthly)
- Ensemble - Music Education : <http://www.ensemble.org.au/news.htm> (monthly)
- Public Education Voice : <http://www.acsso.org.au/pev.htm> (quarterly)

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