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Making Inconvenient Knowledge Invisible

Professor Ian Cunningham

Ian expertly highlights the inability of government and other official bodies to take on board research and thinking that in any way does not fit their view of the world. In education the maintenance of power over young people and their lives is clearly the default position. Despite the research, logic and argument alternative views continue to fall on stony ground. Ian ends by recognising that those of us who seek to change the prevailing paradigm need to acknowledge and take part in a political process.

When I read documents from the Government, academics, policy makers and others who influence schooling in the UK I find that whole areas of knowledge are made invisible. It appears that knowledge that does not fit the prevailing paradigm is too much of a nuisance and would disrupt existing patterns of thought and action.

Here are just a few factors that are made to disappear:

- Official documents talk about attracting recalcitrants 'back into learning'. The notion is that if a person is not in a classroom they are not learning – or at least not learning anything of value. The fact is that all the research on adults shows that schools, colleges, universities, training courses and other formal settings contribute at most 10-20% to what makes a person effective in their work. As to other aspects of people's lives, it's likely that the percentage is even lower. The fact is that people learn all the time and in all sorts of settings. To make invisible learning outside formal settings means that most assumptions by the educational establishment about learning are faulty. Part of the issue is that they are talking about 'schooling' not learning. Therefore, they are talking about a formal learning context in which it is meaningful to say people have left it and you want to get them back into it. The problem is the lack of differentiation between schooling and learning. What the official documents say might make sense if it is about schooling, but makes no sense if it is about learning.
- Prognostications about education make invisible home education, learning centres, democratic schools and other settings that do not fit with the existing schooling model. Internationally there is a huge growth in such

approaches to education yet documents that claim to make international comparisons do not recognise such developments.

- Where non-schooling approaches are covered it tends to be in a biased way, such as the Badman Report on home education which fails to give a mention to the body of research that shows the value of home education. The Report is also selective in covering international evidence. It mentions Germany's legislation against home education (which was brought in by the Nazis to indoctrinate children in schools) while not giving a mention to countries such as the USA where home education is widespread.
- Research on the size of educational institutions shows that small really is preferable, yet the average size of schools in the UK is growing each year. Small educational settings have a better climate for learning, are less likely to experience bullying and so on. The research evidence on this has been around for many years. [CONTINUES OVERLEAF]

CONTENTS

p.1-2:	<i>Making Inconvenient Knowledge Invisible – Prof. Ian Cunningham</i>
p.2-3:	<i>Dispatches from our Grandfather Correspondent – Michael Foot</i>
p.4-5:	<i>Book Reviews: Toxic Schooling: How Schools Became Worse by Prof. Clive Harber – Dr Bernard Trafford and Michael Foot.</i>
p.5-6:	<i>Book Reviews: Isn't that dangerous? African travels among academics and other wild animals by Prof. Clive Harber – Jackie Zammitt</i>
p.6-7:	<i>Universities as the new Grammar Schools – Prof. Ian Cunningham</i>
p.7-8:	<i>Recycling Schools 1- Invitation, Choice and the Catalogue Curriculum – Dr Roland Meighan</i>
p.8-9:	<i>Recycling Schools 2 - Pedagogical Revolution - Paul Henderson</i>
p.9:	<i>Recycling Schools 3 - Evolutionary Development... letting it grow – Peter Humphreys</i>
p.10:	<i>Ed Lines and Flotsam and Jetsam - Educational Beachcomber</i>

- Despite vast expenditure on truancy, young people continue to vote with their feet. The imprisoning of over 130 parents in the last few years for their offspring not attending school has made little difference to the truancy figures. The idea that if a girl is not attending school it would be better if her mother was in prison does not make any sense.

Learning environments that do not fit the standard schooling model are viewed as strange mutant alternatives – and therefore not to be taken seriously. However, it is school as currently conceived that is the strange mutant. Compulsory schooling is a very recent invention in human history and the evidence does not support its continued existence. For instance, Senator Edward Kennedy once quoted the evidence that, before compulsory schooling, Massachusetts had a 99% literacy level in its population - and that this figure has never been achieved since.

The epistemology of making inconvenient knowledge invisible

As a scientist I absorbed the ethic of the field, namely that you don't ignore inconvenient data. If you are conducting an experiment where the expectation is for a straight line relationship between two variables, and there are points not on the line, you go back and check them. You may have made an error in your experimental procedures – or you may have made a breakthrough into new knowledge. This is very much the stance of writers such as Gregory Bateson who described science as needing a pincer movement between theory and empirical evidence. The two sides must come together - or you need a new theory.

Popper, coming from a different epistemological position, ends up close to Bateson. The classic Popperian challenge is that if your theory says all swans are white and you discover a black swan, you have to modify your theory. To ignore the inconvenient evidence (the falsification of your theory) is unscientific.

The theory used to be that atoms were the indivisible particles of nature. Then Rutherford split an atom. And as one writer commented, nobody minded that it was only one atom. From that moment scientific knowledge had to change. We only need one example of something not fitting for it to be the most important thing to pay attention to. Yet in educational policy making the opposite applies.

If we take current concerns about increasing happiness, as promoted by people like Layard, then presumably it might be important to see where young people are happy and where they are not. We can also combine this concern with the interest in parental satisfaction with schools.

One piece of inconvenient evidence is that a school like Summerhill is demonstrably a happy environment. Also when we did research on Summerhill we looked at parental satisfaction. One member of the inquiry team had conducted numerous Ofsted inspections and was clear that Summerhill's parent satisfaction scores were at least twice as good as any school he had been involved in inspecting. We obtained Ofsted's own figures and this was also supported by their evidence across all schools.

Invented facts

A problem that is a mirror image of making inconvenient knowledge invisible is inventing facts. For instance people quote *Lord of the Flies* as evidence that young people are dangerous animals if not kept under strict control. The real fact is that the book is a work of fiction written by an ex-teacher with an explicit dislike of young boys.

Invented facts can help to make invisible real evidence because they muddy the water.

Real evidence

The actual evidence on democratic learning environments is that they are successful. Our own work at the South Downs Learning Centre and in running Self Managed Learning programmes in schools has been independently evaluated in three research reports from the University of Brighton. However, schools that have been part of that research ignore the evidence and carry on as before.

Conclusion

It's clear that official bodies will continue to ignore real research that challenges the thinking of those that want to maintain power over children and young people. Those of us who are committed to rationality, logic and evidence will not find allies in the educational establishment. We have to recognise that there are powerful emotions at work which are deeply hidden in those in power. Their fears and anxieties will not be assuaged with research and clear thinking. We have to acknowledge that there is a political process here with which we have to engage.

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Headline Scan

School place lotteries may be scrapped (*Observer* 1.3.09)

Balls seeks power to dictate what textbooks GCSE and A-level students must study (*Guardian* 19.3.09)

Pupils to study Twitter and blogs in primary shakeup (*Guardian* 25.3.09)

McDonalds to sponsor Australian maths lessons (*Guardian* 20.3.09)

Schools to be graded on discipline (*Guardian* 27.3.90)

Educational Beachcomber

Dispatches from our Grandfather Correspondent

Michael Foot

Michael reflects on his grandchildren’s learning experiences, a project in a Norfolk junior school and communications with Michael Grove (Conservative Education Spokesman).

For a variety of good reasons, James (now aged eight) and Gemma (six) have returned to mainstream schooling. This after a thrilling eighteen months of home-based education which included their family’s ‘big adventure’ - six weeks in Costa Rica and Panama. Theirs has been a rich and diverse experience in this country and abroad which not many of us, many years older than them, can match.

Whatever our reservations about too much of our formal education system, some early indicators on their return to school appear positive. For example, James’s class (in Hampshire) will soon be visiting the British Museum in connection with their studies about Ancient Egypt. And Gemma has recently been nominated by her classmates to be their representative on her infant school’s ‘eco-team’. She’s a mite vague at present about what her new responsibilities will involve, but she does know that they will be aimed at ‘making a better world’. There’s a worthy cause!

Ella is also eight-years old. She is James and Gemma’s second cousin (or is it once removed? This remains for me a grey area!) She attends a primary school in Leicestershire. The school’s homework regime involves them undertaking a project on a half-termly basis. Most recently the project was about mountains. Each child had to choose a mountain to find out about and write about. They were given a number of pointers by their teacher - such as its height, its flora and its fauna - to help to guide them.

Ella chose a mountain in Spain that she and her parents and her younger brother had visited earlier in the summer. Thus, as well as addressing the areas which her teacher had pointed her towards, she was able to give her project a welcome personal touch. There were photographs that she had taken, her own impressions of the mountain, and a note about one or two particular incidents that had occurred while they were visiting it. Not without good reason, Ella (and her mum) were delighted with the project that she handed in.

At the end of the term, the end of the school year, Ella’s project was returned to her without spoken comment. Back at home, she and her mother looked in vain for any written comment. Ella’s project might not even have been looked at by her teacher. But I’m sure that her teacher has ticked a box in some record-keeping system to demonstrate, to whomever she might have to account to, that Ella has met this particular assignment.

Is Ella’s teacher’s attitude typical? Or dare I hope that it is an unworthy aberration and that most teachers do still value their relationship with their pupils so that the best efforts of these latter do not go without appropriate comment?

Which brings me to my friend John who is the head teacher of Mundesley Junior School in North Norfolk. Despite the pressures to which all schools are subject to do otherwise, he remains determined that the children at his school should embrace a curriculum which does more than emphasise the need for better than ever SATs results. A couple of years ago, for example, their

work with the acclaimed Britten Sinfonia from Cambridge culminated in a memorable concert which my wife and I attended in Cromer Parish Church.

Just before the end of last summer term, John sent to us a copy of a DVD entitled ‘Finding The Fallen’. This was a record of his Year 6’s research into the names of the war dead who are listed on the war memorial in the parish church. This deeply moving half-hour includes children’s artwork, children reading their own poems, and contributions by historians and local residents with their memories and their memorabilia.

‘Finding The Fallen’ is a fine example of what is still possible in our schools - despite the potentially stifling effects of national curriculum assessment. Not least among its many merits is that the project was undertaken over the period January through to May - exactly, therefore, coinciding with the run up to and the taking of Key Stage 2 SATs!

Among the people to whom a copy of ‘Finding The Fallen’ was sent was the county’s Director of Children’s Services. Two and a half months on from this lady’s receipt of the DVD, neither she nor her representative has yet sent even an acknowledgement. Perhaps we should not be so surprised that Ella’s mountain project was returned without comment.

Finally, and further to the theme of tardy replies, I found it disconcerting earlier this year to hear Michael Gove, the Tories’ education spokesman, advocating academy status for primary schools as a means of raising standards in those schools. Whatever else, it scarcely seemed to fit with his leader, David Cameron’s, stated wish for a ‘redistribution of power’ so as to create ‘real people power’ which would include ‘local control over schools’. Of course, what academies do not do is serve these ambitions. Instead, although they are state-funded, they are subject to a greatly reduced degree of local and democratic accountability, with power resting with their sponsor.

I wrote to Gove on 28 April and 28 May seeking his clarification of this obvious conflict between philosophy and recommended practice. Having received no reply, I wrote to him again on 8 September. Then, like the proverbial London bus, two letters arrived in the same post on 25 September. Both were signed by the same illegible hand ‘on behalf of Michael Gove in his absence’.

The shorter of the two letters is an obviously standard reply, so obviously standard that it is difficult to give much credence to the assurance that: ‘I do appreciate the concerns you have raised and will bear your comments in mind as we continue to formulate our education policy’.

The longer of the two letters includes precisely the same form of words as the other. But part way through there is a section that purports to address my specific concern. Except that, in terms that are redolent of ‘Yes Minister’ at its best, the letter provides me with an assurance about my right to educate my children at home! Which concern had been no part of the letters that I had written to Gove. To pursue my London bus analogy, neither of these two were going where I wanted. So on 28 September I wrote my fourth letter to Michael Gove.

Beyond which, do we laugh or do we cry?

Perhaps, whatever we choose to do, we should certainly wish Gemma and her eco-team well in their efforts to make a better world.

Note: Copies of the DVD, 'Finding The Fallen' are available at £5:00 each (to include post and packing) from Mundesley County Junior School, Trunch Road, Mundesley, Norfolk NR11 8LE (telephone: 01263 721139)

Michael Foot is a retired Primary Head Teacher and was a long-time member of Education Now and regular contributor to *News and Review*. He has co-authored *Let Our Children Learn*, Educational Heretics Press, ISBN 1-871526-49-3, and contributed a chapter to *Damage Limitation: trying to reduce the harm schools do to children*, Roland Meighan, Educational Heretics Press, ISBN 1-900219-27-1. He is also a school governor.

Book Reviews: *Toxic Schooling: How Schools Became Worse* by Clive Harber.

Educational Heretics Press, Nottingham, 2009. 165pp.

ISBN 978-1-900219-37-2

(1) Dr Bernard Trafford (2) Michael Foot

Bernard Trafford

As its title suggests, this fascinating book gives as hard-hitting and no-nonsense an analysis of the parlous state of global education as one would expect from its author. Clive Harber is almost uniquely knowledgeable about education systems across the world, and is particularly well placed to make comparisons between those in the developing world and what we get up to in the UK. Anyone who knows Clive also knows that he has a huge fund of humour inside that is always waiting to bubble up - hence his hilarious other book just published by Educational Heretics Press. But in this book, despite (or because of) his global perspective and his deep acquaintance with the literature, Clive finds little to laugh about.

It's a book of two halves. In the first, as the introduction states, the book 'examines the main ideas in a dozen or so key texts on schooling.' Clive was forced to make a selection, simply for reasons of space, and states as his aim 'to consider whether the critiques of some key writers on education from the 1960s and 1970s [are] still valid today.' Reading the brief résumés of the work of such writers as Edward Blishen, Paulo Freire, John Holt, Julius Nyerere and Carl Rogers was an experience very like listening to Clive in the flesh: his style is so easy, his grasp so sure. All those writers, of course, were subjecting traditional patterns of authoritarian schooling to a rigorous critique. All came to the conclusion that there must be a better way, one which does less damage to children.

So did Clive find their views were still valid today? He did: 'they are and even more so'. The final three chapters, the second half of the book, are entitled 'Much the same', 'Making matters worse' and 'What is to be done?'

Clive quotes a wide range of observers to demonstrate how little has changed since those critiques of thirty and forty years ago. Children and young people are now given less freedom in school

than ever, he feels. He's right. I was surprised he didn't investigate the UK's City Academies programme. Heralded by politicians on the left and the right (nowadays indistinguishable) as a long-overdue return to traditional standards, academies are based on a model of control at which any serious dictator would marvel. A vital contributor to learning is the uniform, generally of a style which would be comically retro if it were not designed in earnest.

At least one academy has been built without any playground: according to its founder head, children can hydrate (sic) during the learning process (sic). Playgrounds are unnecessary, since children will be so engaged in the learning process (again): besides, they merely furnish opportunities for bullying. So children will not be able to bully one another. But that's OK: the adults are doing it for them. In many academies the lunch break arrives not at a precise time but when the senior teacher in charge of the dining facility phones the class teacher to bring pupils down to eat: uncontrolled free time would just allow trouble to develop. The assembly line model par excellence is now held up as the future.

Education systems are relentlessly driven by testing. In the UK we may feel (rightly) that our schoolchildren are the most tested in the world: but Clive identifies over-testing as a worldwide trend and thus a global problem. Small wonder, in such a climate, that Clive finds teachers profoundly uncomfortable with discussing controversial issues and values in the classroom: so much safer to stick to 'facts', information and concepts.

In such a climate dissent is outlawed, and difference discouraged. From there is but a small step to intolerance and hatred: some observers see these approaches as ripe for education for terrorism. Add to that model in some countries an acceptance of corporal punishment and the system has lost all humanity, encourages bullying and violence and condones sexual harassment.

So what is to be done, then? Clive calls for education to be re-focused on the development of tolerant democratic citizens and to work explicitly against terrorism and extremism. 'Do no harm' is his starting point, a useful catchall which would eliminate the wrong features Clive lists but which, inevitably, represents a basis on which few policymakers would seek to build a system. A vision of choice and democracy 'does not sit well with the top-down, prescriptive, one size fits all national curriculum either in Britain or elsewhere'.

The final chapter is short. While things are so very wrong, Clive has few answers. Even home education, briefly mentioned as an alternative, is outlawed in some countries and currently under threat in the UK after being caricatured by politicians and the Badman report as a breeding ground for child abuse.

Systems can be changed: but there is a daunting array of 'weight of tradition, dominant ideology, perceived "common sense" and vested interests... to be challenged and overcome.' At the end Clive can manage no more than a note of cautious optimism. 'Education can be more democratic and geared to the promotion of human rights and the peaceful settlement of conflict... but not in schools as they are presently constituted.'

So it ends on a note of frustration. It left me, as truly visionary books do, wanting to go further. Surely we can't stop there! Is hoping for systemic change asking too much? Probably, yes: it is after all government-driven systems that are doing the damage.

Macro-systems got us into this mess: is it time to look at the micro?

I have spent three decades working in the independent sector and dealt with my fair share of criticism from progressive educationists along the way. Maybe we need now to heed someone like Professor James Tooley of Newcastle University (‘Educating Amaretech: Private Schools for the Poor and the New Frontier for Investors’ *Economic Affairs*, Vol. 27, No. 2, pp. 37-43, June 2007 <http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=993992>) who is finding in developing Africa that small, under-funded private schools are more popular with pupils and parents and achieving better outcomes than the paternalistic, curriculum-driven state equivalent.

But that would have to be another book, and a whole new agenda. Clive’s masterly analysis of the current disastrous situation does a vital job of setting the scene - starkly, without overstatement, and founded in deep personal knowledge. Perhaps the highest praise one can give this excellent book is to say that we simply cannot leave matters there: his book demands further action.

Dr Bernard Trafford heads Newcastle’s Royal Grammar School and is currently Vice-Chairman of the Headmasters’ and Headmistresses’ Conference (HMC). The opinions expressed are entirely personal.

Michael Foot

Some of our labours are labours of love. To write this book review is one such. I had already read it because I had been its proof-reader (apologies for page 2 line 5!). So I knew of its inspirational qualities, of the scope of its ambition, of the strength of its argument, of the validity of its conclusions.

Harber has revisited thirteen books - he calls them ‘key texts in schooling’ - all by different authors, and all written during the period 1960 to 1980. He does so in order to examine in particular their relevance for today.

For those of us who trained and began teaching in the 1960s, Harber performs the most welcome service of demonstrating that we are not the dinosaurs of the education world that some would have us believe. The principles upon which he and his chosen writers argue that education must be based remain relevant. And those principles remain at risk amid the welter of ill-considered policies and practices which have happened since these books were published.

Harber’s description of the main purpose of the book finds best expression in his contention that ‘schooling not only reproduces society fundamentally as it is but also actively makes the lives of individuals worse and harms the wider society’. ‘His’ writers identified the yawning gap that existed between schooling and the type of education required in a genuinely democratic society. The gap remains as large and as intimidating as it was.

In the book’s second half, Harber draws together a list of ‘Key Critiques’ of schooling that emerge from the books that he has considered. There then follow two substantial chapters on ‘Schooling Today’ - one sub-titled ‘Much The Same?’, the other ‘Making Matters Worse’. The link between the concerns of half a century ago and current practice and reality is thus powerfully made.

In a final chapter which addresses the question: ‘What Is To Be Done?’, Harber admits that it is ‘easy to despair at the lack of

progress and even the evidence of regression’. But, of course, the struggle must go on.

It will go on, for example, through the efforts of Personalised Education Now and of Educational Heretics Press, and of other such groupings and pressure groups. Harber wisely counsels that in order to survive and remain active in the struggle, we need sometimes to lower expectations by ‘keeping hope in perspective and the celebration of small, localised victories when they occur. A kind of restricted and realistic optimism.’

Which is, I think, about as good as it will usually get - for which Harber is to be thanked and his splendid book commended to all involved in the continuing debate about education.

Michael Foot is a retired Primary Head Teacher and was a long-time member of Education Now and regular contributor to *News and Review*. He has co-authored *Let Our Children Learn*, Educational Heretics Press, ISBN 1-871526-49-3, and contributed a chapter to *Damage Limitation: trying to reduce the harm schools do to children*, Roland Meighan, Educational Heretics Press, ISBN 1-900219-27-1. He is also a school governor.

Book Review: Isn’t that dangerous? African travels among academics and other wild animals by Clive Harber. Educational Heretics Press, Nottingham, 2009. 182pp ISBN 978-1-900219-38-9. Jackie Zammit

When this book arrived on my desk, I skipped the Preface and dived straight in to the first chapter. Two pages in and I was hooked! It certainly brightened up a Monday morning and I had to force myself to put it down until I got on the train that evening.

Isn’t that dangerous? shares the travels and the work of Clive Harber, Professor of International Education at the University of Birmingham. It provides insight into Clive’s research into democratic education, as well as being an entertaining read.

Clive Harber has been involved with my organisation since way before my time, and although I knew something of his work, I didn’t know much about Clive himself. I now know Clive doesn’t do ‘roughing it’, unless he really has to [‘En suite’ are his two favourite English words]; knows the difference between a Lark-like Bunting and a Superb Starling [complete ends of the spectrum in the bird world apparently] and has an unnatural interest in animal poo [I’m far more polite than he is]!

Sharing experiences of places and the people you meet can be a precarious thing to do. Surprisingly, not everyone wants to know about your ‘life changing’ experiences, your brush with death or the array of stomach bugs that you’ve picked up on the way. Many more find it beyond their imagination that anyone would want to visit somewhere like the African continent, as the American lady in the book revealed when Clive told her he was going to The Gambia, ‘Africa? Isn’t that dangerous?’ [I did read the Preface in the end.]

Isn’t that dangerous? is not just about travel though. Yes, it will have you laughing out loud most of the way through, especially if you have been a traveller in Africa yourself, but Clive has

successfully woven together hilarious, laugh-out-load anecdotes of his experiences with reflections on its history, education, culture and wildlife. His career researching the role of education in politics has enabled him to spend large parts of his life living and working in different parts of the continent. What he brings are his personal reflections, insights and a genuine affection for Africa, its people and its wildlife.

Whether a tourist, academic, or armchair traveller, there is much here to provoke thought and discussion, as well as to entertain. I will remember to keep a safe distance from elephants, buffalos or suicidal guinea fowl, the next time I go on safari and will be on the lookout for a T-shirt equivalent of a book to identify animal droppings.

The book also had heart-stopping moments that left me with much to think about. The two pages where Clive describes his visit to the genocide museum in Kigali, Rwanda, and reflects on the role education played in the horrors that occurred there, stayed with me long after I finished reading the. Those two pages made me think long and hard about the role education plays in all societies.

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Readers might be interested in
Comparative education and quality global learning: Engaging with controversial issues in South Africa and the UK, by Clive Harber and Jeff Serf, available from Tide- global learning.
www.tidegloballearning.net

Ed Lines

It has always seemed strange to me that in our endless discussions about education so little stress is laid on the pleasure of becoming an educated person, the enormous interest it adds to life. To be able to be caught up into the world of thought--that is to be educated.

Edith Hamilton

Universities as the new Grammar Schools

Professor Ian Cunningham

Ian asks whether the Government want to make universities the new grammar schools.

The recent Milburn Report on fair access to the professions is a dangerous document. The Report talks about 'expanding opportunities and widening the winners' circle' (that is – getting more working and middle class young people into professions). If becoming a professional makes you a winner then others are losers. Lord Adonis, when involved in education, talked of his desire for an 80:20 society – where eventually 80% of young people gained five A* - C passes at GCSE. He didn't trouble himself with the other 20%. But it doesn't take much imagination to guess that the chances of anti-social behaviour in such a large group of outcasts is quite high.

A key question is – does the Government want to make the universities the new grammar schools? Sheep and goats are divided and the so-called talented working class young people are creamed off to the universities and the professions leaving the rest (the losers) behind. GCSEs and A Levels become the new 11 plus. This replicates the worst of the grammar school-secondary modern divide.

Milburn comments on the privilege he gained by escaping from his council estate to become a Cabinet minister and his desire to give other privileged working class children the same chance. As someone who also started out on a council estate and gained a grammar school place, I often felt guilty about this privilege. In the gang that I belonged to it seemed to me that the other boys were of equal worth to me and had talents that the school system didn't recognise, hence being labelled 11 plus failures.

If we are to have a fairer and more just society then merely improving the so-called social mobility of a select few is misguided. If more people join well-paid professions and the rest are left in low paid and low status jobs, that is not the kind of society that should be encouraged. Richard Wilkinson, Michael Marmot and other epidemiologists have proved that greater status and income differences produce greater ill-health, crime and psychosocial stress. Schools in England start the process in primary schools with SATs. Children learn where they stand and that those with academic orientations are more valued.

As young people grow up we know that one issue is creating an identity for oneself. If your identity is not going to be good at school subjects then come the teen years you might decide it's better to be good at stealing, drug dealing or whatever other avenue gives you an outlet for your talents. Only by valuing the different talents that people bring to the world can we address this issue.

The work of Scott Page, Meredith Belbin and others has shown that organisations and communities need difference not sameness to work effectively. Having different perspectives and different abilities in people is correlated with long-term organisational success. The seemingly smart bank employees that knew how to create derivatives and what a Gaussian copula function is were able to bring the banking industry (and most other industries) to its knees because they thought and acted the same. They were disconnected from the real world where people were given mortgages that they could not pay back.

This situation was created in part by the culture of the banks. But another cause is the schooling system that values narrow academic performance and people who can think the same, preferably the same as their teachers and exam setters and markers. Milburn's overall policy objectives could produce more of this syndrome where the narrow pursuit of a respectable professional career is seen as creating society's winners. The winners have a vested interest then in maintaining a social divide. Schools and universities with their professionals and their support staff exemplify these status distinctions. The assumption that the professionals are always better at just about everything than the others doesn't stand up to test. Our experience in working in schools with teaching assistants, learning mentors, learning support assistants and others is that they can be better equipped than many teachers to relate effectively to young people and provide real support for them.

Promoting the sectional interests of self-regulating professions can produce more problems for the users of such services. And it isn't just the bankers that can be at fault here. My first training was as a chemist. After graduating I could have entered the pharmaceutical industry. Presented with the problem of mental health my only solution would be to create a pill. Later in life, working in the counselling and psychotherapy world, the solution to the same problem was talking. Both have their place, but I never came across any kind of meaningful dialogue between the two professions.

Even allowing for the need for experts in particular fields, should we value the third rate lawyer above the first rate care worker? Milburn's report misses whole areas of expanding need and the care system is one. Having researched in that field I am aware of the superb job that many care workers and care managers carry out – with little recognition.

But as a mainly female and low paid job, it's easy to see why work like this is below the Government's radar. And if workers in this growing sector don't want to have high-level qualifications, they don't fit with Milburn's notion of people having higher aspirations. But aspiring to do a good job with the most vulnerable people in society seems a noble aim compared with elements of professional life that promote narrow self-serving desires, such as unseemly bonuses.

What we need is not a society where people aspire to be winners and to leave behind the rest but one where status and pay differences are reduced and where valuable work is better valued. Encouraging the social mobility that Milburn argues for can produce a less equal society with all the consequences of increased crime and prison populations, lowered life expectancy and increased psychosocial stress. Schooling starts the process in primary schools where children grow up knowing their place in the world because of the testing regime imposed on them – and it needs to stop.

Professor Ian Cunningham chairs the consultancy Strategic Developments International Ltd. and the charity Centre for Self Managed Learning. He is Visiting Professor in the School of Lifelong Learning and Education at Middlesex University and a Visiting Fellow in the Centre for Educational Innovation at Sussex University. He was Chief Executive of Roffey Park Management Institute from 1987 to 1993. Ian invented the Self Managed Learning approach in the late 1970's as a result of a wide range of experiences in the educational world and in organisations. These included being National Secretary of the National Union of Students in the UK (1968-70); work as a trainer and developer in the public sector; time as Visiting Professor in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Utah and in the Technical Teacher Training Institute, Bhopal; acting as a consultant to various companies. Projects in education include working with the Institute for Democratic Education, Israel; evaluation of Summerhill School; research and writing on learning. Current projects include working as part of the team running the South Downs Learning Centre, running Self Managed Learning programmes in schools in England, researching, writing and consulting with various international companies.

Recycling Schools 1 – Invitation, Choice and the Catalogue Curriculum

Dr Roland Meighan

Roland looks back at examples of convivial, invitational learning centre in action.

In the daytime, the schools in the borough where I worked were the normal compulsory, day-prison organisations – Illich classified such places as '*coercive institutions*'. Chief Inspector of Schools, Edmond Holmes described them as the 'Tragedy of Education' in 1911.

But in the evening they were transformed. They became invitational learning centres called the Evening Institute (E.I.) – Illich classified such places as '*convivial institutions*'. They were very popular and much in demand.

After a few years as a teacher in a secondary school, I took up the appointment as an organiser of further education in the borough of West Bromwich to help manage Community Centres, Youth Clubs and the Evening Institutes. One task was to prepare the 'catalogue curriculum' for the last named. Classes were offered in a wide spectrum of activities ranging from Spanish and French, to Keep Fit, to Cookery, to Amateur Dramatics, to First Aid, to Examination Subjects in English, Maths and the like, to Car Maintenance. The brochures, the catalogues of learning opportunities, were then distributed to members of the public to make their choices.

Class and Age did not seem to matter much. An examination class could contain 16 to 60-year-olds, and the other subjects showed the same pattern. The Evening Institutes flourished in middle class and working class areas alike. There were modest fees charged but this did not seem to deter people from coming along to enjoy their chosen learning opportunities.

The head of each E.I. was a facilitator, an educational travel agent, rather than the directorial model of heads of the daytime schools. One task was to review outcomes and stimulate feedback in place of any formal testing or inspection. Another of their tasks was to respond to requests for classes not yet on the brochure. These could be somewhat unusual. Thus, a group of young men requested a class in Morse Code. They were working to pass the exams for their Radio Amateur Certificates. The only person we could find to run the class was me. I had served my National Service in the Royal Signals as a radio operator, so, unexpectedly, I found myself teaching a Morse Code class. They all passed!

When Janet's Keep Fit class teacher fell ill, it looked as if the class would have to close. But the class members persuaded Janet to fill the breach. She was so successful that she was invited to run another class at another E.I.

So, can we recycle schools into convivial, invitational learning centres? Yes, we can. Compulsion has to give way to invitation and the National Curriculum to the Catalogue Curriculum. We have done so in the past, we can do so again.

One doubter asked if this would work with young children. Well, Janet worked for years in an open plan, integrated-day infants school. The open plan had been created by taking off some of the doors and leaving the others open all the time, and using the corridors as display and working spaces. Children made their own

learning plans from the facilities and activities on offer, in consultation with the teachers, and could operate in any of the rooms available. This is about as far as you can get within a coercive learning institution in making it invitational and personalised.

George Baines died recently. His obituary in *The Guardian* by Catherine Burke noted that he was one of a group of headteachers who worked for primary schools to become 'hives of activity where children were occupied in a variety of carefully designed and differently ordered spaces, supported by teachers working co-operatively in teams ...'

Home-based education co-operatives, such as the Learning Centre at Chard, Somerset, operate in the same way. On a recent visit I found that the enthusiasm for learning of the children was clear for all to see.

Yes, it has worked with young children in the past and still does today in some places.

Dr Roland Meighan was an academic at Birmingham and Nottingham Universities. He is a trustee and treasurer of CPE-PEN and is a leading thinker, researcher, publisher, and author of Education Now and Educational Heretics Press. He has researched, written and presented extensively across the world. His booklist is too numerous to list but includes the 5th edition of *A Sociology of Educating* with Prof Clive Harber ISBN 0-8264-6815-2. His latest work is *Comparing Learning Systems: the good, the bad, the ugly and the counter-productive* Educational Heretics Press, ISBN 1-900219-28-X

Recycling Schools 2 – Pedagogical Revolution

Paul Henderson

Paul recently wrote a long piece entitled *From schooling to a learning framework fit for a democracy in six steps*. Within his six steps he included the need for a Pedagogical Revolution as his step two.

John Taylor Gatto points out in his 2009 book *Weapons of mass Instruction* that the word 'pedagogue' can be traced back to Roman times when it referred to a specialist slave who delivered a curriculum prescribed by his master. Today's pedagogues deliver a curriculum prescribed by the state. Not much different.

A successful revolution would require a reversal of pedagogical allegiances so that learning agents (formally known as teachers) can serve their learners' needs as opposed to those of their masters (i.e. the state). They need to assist, guide and advise on the best way for learners to achieve their self defined objectives; this would necessitate a *learner defined curriculum*.

For true personalised learning to be achieved the standard pedagogical methodologies of child-centred learning need to be extended to facilitate individualised learning programmes as negotiated between parent, child and learning agent.

Personalised learning as found in today's schooling is often misinterpreted as learner-paced learning. In true personalised learning, content is learner-defined.

In today's schools active learning is often misinterpreted as teacher defined activities with learners following steps on a worksheet. In true active-learning activities are learner-defined, as are all educational aims, objectives, plans, resources and sources.

The process is perpetuated and refined through self-evaluation and review, which leads to high levels of metacognition. True personalised learning enhances and refines the considerable natural autodidactic abilities that every learner was born with.

Progressive child centred learning is nothing new. There have been many well-funded and carefully advised education reform programs introduced in American education throughout the 20th century and also in Britain. The OU book *Curriculum In Context* edited by Bob Moon and Patricia Murphy discusses the 'progressive period' in American education which spanned from about the early teens to the 1940s and aimed to 'change the core of schooling from a teacher-centred, fact-centred, recitation based pedagogy to a pedagogy based on an understanding of children's thought processes and their capacities to learn and use ideas in the context of real-life problems' (p.259). 'Opposition to progressivism, which had been building through the twenties, came to a crescendo in the forties. The movement was increasingly portrayed by a sceptical public and press in terms of its most extreme manifestations – watered down content, a focus on children's psychological adjustment at the expense of learning, and a preoccupation with self-expression rather than learning' (p. 262).

In the 1950s and 1960s reform agendas very similar to the progressive reforms were introduced and funded by the National Science Foundation. 'The central idea of these curriculum reforms was that learning in school should resemble, much more than it usually does, the actual process by which human beings come to understand their environment, culture, and social settings' (p. 264).

'From the beginning, these curriculum reformers were clear that they aimed to change the core of US schooling, and their aspirations were not fundamentally different from the early progressives. They envisioned teachers becoming coaches and co-investigators with students into the basic phenomena of the physical, biological, and social sciences' (p. 264).

Despite massive funding and endorsement by the world's leading educational thinkers, none of these reforms succeeded in changing the standard day-to-day teaching and learning in American schools. In both America and Britain new progressive reforms did not raise standards (as defined by the schooling system) and consequently the more conservative orientated educationalists ended up screaming for a more regressive 'back to basics' approach, which is inevitably what happened.

The history of American schooling is characterised by a slow oscillation between progressive and regressive ideologies. Why have the many well-funded and resourced attempts at child-centred learning never worked? The answer lies in the now well known idea that every learner learns best in a learning environment that suits his or her learning style and the other very well known idea that state custody in any state run institution fosters a culture of dependency. When a child is at school he or she is in state custody in a state run institution.

When children have their learning institutionalised for a period of a few years their individual learning style gradually morphs towards a style that suits the institution. Pupils become dependent learners, dependent on their educational aims, objectives, planning, implementation, evaluation and review being determined by teachers, formulated by politically favoured educationalists and sanctioned by committees of 'honourable' politicians.

This relentless process bludgeons pupils into becoming dependent on ‘sage on the stage’ style teaching; consequently, through lack of use, their inborn autodidactic abilities atrophy to virtually nothing as does their inclination or wherewithal to use the services of a ‘guide on the side’, in the way they did when they learned to walk and talk. Pupils cannot be expected to take responsibility for their own learning when they have forgotten how to. Pupils cannot be expected to learn based on their desire to if that desire has been lost. *The pedagogical methodologies of child-centred learning do not work on dependent learners i.e. schoolchildren.*

Paul Henderson is in the CPE-PEN network. His provocation *The Propagation of Learning* was serialised in our e-briefings. An extract of *Escape from Pop Pap Education* featured in Journal 8 and the whole article is available on the PEN website and parts serialised in the PEN blog. *Sci-Fi Nightmare Becomes Reality* was the feature article in Journal 9.

Recycling Schools 3 – Evolutionary Development ... letting it grow

Peter Humphreys

Peter accounts how transformation of our learning system is best approached in an evolutionary manner.

CPE-PEN believes the recycling of schools will be instrumental in leading both the educational and cultural shifts necessary for the development of a *personalised educational landscape*.

Moving to such a landscape is *beyond a single, simultaneous change*. People and communities are at different stages. The capacity to deliver the required structures, informed and supportive communities and educational professionals will take time.

System transformation requires looking pragmatically, logistically and politically at the whole landscape continuum. Too many innovations and experiments have floundered over the years with short-term thinking and inconsistent values and principles.

An *evolutionary approach* is required. This is about letting it grow and adapt. *This is central to the solution and not a problem in itself*. It’s about moving when the commitment to build and put the capacity, systems and logistics is in place.

There are some indications of what the *personalised educational landscape* may look like, but, rather than pre-judging it all and looking for instant blueprints it would be best to *co-construct the landscape building on those elements which prove successful*.

The starting points are by learning from, valuing, legitimising and funding existing elements and innovations. There are already alternatives to the schooling system that work. We account these regularly in our journals, website and blog. Educators and policy makers need to listen and learn with them and not impose the existing sets of assumptions on their practice.

It may then be possible to build on current agendas (i.e. Personalisation; Every Child Matters; Building Schools for the Future; 14-19 Provision; Extended Schools; Remodelling and Restructuring the workforce; Technology in Learning; Curriculum Debate; Science of learning, etc). They may be narrow and limited in scope at the present time but these are the kinds of areas where some mainstream educators are desperately trying to think ‘out of

the box’. On that basis they can be starting points for a wider dialogue around CPE / PEN values and principles:

The Personalised Education Now 8 Principles of Personalisation

1. **Learner-managed and co-constructed learning.** To meet learning styles and preferences and supported by a range of others.
2. **Shift from dependency to independence and interdependency.** Based on the principles of subsidiarity, personal responsibility and choice.
3. **Invitational learning and assessment.** Within convivial institutions, contexts, settings and experiences.
4. **Learning from an educational landscape of opportunities.** Within physical and virtual places and spaces.
5. **Re-integration of learning, life and community.** This implies interweaving learning with all aspects of living and community.
6. **Democratic values, organisation and practice.** Democracy has to be cultivated and developed.
7. **Catalogue and natural versions of curriculum and assessment.** Invitational with no imposition.
8. **De-coupling of age-stage progressions and assessments.** Learning linked to readiness and the principle of life-long learning.

Schools lie at the core of what most people consider as education and learning. When their basic assumptions are challenged and recycled on the above principles altogether more convivial institutions emerge.

With movement from ‘school-focused’ solutions to learner-focused solutions recycled schools would evolve into *invitational, all-age learning centres* and bases for pedagogues and community-based learning. Every community deserves dynamic, world-class facilities at its heart. These learning centres would be at the core of social and learning policy and form a pivotal part of the wider personalised educational landscape based on ‘alternatives for everybody all of the time’.

As different communities and learners move towards such centres and adapt their lives accordingly those still operating within schooling models would have the opportunity to witness the power of choice and alternatives. It is highly likely that the flexible learner journeys and episodes, the deeply motivated, self-managed and co-created learning, the levels of independence and rates of progress would be seductive. The evolutionary drive would accelerate – not by compulsion but because it was seen to be both effective and beneficial.

Peter Humphreys is Chair of the Centre for Personalised Education – Personalised Education Now. Peter spent 25 years as a Primary teacher, 10 years as Headteacher. Since that time he has worked as an educational consultant covering roles in local authority advisory service and BECTA the government agency promoting ICT. He currently works for Birmingham City University with teacher trainees, is an Associate Researcher with Futurelab and researches, edits, writes and publishes in the PEN Journal, PEN website and blog.

Ed Lines

In the end, the secret to learning is so simple: Think only about whatever you love. Follow it, do it, dream about it...and it will hit you: learning was there all the time, happening by itself.

Grace Llewellyn

How could youth better learn to live than by at once trying the experiment of living?

Henry D. Thoreau

Let us think of education as the means of developing our greatest abilities, because in each of us there is a private hope and dream which, fulfilled, can be translated into benefit for everyone.

John F. Kennedy

It is... nothing short of a miracle that the modern methods of instruction have not yet entirely strangled the holy curiosity of inquiry; for this delicate little plant, aside from stimulation, stands mainly in need of freedom; without this it goes to wreck and ruin. It is a very grave mistake to think that the enjoyment of seeing and searching can be promoted by means of coercion and a sense of duty.

Albert Einstein

It is among the commonplaces of education that we often first cut off the living root and then try to replace its natural functions by artificial means. Thus we suppress the child's curiosity and then when he lacks a natural interest in learning he is offered special coaching for his scholastic difficulties.

Alice Duer Miller

Educational Beachcomber

Flotsam and Jetsam

Do not try this at home?

'A group of disgruntled parents have taken three teachers at a primary school hostage and blocked exits in protest against a decision to move a teacher away. Authorities decided to scrap one class at the school in Laroque d'Olmes, on the edge of the Pyrenees, and redeploy one teacher elsewhere.'

in *The Guardian*, 10th September 2009

Voting with the feet?

'Pupils in England skipped almost 3.9m school days in the spring term, a rise on last year, government figures revealed yesterday. The rate of unauthorised absence is now a third higher than in 1997 ... Almost 70,000 children now miss school every day.'

in *The Guardian*, 27th August 2009

The Dick Turpin approach to education

This used to be limited to the dreary OFSTED-favoured approach to teaching, 'Stand and Deliver'. But now it has been extended to schools demanding money with menaces. 'Schools are increasingly making heavy-handed demands for "voluntary contributions" – and some parents are afraid to refuse.'

Jessica Shepherd in *The Guardian*, 16th June 2009

Dumbing down – a variation

John Taylor Gatto wrote about how schools dumb down their inmates. Self-dumbing down is another variation: 'Clever children are saving themselves from being branded swots at school by dumbing down and deliberately falling behind, a study has shown.'

Jessica Shepherd in *The Guardian*, 29th March 2009

(Educational Beachcomber remembers using the same tactics in the 1950s – doing homework and then re-writing the pieces with mistakes in them to lose marks.)

The Tragedy of Education lives on?

Chief Inspector of Schools, Edmond Holmes saw the schooling system as the Tragedy of Education about a hundred years ago, and had to go for writing a book with that title. Mike Baker writes in *The Guardian*, 15th September 2009: '...today's primary schools, have in certain respects – such as the national curriculum and the emphasis on testing pupils in Maths and English – moved back towards their Victorian legacy'

Educational Beachcomber

PERSONALISED EDUCATION NOW STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The vision of Personalised Education Now is grounded upon a legitimated and funded Personalised Educational Landscape that includes:

- a focus on the uniqueness of individuals, of their learning experiences and of their many and varied learning styles
- support of education in human scale settings, including home-based education, learning centres, small schools, mini-schools, and schools-within-schools, flexischooling and flexi-colleges
- recognition that learners themselves have the ability to make both rational and intuitive choices about their education
- the re-integration of learning, life and community
- advocacy of co-operative and democratic organisation of places of learning
- belief in the need to share national resources fairly, so that everyone has a real choice in education
- acceptance of Einstein's view that *imagination is more important than knowledge* in our modern and constantly changing world
- a belief in subsidiarity: learning, acting and taking responsibility to the level of which you are capable
- adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in general and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in particular - recognising current limitations on educational choice.

PERSONALISED EDUCATION NOW

Maintains that people learn best:

- when they are self-motivated and are equipped with learning-to-learn tools
- when they take responsibility for their own lives and learning
- when they feel comfortable in their surroundings, free from coercion and fear
- when educators and learners value, trust, respect and listen to each other
- when education is seen as an active life-long process.

What is meant by 'Personalised Education'?

Personalised education as promoted by Personalised Education Now is derived from the philosophy of **autonomous education**. This centres on learner-managed learning, invitational learning institutions, the catalogue/natural versions of curriculum, invited rather than uninvited teaching, and assessment at the learner's request. Its slogan is, '**I did it my way – though often in co-operation with others**' and operates within a general democratically based learning landscape that has the slogan, '**alternatives for everybody, all the time**'.

We already have institutions that work to the autonomous philosophy within a democratic value system. A prime example is the public library. Others are nursery centres, some schools and colleges, museums, community-arts projects, and home-based education networks. They work to the principle of, '**anybody, any age; any time, any place; any pathway, any pace**'.

Such institutions are learner-friendly, non-ageist, convivial not coercive, and capable of operating as community learning centres which can provide courses, classes, workshops and experiences as requested by local learners.

These are part of a long, rich and successful but undervalued personalised learning heritage, from which we draw strength and which we celebrate. Our urgent task now is to share the benefits of personalised learning and to envision a **Personalised Educational Landscape** that really attends to the needs of all learners and to the greater good of society at large.

Personalised Education Now seeks to maintain '**Edversity**' and the full range of learning contexts and methodologies compatible with Personalised Education, our latest **understanding about the brain**, and how we **develop as learners and human beings** throughout our lives.

Personalised Education operates within a **framework of principles and values** resulting in learners whose outcomes are expressed in their character, their personality, in the quality of life they lead, in the development and sustainability of our communities and planet and in peaceful coexistence and conflict resolution. Performance indicators are measured as much in their physical and mental health, in peaceful existence, freedom from crime, the usefulness of their contributions and work, their levels of active citizenship etc as they are in the existing limitations of the assessment scores and paper accreditations.

Personalised Education Now seeks to develop a rich, diverse, funded **Personalised Educational Landscape** to meet the learning needs, lifestyles and life choices made by individuals, families and communities. It promotes education based on learner-managed learning, using a flexible catalogue curriculum, located in a variety of settings, and operating within a framework of democratic values and practices. The role of educators moves from being, predominately, 'the sage on the stage', to, mostly, 'the guide on the side'.



The Centre for Personalised Education Trust (CPE)

Personalised Education Now (PEN) is the trading name for The Centre for Personalised Education Trust (CPE), a charitable company, limited by guarantee (Charity number: 1057442). It emerged from Education Now in 1996 as The Centre for Personalised Education Trust (CPE). In 2004, after 17 years' pioneering work, Education Now transferred its resources and membership to PEN.

What can you do?

Don't let the *Journal* and enclosures end with you or just share with the converted - distribute them widely. This is a message for everyone. Enter a dialogue with as many people as you can. Engage them in the issues and encourage others to join PEN. We find kindred spirits in all sorts of surprising places and those who just need a little more convincing. Often people partly understand but cannot conceptualise solutions. This is not an issue of blame. We need to engage the present system, not alienate it. Some have never thought at all and need deep engagement. One of our roles is to explain and show how it is and could be different. Within a developing personalised educational landscape solutions will evolve according to localised possibilities, including ways of learning that we have not yet imagined. It's all too easy to take the moral high ground and believe we have all the answers because patently the enterprise is challenging and far from easy. But even now we can share the rich history and current practice of learning in all sorts of institutions and home based situations and we can assist in the 'Futures' thinking that can envision and give rise to its evolution. Together, the debate can be aired throughout grass roots and the current learning system, with the general public, media, and politicians and decision makers. The one certainty is that although the road is not easy it is more solidly founded than the one we have at present. Publicise and forward our web and blog links, circulate our PEN leaflet (from the general office). Bring the strength of PEN to succour those currently engaged in personalised education, and provide vision to those who are not.

To find out more, visit our website: <http://www.personalisededucationnow.org.uk> and our linked blog <http://blog.personalisededucationnow.org.uk/>
Read Educational Heretics Press Publications: <http://edheretics.gn.apc.org/>

Contact Personalised Education Now

Enquiries should be made via Janet Meighan, Secretary, at the address in the next column or on Tel: 0115 925 7261

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Contributions for consideration for publication in the Journal are welcomed. Authors should contact any of the Journal Publication Team to discuss before submission.

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<http://www.personalisededucationnow.org.uk/ContactUsSubPage.php>
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Newsletter:

Contributions for the Newsletter are also welcomed. Contact Janet Meighan.

Membership of Personalised Education Now

Personalised Education Now welcomes members, both individuals and groups, who support and promote its vision. Its membership includes educators in learning centres, home educating settings, schools, colleges and universities. Members include interested individuals and families, teachers, head teachers, advisers, inspectors and academics. PEN has extensive national and international links. Above all the issues of personalised education and learning are issues with relevance to every man, woman and child because they lie at the heart of what kind of society we wish to live in.

E-Briefings – Blog Ezine

-Monthly

Sign up at <http://blog.personalisededucationnow.org.uk/>

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July / August 2009

January 2010

Journals

Issue 12 – Spring / Summer 2010

Learning Exchanges

Further information - blog / newsletters.
Currently planning for next 12-24 months.
Loughborough – Sun 28th March 2010.

Conference (tba)

Join Personalised Education Now

Membership Includes:

2 PEN Journals a year
2 PEN Newsletters a year
Minimum of monthly PEN E-Briefings
Annual Learning Exchanges (free)
The support of a diverse network of learners and educators.

Your membership supports:

Ongoing research and publications
Development of the PEN website, blog and other resources

Yes, I would like to join Personalised Education Now

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