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## Sci-Fi Nightmare Becomes Reality

Paul Henderson

Paul invites us to look at the attachment to schooling as an addiction and enables us to look again at those taken for granted assumptions and the 'fall-out' that arises. He draws upon Oliver James' book *Affluenza* and some of the learning from home-based education. He finally identifies *Ten Incoherent Dichotomies Intrinsic to Schooling* and their obvious logical solutions.

One of the most common themes running through cult sci-fi classics such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *The Omega Man*, *Dr Who*, *Star Trek* and many more is when the human race is faced with the prospect of being dehumanised by being assimilated into some form of alien entity. The central characters in these plots are usually a small band of intrepid heroes fighting against overwhelming odds just to survive by keeping their humanity intact. Their adversaries take on human or semi-human form and may even be friends and colleagues but their minds have been reprogrammed unknown to them to work towards dehumanising any remaining humans. This might sound like a very great and far-fetched ripping yarn, but this sci-fi nightmare is happening in reality right now, subtly, slowly and insidiously throughout the world and 99% of people reading this have almost certainly been unwittingly assimilated. To find out whether you have been assimilated read on to the self-test later in this piece, which takes the form of a simple question with a yes or no answer.

So what is it that is slowly but surely making individual human personalities more uniform and our cultures and societies more like that of ant colonies? It takes the form of a kind of addictive behaviour. If the cause of this addiction were a drug, which was subjected to the rigorous randomised controlled trials that form the basis of modern medicine, it would be taken off the shelves and banned immediately because of its unacceptable side effects, which include emotional and psychological distress, a general lack of motivation especially with regards to learning anything and a predisposition towards anti-social behaviour. This slowly creeping menace is not a drug but a form of addictive behaviour that could be likened to gambling. The institutions that perpetuate and facilitate this gradual and subtle dehumanisation process have a similar relationship with their attendees to the relationship that casinos have with their customers. Gamblers are drawn into casinos for a perceived pay off which they very rarely receive, but

the gambling bug is promoted and perpetuated by the winners. There are not many lottery winners who say that buying their winning lottery ticket was a bad idea and even if they did very few people would believe them. The winners out of the gradual but relentless dehumanising process that is encircling our planet are the ones who, perhaps unknowingly, promote and perpetuate it despite its hugely damaging side effects. The vast majority sees the tiny minority of people, who have achieved status and power as a result, as the winners from this addictive behaviour and so the seductive casino-like allure draws the desperate gambling-addicted majority into these institutions like moths to a flame. What they do get is an unquenchable thirst for materialistic consumerism, celebrity culture, power, status and money and their desperate attempts to quench this thirst only serves to line the pockets of the winning minority even further. Of course the desperate majority have a say in the matter and can change their addictive behaviour whenever they like, but it is very difficult to see the wood for the trees when hopelessly addicted. Even when they are offered a fresh perspective of their hopeless situation, their addiction is so ingrained that it has become part of who they are.

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This addictive cycle started about 160 years ago and, because it has been consolidated in each proceeding generation, this virtually hopeless addiction is now part of our heritage. It is so ingrained in our culture that it almost defines it. Generations of self-fooling addicts have played a huge role in defining most people's self-perception of where they came from, where they are now and their future aspirations. The thought of giving up their addiction for something with a long and scientifically proven list of hugely positive benefits provokes a strongly negative kneejerk reaction. To give it up would mean denying a huge part of their past and present identities and future aspirations even though all these things are detrimentally tainted by their cruel and destructive addiction.

It is now time for your self-test. If you answer 'yes' to the following question then I'm afraid you are an addict and have been subtly and unwittingly assimilated. Do you feel, generally speaking, that in order to get on in the world, lead a happy and successful life and be a positive contributor to society, it is necessary to have gone to school?

The one percent of you still reading this are probably part of the small band of intrepid heroes who have decided that resistance, in the face of overwhelming odds, is not futile. To the few visionary independent thinkers who are immune to viral educational herd instinct, registering a child for school would be like Captain Jean-Luc Picard offering himself to the Borg for immediate assimilation, or like the central character of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* neatly setting a pod beside his bed and going for a quiet nap, or the central character from *The Omega Man* taking a trip out at midnight with absolutely no protection and shouting at the top of his voice, 'Here I am. Come and get me.'

I mentioned earlier that if this insidious addiction, now identified as schooling, were a drug which was subjected to the rigorous randomised controlled trials that form the basis of modern medicine, it would be taken off the shelves and banned immediately because of its unacceptable side effects, which include emotional and psychological distress, a general lack of motivation especially with regards to learning and a predisposition towards anti-social behaviour. In actual fact in the case of schooling these rigorous randomised controlled trials have effectively already been done repeatedly and extensively over the last 30 years by a multitude of researchers, many of whom were government-funded in order to debunk the claims of home learners. The extensive and rigorous research finds that home learners have consistently and repeatedly shown that their academic attainment is higher than that of their schooled peers. Not content with this the researchers then turned to proving their hypothesis that home learners were weird and had no social skills, only to find that, using standard scientific tests and benchmarks, home learners had far better social skills and a much greater feeling of emotional and psychological well-being than their schooled peers. Not content with that, the researchers then tried to confirm the hypothesis that home learners would not get on in the world, and found that their level of employment as adults was much higher than average, with much higher than average levels of job satisfaction and career fulfilment. The percentage of home-educated adults on state benefits was virtually zero.

But surely home learners have to be weird. Every time you see them on Channel 4 documentaries they are either evangelical child preachers on the verge of sanity, holding firm to views that make extremist religious terrorists look like boy scouts by comparison, or

they are petulant child geniuses with no friends except their doting parents. There are a small number of eccentrics and misfits who are home educated but their educational method is not the cause of their unusual behaviour, the seeds of which were probably planted before or during their conception, just as there are many more eccentrics and misfits who attend school but their schooling is generally never blamed as the cause of their unusual personality or behaviour. While there are eccentric exhibitionists who are home-educated and love the attention of the cameras, the vast majority are drawn to home and community based learning because it offers scientifically proven average levels of academic attainment, social skills, emotional and psychological well-being and eventual career fulfilment well in excess of those offered by standard schooling, and many have understandable reasons for keeping a low profile considering the treatment home learners have had in the past from their local council. It is the hidden majority of elusive home learners that the media have never seen and probably don't even know that they exist. This suits home learners very well.

If most of mainstream culture is inhabited by desperate gamblers in pursuit of virtually unattainable material wealth and celebrity status, does that mean that the silent majority of elusive home and community based learners are a bunch of hippies living on the fringes of economic society who shun all material wealth and possessions? Far from it. Material wealth is quite welcomed by most home learners when it is procured as a product of intrinsically motivated activity. Home learning is seen by many as part of a lifestyle choice that produces an abundance of the antidote to a virus that is damaging the emotional and psychological well-being of most people in the developed world. This virus is described in great detail and named by the renowned psychologist and author Oliver James in his 2007 book *Affluenza*, in which he makes no bones about the fact that this ubiquitous infection is incubated in schools. Here are some quotes:

In most of the developed world today, you learn in order to earn. Especially in English speaking nations, education has been hijacked by business. The goal is to create good little consumers and producers, whereas it should be an enquiring mind, capable of both scholarship and of a playful, self-determined and emotionally productive life. [p.179]

What a very, very silly education (and consequently career) system if its main impact is to leave even the highest achievers feeling like shit. [p.187]

Discourage your children from believing that the purpose of education is to launch a career. [p.204]

Be willing to side with your children against the dreariness of conventional schoolwork. Obviously, you are not seeking to prevent them from doing well, but you should help them to challenge the assumption that it is all that matters, and to question the system. However slothful your child at school, never try to motivate them by menacing them with the spectres of failure and penury in their adult career, the shrill cry of the frustrated parent that 'you will never achieve anything if you do not do your homework and make an effort to get through your exam'. In saying this you are the unwitting patsy of corporate interests. Far better is to ask them what they hope to achieve in life. If the answer is 'don't know', try

engaging them about their favourite activity – soccer, dancing, music, sex, it does not matter what. Then discuss with them how they would need to proceed if they wanted to make a career out of this activity, preferably with them asking the questions. If you are still finding nothing that interests them or that they will engage with, tell them that the ideal is finding something that interests them that they can also be paid to do. It does not matter whether this is glamorous or well paid, only that they find it fascinating. If they do proceed to university, encourage them to find a subject which captivates them rather than to worry about their CV. Whilst they are there, do not worry them about coursework, but see whether they are reading and thinking – say that it does not matter what they read, merely that this is their chance to really think a subject through, develop their own intellectual and philosophical positions about life. [p.204]

Chapter four is devoted to the virtues of intrinsic motivation and self-concordance as a means of avoiding emotional and psychological distress. The drawing together of many psychological studies and their consequent conclusions adds a lot of weight and credibility to home educating philosophies involving intrinsically motivated autonomous learning and its relationship to emotional and psychological well being.

With chapter titles such as ‘Meet your children’s needs (not those of little adults)’ and ‘Educate your children (don’t brainwash them)’ it is certainly in agreement with most home educating motives even though it is not a home education book.

Critics of home-based learning may say that the way to fight the affluenza virus is to get exposure to it in order to build up a resistance as many parents advocate in the case of chicken pox, therefore school attendance is essential if that is the place where it is incubated. The only thing is that affluenza is more like HIV than chicken pox in that it can incubate for the entire schooling period and only reaches its full-blown stage when children become economically active adults. Sending kids to school with the purpose of learning the hard knocks of life is a bit like encouraging them to run in front of a fast-moving bus so that they learn from experience that it is not a good idea, or injecting teenagers with a cocktail of sexually transmitted diseases in order for them to learn about the consequences of unsafe sex. Learning about the consequences of any damaging activity through compulsory coerced exposure to it is madness, since the damage will have already been done by the time the lesson is learned. Some may say that those who don’t attend school will be a bit soft and not hardened up to the robust rough and tumble of their future adult lives, thus being easy meat for the more predatory streetwise types coming out of inner city comprehensive schools. They forget that, rather than being shut off from society during their school years, home and community based learners have been brought up in their communities and may well be a lot more street savvy than their classroom engaged peers. Critics may say that likening the negative aspects of schooling to being assimilated by the Borg or catching the albino vampire plague depicted in *The Omega Man* is rampant unchecked paranoia. However, if the subtle, insidious and slow mind deadening effect of mass coercive schooling is extrapolated across generations, perhaps for a million years, it is bound to have an evolutionary impact, as our brains slowly lose their individual personalities, thoughts, impulses and the capacity for intrinsically motivated autonomous learning and critical

thinking, only to be replaced through the coercive force of behaviourist punishments and rewards by a homogenised mass that mindlessly regurgitates and recites the curriculum mantra of the day. As a species, while it may not happen overnight, we will have been changed almost beyond recognition over an evolutionary timescale and effectively dehumanised.

At the end of the day most parents just want their kids to be happy but, with practically daily reports of school violence, abuse, anti-social behaviour, bullying, low academic attainment and general misery, the huge mountain of scientific evidence showing that school as it stands today is neither the best environment for nurturing academic, social, emotional and psychological development nor future career fulfilment cannot be ignored forever and the more people that can shake off their addiction to schooling, the better for all concerned. The rate at which people are turning to home education is steadily increasing and, if our education system does not get its act together soon, a critical threshold will eventually be reached that will trigger an exponential increase in the numbers of these educational heretics who refuse to bow to established dogma. When this happens, the current steady trickle of people turning to home and community based learning will turn into an unstoppable tsunami. There are too many incoherent dichotomies intrinsic to schooling for it to carry on as it is for much longer. Critics of home educators may say that their decision to exclude their children from school is based on over-emotional, psychologically suspect and illogical thinking when in actual fact it is firmly built on a strong foundation of irrefutable scientific research findings, influenced by the world’s leading educationalists and can be deduced using pure logic. Critics also wrongly presume that home and community based learners are permanently excluded from school by their tyrannical parents when in reality most home educating parents believe that effective learning cannot be achieved in any compulsory environment even if that environment is home, therefore the learning environment is chosen by the learner or via a democratic learner-centric family process.

In conclusion, it might be fitting to end, using the Sci-Fi theme of the introduction, with a comment from another *Star Trek* character. Given all the recent educational research findings and new understanding of multiple intelligences, personalised learning styles and personality related educational content preferences, our current education system would certainly be described by the Vulcan character Dr Spock as ‘illogical’. Ten incoherent dichotomies intrinsic to schooling are listed in the following table along with their options for logical coherence and obvious logical solutions, of which Dr Spock would surely be proud.

Paul Henderson is a CPE-PEN network member and contributor. 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 with parts being serialised in the PEN blog.

## Ed Lines

***People who make themselves useful for government service risk the dangers of intrigue and unjust punishment; better to be useless to others, useful to oneself, and thus survive.***

*Chuang Tzu, 367-286 BC*

## Ten Incoherent Dichotomies Intrinsic to Schooling

Incoherent Dichotomy	Options for Logical Coherence	Obvious Logical Solution
1. Schooling advocates social equality whilst grading its students thus making them unequal.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Advocate social inequality</li> <li>2. Don't grade students. Let certificated assessments be taken voluntarily when ready as required.</li> </ol>	<b>Don't grade students. Let certificated assessments be taken voluntarily when ready as required.</b>
2. Schooling advocates freedom but incarcerates its students against their will and coerces them to work without pay.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Advocate slavery.</li> <li>2. Make school voluntary.</li> </ol>	<b>Make it widely known that schooling <u>is</u> voluntary and make flexi-schooling a standard option for registered pupils.</b>
3. Democratic values are taught by unelected schoolteachers who enforce school rules through coercion.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Advocate fascism.</li> <li>2. Let students choose their teachers.</li> </ol>	<b>Let students choose their teachers either by direct invitation or by democratic election.</b>
4. School anti-bullying policies are enforced using coercive behaviourist stimuli (bullying).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Plant the seeds of bullying in very fertile soil by enforcing institutional rules using coercive behaviourist stimuli (bullying).</li> <li>2. Create a non-coercive learning environment in which bullying can neither be created nor propagated.</li> </ol>	<b>Create a non-coercive learning environment in which bullying can neither be created nor propagated.</b>
5. Schooling tries to meet individual student's needs by implementing a one-size-fits-all, age-stage-locked curriculum	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Take the anachronistic view that children's minds are identical blank slates onto which state-approved committee-formulated standardised knowledge and understanding is to be imprinted.</li> <li>2. Take into account the more recent view that every child's mind is different and employ a 'catalogue curriculum' approach i.e. let learners stimulate and enhance their natural curiosity and feed their voracious natural learning drive through intrinsically motivated autonomous learning leading to the acquisition of fully autodidactic learning skills.</li> </ol>	<b>Let learners stimulate and enhance their natural curiosity and feed their voracious natural learning drive through intrinsically motivated autonomous learning leading to the acquisition of fully autodidactic learning skills.</b>
6. School teaches pupils about their community and the wider world by cutting them off from it.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Present the state-prescribed learning outcome, interactive visual aid, textbook, workbook, activity, IT and classroom view of the world and the social inequality, slavery, fascism and bullying, found in schools as a true and desirable reflection of the real world.</li> <li>2. Learn in the real world using libraries, learning centres and IT with home and family as a base.</li> </ol>	<b>Learn in the real world using the local community, libraries, learning centres and IT with home and family as a base.</b>
7. School teaches social maturity through socially immature age segregated peer group socialising.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Advocate social immaturity, peer pressured materialistic consumerism, celebrity culture, ageism and antisocial behaviour.</li> <li>2. Encourage purposeful non-ageist socialisation through common interests and pursuits.</li> </ol>	<b>Encourage purposeful non-ageist socialisation through common interests and pursuits.</b>
8. School teaches independent learning and critical thinking by telling pupils what to learn and think through the imposition of a compulsory curriculum.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Don't advocate independent learning and thinking.</li> <li>2. Ditch schooling in favour of a method of learning that is successfully field-tested and scientifically proven to produce higher than average academic attainment, social skills, feelings of emotional and psychological well-being and future career fulfilment.</li> </ol>	<b>Learn by means other than schooling as it is today such as home and community based learning.</b>
9. School advocates civil and human rights, good citizenship and respect for others while disrespecting pupils' wants, needs, civil and human rights.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Support the institutional flaunting of human and civil rights and the disrespecting of the needs and wants of others.</li> <li>2. Create a learning environment that respects human and civil rights and the needs and wants of learners.</li> </ol>	<b>Create a learning environment that respects human and civil rights and the needs and wants of learners.</b>
10. Schooling is a culturally normal anomaly.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Accept schooling and all its incoherent dichotomies as the culturally normal and correct place to shape social and cultural attitudes but don't be surprised when all the learning drive damage, emotional and psychological damage, and social diseases incubated in schools results in a fully blown sick society.</li> <li>2. Reject schooling in favour of something more humane</li> </ol>	<b>Reject schooling as it stands today in favour of something more humane.</b>

## **Book Review: *Personalised Learning: Taking Choice Seriously* edited by Mark Webster**

*Michael Foot and Peter Holt*

ISBN 978-1-900219-36-5. Educational Heretics Press

We have got to get on and change things...more analysis of what is wrong and what should be done - without any notion of action - is a continued betrayal of our young people.

This book is at its very best when various of its contributors write with passion about what they are doing to 'change things'. It is at its most provocative, most inspirational, when the writers describe the particular ways in which they are putting into practice their theoretical understandings of personalised learning.

So it is that Ian Cunningham's crackling anger at 'betrayal' is set within his description of the South Downs Learning Centre for a dozen students, 'most of (whom) have had bad experiences in school'. For Leslie Safran it is The Otherwise Club which 'supports families who choose to educate their children out of school'. And for Jackie Rose, who writes with the same clarity and conviction as the other two, it is The Bridge International Youth Project with its 'focus on working with marginalized and disadvantaged groups'. It is their three chapters which are the book's beating heart.

Provocative? Lest the appropriateness of the word be doubted in relation to their contributions, we offer just one example among many:

Doing nothing can be fruitful; it is restful, confers dignity, removes pressure and allows people to think for themselves...For the club, 'not doing' is as important as 'doing' and is implied by the principle of self-determination.

Doing nothing confers dignity and we do hope that we get the chance sometime soon to discuss this with Leslie.

An important and welcome thread that runs through the book is defined by Tony Jeffs in the opening chapter. He writes that:

education, freedom and democracy flourish alongside each other and ... none prospers for long without the support of the others.

Peter Humphreys then develops this so that the 'prize of personalisation' is no less than that it:

allows us to support the reshaping of society in ways that reflect basic human needs, rights and responsibilities.

And in his typically thoughtful contribution, Roland Meighan defines an aim of personalised education as being:

to produce people with the confidence and skills to manage their own learning within a democratic culture.

It's a worthy prize indeed.

And thus it is that personalised learning is more than merely the means by which better and 'deep' learners can flourish - important though that is - but it is also a means towards a better society, a better world.

Unsurprisingly in a book that contains chapters by ten contributors, it is not consistently readable. There are a few impenetrable sentences - at least impenetrable to these two readers - and there are others which become demanding by being overlong (one sentence extends over a dozen breathless lines). But these and the proof-reading errors, four of which are acknowledged in an 'Errata' sticker which refers to 'the rush to meet deadlines', should not prevent this book from being widely read and thereby being a means of clarifying the important notion of personalised learning.

And clarification is certainly needed.

For example, at a meeting of school governors a few months ago which was attended by one of us, the school's 'School Improvement Partner' (SIP, of course!) included in his written report the fact that: 'The school has been allocated...a sum of £98,000 for personalised learning in 2007/8.' (The total budget of the school, by the way, is nearly £5 million.) The minutes of the meeting record the answer to the question about how this £98,000 is being spent: '...we employ 10 more T.A.s (teaching assistants) than we really need to enable extra programmes to be done.' Which surely confirms the fear that Tim Rudd describes in his chapter, namely that:

the concept of personalisation is often used in a tokenistic manner, as a 'buzz word' and perhaps even as shorthand to legitimise decisions, activities and products that do not really promote a personalised approach to education.

Philip Toogood writes in a similar vein when arguing, powerfully, that too much that is presently done in the name of personalised education should be:

condemned as a reactionary perversion of (its) essence.

Thus this book fulfils a need. It explores and explains meanings; it sets those meanings within a context of society's needs; and it describes their application in a range of educational contexts which serve to confirm Mark Webster's assertion that:

personalised learning is not an abstract concept but a lively, vibrant, radical force.

And it offers cause for optimism, for example in Alan Wilkins' reminder that:

Co-operation is everywhere and is in the very essence of our being.

We owe a continuing debt to Roland and Janet Meighan and their supporters at Educational Heretics Press. As *Personalised Learning - Taking Choice Seriously* shows, they continue to provide an otherwise scarcely heard voice and a vital service. Their developing partnership with Mark Webster and colleagues at Staffordshire University's Creative Communications Unit promises much.

To end this review, properly, with the sentiments with which it began:

We have got to get on and change things.

Michael Foot is a retired primary head teacher. He is a member of CPE-PEN and writes for the journal regularly. Michael has co-authored *Let Our Children Learn*, Educational Heretics Press, with Peter Holt and contributed a chapter to *Damage Limitation: trying to reduce the harm schools do to children*, Roland Meighan, Educational Heretics Press, <http://edheretics.gn.apc.org/>. Michael was up until recently a school governor. Peter Holt is a retired head teacher and county inspector. Like Michael he has a long association with our group and has written for us on numerous occasions.

## **Book Review: *The Standing Ground* by Jan Fortune-Wood**

*Chris Shute*

Cinnamon Press, Tŷ Meirion, Glan yr afon, Tanygrisiau,  
Blaenau Ffestiniog, Gwynedd, LL41 3SU  
<http://www.cinnamonpress.com/>

**In a future without freedom life is unravelling for Luke until he has a virtual encounter with a girl from beyond the all-controlling grip of E-government. Is Alys real? What parts have the mythical characters of the past to play in saving the future and, most importantly, can Luke find the Standing Ground?**

Dystopias don't have to be squalid, like *Airstrip One* in 1984. They can be clean, comfortable, even superficially benevolent, but there will always be something which recalls George Orwell's ever-present telescreen. At one end of the scale there is Bart Simpson's frightful grade-school teacher, Mrs Krabapple, who has, concealed under the edge of her desk, a button marked 'Independent Thought Alarm' to signal to her Principal that the great enemy of organised schooling, the tendency of some children to think for themselves, has manifested itself. At the other end, is the hero of this novel, boy called Luke Nazir, aged about 15.

Luke's father is an artist. He creates vast sculptures, of an abstract kind, for the Government, which is known by the abbreviation E-Gov. I'm not sure whether the 'E' stands for 'European' or 'Electronic', but it is ever-present and more or less all-powerful. It controls the population by means of implants which inform the satraps who run things about where everybody is, and what they are doing.

The boy lives not with his father, but in a residential facility attached to his school. The custom of parents bringing up their children has been abolished: it led to too much diversity and different modes of thought, and some youngsters nurtured in that way even questioned the wisdom of the Guardians. Better for them to be herded together and all taught in the same way.

At the beginning of the book, young Luke is visiting a web-site when a girl from Somewhere Else comes into his view. She is Alys, from a place outside the hegemony of E-Gov. He begins to realise that there are still areas where people live in freedom, able to question the way things are done and allowed to live by their own perceptions and pursue their own ends.

The book sets out the story of Luke's refusal to play by the rules. He sets out to travel to where Alys lives in Wales. First of all he has to remove the implant from his neck, which he accomplishes with a small knife, and a degree of self-possession which I doubt if I could emulate! He goes via Telford, which, for some reason, is not under E-Gov, where he meets some sympathetic proletarians who help him on his way.

The story is not complicated. It bases itself on several tendencies which can be seen in grim operation in present-day schools. There is a single curriculum. There is no room for non-conformists. Those who have minds of their own are sent, not as now into detention or counselling, but to a place called Serenity Island where a regime of absolute control and humiliation soon changes minds. Luke's teachers see their role as positive: they are

protecting their charges from the dangers which they think attend on independent thought – the unhappiness which can come from making decisions and living by them, the perils of isolation and loneliness which they believe will blight the lives of any young people who do not 'fit in'.

The main contrast in the story is furnished by the Welsh community which calls to Luke. The great heroes of Welsh legend, Artur, Myrddin Emrys, Luned, appear as a counterpoint to the futuristic tragedy which is unfolding. They represent the eternal presence of free humanity, the endless longing for liberty, to control one's destiny. The author's deep love of Wales, her adopted home, and its language, which she is learning, comes through in the frequent mention of Welsh words and names. Clearly, for her, the mountains and valleys of Cymru are integrally sacred, and from them comes a power which will always stand against the soulless, mechanistic blight represented by established authority.

This novel is unlikely to figure in school programmes of study. It is too subversive; it encourages disruptive modes of thought. At present, successful schools are seen as those which sanctify conformity, and persuade their pupils to do the same. An honest exposition of this book would lead to questions such as, 'How can we be certain that the things our teachers tell us are necessarily and unchallengeably true?' 'How can we know that conformity now will get us advantages in the future?' 'Why shouldn't things change, anyway?'

This is not a 'Teenage Novel', although it is about a teenager. It tackles serious themes which ought to occupy the minds of adults who have responsibility for introducing young people to our national life. It also reminds us that the difference between us and our children is chronological, not moral. We got here before them, but that does not make us any better, or any wiser, than them.

Christopher Shute is Copy Editor of the journal and trustee of PEN. After 25 years secondary teaching Chris has researched and written widely on education. He was a regular contributor to *Education Now News and Review* and is author of *Compulsory Schooling Disease*, in addition to books on Alice Miller, Edmond Holmes and Bertrand Russell. His latest work is *Joy Baker: trailblazer for home-based education and personalised learning*. (Heretics Press for details of all these titles <http://edheretics.gn.apc.org/>).

## **Book Review: *How Children Learn at Home* by Alan Thomas and Harriet Pattison**

*Alan Clawley*

Continuum Books, 2008. ISBN: 9780826479990

This is a welcome addition to the growing body of empirical evidence about the effectiveness of home-based education or in the authors' terms 'informal learning'. Yet for those of us who believe intuitively that learning is as natural as breathing the fresh revelations that appear to have come to the authors during their study merely reinforce what we already know.

My impression is that the book, with its many references to and comparisons with school, was written to reassure parents or perhaps school administrators that home-based education is on a par with school-based education. And many parents who are anxious about whether they are doing the right thing will be reassured to have a respected academic tome to refer to when assailed by doubts or school inspectors.

Opting out of such a dominant institution as school is bound to worry moderate parents who may really just want their children to grow up in the normal way. The families illustrated in the book are bound to be self-selecting. Parents who are non-authoritarian, conscientious, caring and reflective are by definition eminently fitted to carry out their task as informal home educators. Perhaps it is too much to expect such a modest book to try to answer the question whether informal learning at home can be managed by all parents or just those with the right qualities and life-styles. School teachers are always ready to blame the failures of school on their pupils' home background and objectors to home based education may question whether informal learning can happen when children are not 'with their parents all day or watching them in their day-to-day activity'. On the other hand, if informal learning should become the norm rather than an alternative to school-learning, and the authors do not explicitly deny this possibility, the institution of school with its suffocating formality and mass-production methods should become obsolete.

My own Deconstructing Schools exercise for PEN was an attempt to rehabilitate schools by finding elements that are friendly to the practice of personalised or informal learning, so I am not encouraged by the authors' gloomy conclusion (p.22) that 'the kind of informal learning at home we describe in this book would simply not be feasible or even make sense, in a class of 25 Children...'. .

I would have preferred the more optimistic conclusion that 'informal learning' can and does happen anywhere at any time - even, perhaps, in today's schools.

Alan was first exposed to self-directed, personalised learning as a student at the AA School of Architecture in London. The idea of taking responsibility for one's own learning has stayed with him and underlies his work in regeneration, community development and green politics. Along with Hazel Clawley, Alan was involved in home-based learning with his own children for 12 years and is currently a CPE- PEN trustee.

## **Book Review: *Joy Baker: Trailblazer for home-based education and personalised learning* by Chris Shute Hazel Clawley**

**ISBN 978 1-900219-35-8. Educational Heretics Press, £10.00**

Chris Shute's latest book tells the story of Joy Baker, one of the heroic pioneers of home-based education in the UK. The book summarises events from Joy's first encounter with an Education Welfare Officer in 1952, when her eldest child was six, to her final court appearance over ten years later, when an appeal by the Local Education Authority was dismissed, and her method of education was at last deemed 'efficient', 'full-time', 'suitable', and therefore satisfactory.

I first came across Joy Baker's own account of her experiences, *Children in Chancery*, in 1979, soon after I withdrew my seven-year-old son from school. I joined the fledgling organisation Education Otherwise, and scoured the library for accounts of other people's experiences of home-based education. In those days I found one book only – *Children in Chancery*. I vividly remember revelling in Joy's accounts of her natural, common-sense approach to children's learning.

*Children in Chancery* is hard to find on library shelves now, so Chris Shute's book is a valuable addition to the Education Heretics collection. The most harrowing part of the story tells how Joy's

children were taken away by the authorities. 'A policewoman, several policemen, a female magistrate, and an inspector from the N.S.P.C.C. had ... gained entry through a window and woken the sleeping children.' Joy was away on business for one night, and the children were being cared for by a domestic helper, whose protestations were ignored. The 'raiding party' dressed the children and took them away in a police car. Next day, with great difficulty, Joy was able to discover where her children were being held, but was not allowed to see them. The 'crime' which triggered these barbaric actions was that Joy had ignored several attendance orders served on her by a Local Education Authority whose officers were well aware of her reservations about schooling and her desire to continue educating her children according to her own ideas and values.

Chris Shute's book is far more than just a précis of the earlier *Children in Chancery*. To begin with, he sets Joy Baker's story in its historical context in the post-war decade, with the 'otherwise' provision of the 1944 Education Act still assumed to apply only to those rich enough to employ a tutor. Throughout the book, he reflects on the reasons why a mother's insistence on her right to educate her own children provoked the authorities to such extreme reactions, drawing in part on his extensive knowledge of the psychological writings of Dr Alice Miller; and also pointing out Joy's explicit challenge to the growing sense among the educational establishment that teaching was a profession with its own mystique and specialist skills which no untrained person could claim to practise. In her presentations to various Local Education Authorities, Joy Baker went on the offensive, making much of the crucial word 'suitable' as it occurs in the 1944 Education Act (which required parents to ensure their children received 'efficient full-time education suitable to their age, ability and aptitude'). She wrote:

...on what grounds have the Education Committee decided that Yaxham School is suitable for the four children in question, none of whom they have ever seen; and what qualifications will the Inspector possess that will enable him or her to assess the ability, aptitude and educational needs of these children in a brief visit, more beneficially than can the parent who has studied the children throughout their lives...

She went on to suggest that she be allowed to visit (unannounced) and inspect Yaxham School, to judge for herself its suitability or otherwise. Needless to say, her request was ignored.

In the final chapter of his book, Chris Shute considers the relevance for today of a series of events that happened more than 50 years ago. As he says, 'Joy's campaign is still going on. The case she made out against the institution of school is still not recognised by anyone whose voice is listened to and acted on in the world of education.' Why? At the heart of the matter, he claims, lie two contrasting attitudes to children: are they 'a different kind of human being from adults, dangerous, skittish and unable to make good decisions for themselves'; or are they able 'to decide for themselves when, and whether, they [learn] the things which parents and teachers have decided are "important".'

Hazel Clawley was involved in home-based learning with her own children for 12 years; during that time she helped to run community playgroups and playschemes. As a Green Party activist, she convened the education policy group for 10 years. Hazel is currently a CPE- PEN trustee.

## Book Review: *Inessential Shakespeare* by John and Leela Hort. Philip Toogood

Shakespeare's plays are often mocked because they are generally regarded as appealing to a small elite of intellectuals privileged to understand 16th century English. Here are seven of his plays, translated into modern English and abridged. Their purpose is to introduce the uninitiated into the threshold of understanding what Shakespeare was about. They are presented in an attractive and readable format for only 4.80 GBP each. They may be used by anyone coming back to Shakespeare after the (usually deterrent) experience of having studied him as a set book for examination at school, by the student (young or old) who is approaching Shakespeare for the first time, by the already devoted fan who wants a quick up-date before going to see a play or re-reading the original text in order to gain further insight and enjoyment.

*Macbeth, Hamlet, Romeo And Juliet, Twelfth Night, Midsummer Night's Dream, Henry V* and now *Julius Caesar* are all offered by the Kabet Press written by John and Leela Hort .

Anyone engaged in home educating, or any school teacher should give these texts to their students as a mind-opening experience which may lead to a lifelong enthusiasm for Shakespeare. International Schools whose language of learning is English would also find them essential for their students' enjoyment and understanding.

Why, then, are they part of a series entitled "Inessential"? Surely this is because the essence of Shakespeare's poetry and theatrical dramas can only finally be appreciated by experiencing them in the original form and language. If, like me, you have endured three hours of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in Polish in the annual Shakespeare festival in Gdansk, you will be crying out for language that you can immediately understand. Like any music in a form you are unaccustomed to or any play presented in an unfamiliar format you will need to be drawn in by stages. This is what these shortened versions in modern English do. They are pathways to the essential Shakespeare.

There is the further question of why should Shakespeare be introduced to succeeding generations if his language is so inaccessible to young people expert in texting, blogging and the peer group world of Facebook et al? Surely this is because education is not firstly about preparation for work, or the acquisition of a body of facts reduced to the level of multiple choice questions in a sort of *Who wants to be a Millionaire* obstacle race in places which have changed essentially little since *Dickens' Hard Times* portrayed *Grandgrind* and *Dotheboys Hall*. It is (amongst other things) , as Derek Morrell stated in 1960, "not an end in itself....both a tool and a product of successful living, a means of maximising the emotional satisfaction of being alive, an aid to coming to terms with the facts of pain, suffering and death". Shakespeare is profoundly much about these matters. This series supports the 'coming to terms'.

Copies 4.80 GBP - KABET PRESS, 239 Bramcote Lane, Wollaton, Nottingham, NG82QL. Ring 01159283001 or e-mail to [kabet@johnandleela.uk](mailto:kabet@johnandleela.uk).linux.net

Philip Toogood is a trustee of PEN. He has spent a lifetime as one of our leading educational whistleblowers. He was a headteacher within the secondary phase. In Telford, he developed the theory and practice of Mini-schooling to break up large schools into small human-scale learning communities. At Hartland, he was invited by the Schumacher Society to co-ordinate a movement to become known as the Human Scale Education organisation in 1985. Philip and his wife Annabel spent two years working at the Small School at Hartland; they then re-opened the Dame Catherine's School at Ticknall, Derbyshire, as an independent, all ages school, and the base for the development of flexi-schooling. Philip then established a Flexi-College in Burton-on-Trent followed by a language school in Spain.

The Journal of Personalised Education Now. Autumn/Spring 2008-9 Issue No.8 <http://www.personalisededucationnow.org.uk/>

## Educational Beachcomber

### Flotsam and Jetsam

#### The ever expanding National Curriculum?

After proposals for 'toy guns for boys', compulsory cooking lessons, five hours of compulsory sport, five hours of compulsory 'high culture', compulsory Shakespeare, compulsory music notation, comes a plea for compulsory cycling. 'David Brailsford called for the government to make cycling obligatory in the national curriculum.'

**William Fotheringham in the *Guardian*, 21/8/08**

#### 'High Noon' in the classroom?

'Things just got tougher in Texas. The Lone Star state, which prides itself on its macho Western cowboy image, is now to have the first school district in America in which teachers can carry concealed guns.'

**Paul Harris in the *Observer* 17/8/08**

#### Lord Adonis to go into Special Measures?

'The schools minister Lord Adonis has told the *Guardian* that the 20% of pupils who leave primary school lacking basic skills in reading, writing and arithmetic is the biggest failure of the Labour government's education policies.'

**Polly Curtis in the *Guardian* 21/8/08**

'I was delighted to read that Andrew Adonis is keen to import the Finnish model of education into the UK. In line with the Finn's approach I therefore look forward to the government's removal of the oppressive and counterproductive Sats regime, much less emphasis on rote learning, more flexibility for teachers to teach rather than "deliver" a centrally imposed curriculum, the removal of school league tables, and a raising of the school starting age to seven.'

**Philip Moriarty, letter in the *Guardian*, September 2008**

#### New Labour Government to go into Special Measures?

'Children start their new schools this week for the 12<sup>th</sup> year under Labour. Who could have predicted that more pupils than ever will be going to religious schools this term, as the churches boasted gleefully? Pews empty but faith schools multiply. There are about 14,000 non-religious schools, and nearly 7,000 faith schools. ... Look no further than evidence from Northern Ireland to see how much worse divisions grow when 95% of children meet no one from outside their sectarian schools. There a majority tell pollsters they would prefer mixed schools, but politicians ignore it. A *Guardian*/ICM poll showed that 64% across Britain oppose religious schools – which is also ignored. ... More religious schools open this week, more still next year, all covertly. Labour MPs were never told a third of academies would be faith-run.'

**Polly Toynbee in the *Guardian* 2/9/08**

### Educational Beachcomber



# Are Video Games an Instrument of Violence?

*Dr Andreas Oikonmou and Ben Partridge*

**It's not so simple, according to Dr Andreas Oikonmou and Ben Partridge from the University of Derby. Here they take a look at the accusations levelled against video gaming for the young.**

Crime amongst the young is on the increase – or so it would appear according to the media. It seems that every week headlines report another fatal stabbing or attack involving a young person. Whilst there is no doubt that these are terrible and tragic events, there is a danger that, by immersing ourselves in such stories, we will lose our objectivity and sense of proportion. The media outcry has unleashed the desire for someone or something to blame. In this particular case, video games such as the notorious Grand Theft Auto 4 have attracted much criticism and culpability for the apparent rise in violent youth crime.

Moreover, it is not just in the UK that such games attract fierce criticism: in 2005 Senator Hillary Clinton singled out Grand Theft Auto for its 'many demeaning messages about women' and the fact that it 'encourages violent imagination and activities' – particularly in children. However, as is often the case, the truth is more complex with valid arguments for both points of view. The important thing is to maintain a degree of objectivity and look at what the research and the facts can tell us.

## **A lucrative market**

There's no denying that many people have a vested interest in the gaming market which is extremely lucrative. The UK games industry is the 4th largest in the world after the U.S., Japan and Canada. In real terms this means that over the ten year period of 1994 to 2004, more than 335 million units of leisure software were sold in the UK; over 5 titles per head of population. With the popularity of gaming still increasing, the real total today is likely to be even higher.

The Grand Theft Auto series has attracted criticism from the outset. One of the most popular games, it tells the story of a range of characters from the criminal underworld. Set in vast virtual and extremely realistic western cities, players get to carry out activities such as bank robberies, assassinations and pimping. Unsurprisingly, this unsavoury content has aroused parental concern, particularly about issues of access by younger children.

## **Pay attention to the ratings**

Grand Theft Auto 4 is rated M (17+) and it is this age guidance which is really the crux of the matter. Many parents mistakenly believe that a game rating relates to the level of difficulty, whereas it actually indicates the age appropriateness of the subject matter. A key concern is that children, especially those under the age of 12, may imitate what they see on television, particularly behaviours that look like fun with vague or non-existent consequences.

This problem of age appropriate gaming is fundamental to the debate and is one which needs to be addressed. The most effective way to do so is probably through parental education so that they have the information they need to make an informed decision. Ultimately, parents need to understand and take note of video game ratings to ensure that they are suitable for their children.

Young people have access to an increasingly wide selection of inappropriate screen media via the Internet and TV as well as video games. So, assuming that an M rated game finds its way to younger audiences than those it is intended for, how big is the problem and are the concerns of parents, politicians and the media justified?

## **Do your homework**

It's easy to make assumptions, but research can often uncover more complex conclusions. Two Harvard Medical School psychiatrists, Lawrence Kutner and Cheryl K. Olson carried out federally funded research to discover the effects of violent video games on preteens and teenagers in the US in order to address the concerns of the public.

Their research came up with some interesting - and surprising - conclusions as Kutner and Olson deduced that parents 'should not worry about M-rated video games having a profound effect on their children's behaviour or values'. In their book *Grand Theft Childhood: The surprising truth about violent video games* the authors conclude that most young gamers 'had incorporated their parents' fundamental values into their lives' and realised that 'these games were entertaining but outrageous fantasies.' They also found that what happened within the children's real lives such as violence or abuse in the home, treatable mental health problems and access to real weapons were far more influential than exposure to violence on the screen.

However, research such as this should not be used as an excuse to relax the boundaries: game ratings are there for a good reason and should be adhered to. The most significant influencing factor is that the child has the emotional intelligence and maturity to understand consequences and differentiate between fantasy and reality. For example, in Grand Theft Auto 4, the graphic depiction of hot dog stands and their owners flying left and right and people running and screaming as the player is driving down a busy pavement at 70mph leaving a trail of dead bodies and injured pedestrians may be fun for a 17 year old that can make the distinction between reality and fantasy. However, it can become dangerous when a young child mimics a similar behaviour on their new bike because they cannot yet distinguish between reality and the consequences that their actions can have.

It is also worth noting that the optimal running time for Grand Theft Auto 4 is approximately 60 hours. In an average game, the time spent simulating criminal activity can vary between 15%-35%, with at least an equal amount of time spent trying to evade the police. In light of this, you could argue that the game gives youngsters a clearer appreciation of the negative effects of criminality, rather than criminality itself.

## **Gaming for good**

To redress the balance of negativity laid at the door of video gaming, it is important to acknowledge the incredible advances in gaming technologies over the past few years which can open up many opportunities for learning and education. Advances in high fidelity visualisations, accurate physics modeling, user interface

accessibility and multiplayer gaming means that these ‘toys’ actually have a valuable and valid part to play in the application of solutions for some of the more difficult problems of the real world.

The term ‘serious games’ was popularised in 2002 with the launch of the ‘Serious Games Initiative’ at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington DC where scholars throughout the 90s had been examining how games could be used for purposes other than entertainment.

Game based learning (GBL), which evolved from such studies, is a branch of serious games that involves the design and development of software with defined learning outcomes. In educational games, the ‘gameplay’ or ‘game mechanics’, which refer to all the player experiences during the interaction with a game, must be carefully balanced with the particular subject matter and the ability of the player to retain and apply that subject matter to the real world.

GBL uses competitive exercises to motivate students to learn and incorporates fantasy elements that engage players in learning activities through storylines. One of the key characteristics of successful educational games is understanding that the learning material is always essential to scoring and winning. GBL makes learning fun, motivates players through collaboration or competition and immerses them in the learning material more than any of the traditional mediums. In short, it makes the process fun, interactive and challenging so that the gamers can learn more effectively. This has the added advantage of engaging those who may struggle with more traditional methods of education Not only that, but gamers are actively encouraged to learn from their mistakes. As such gaming technologies evolve, their educational use will continue to be extended and maximised still further.

These gaming advances have all sorts of exciting implications for the future of education - and our society. Analysts predict that the games of the future will be much more sociable than those of today, addressing concerns that we are becoming an increasingly insular society. As improvements in immersive technologies advance, we will soon have access to games with simulation and experiences that go well beyond the view screen and speakers setup, moving into the sensory realms of stimulating taste, smell and touch, as well as providing life-like audiovisual experiences. One day, it may be that, far from being the negative influence they are perceived as today, video games will be hailed as one of the most significant educational tools for learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Dr Andreas Oikonomou works in the Faculty of Business Computing and Law whilst Ben Partridge is Head of Innovation for Learning at the University of Derby.

## **PEN Blog and E-briefing Ezine**

*Peter Humphreys*

**The PEN blog and E-briefing Ezine were launched during March and April 2008 providing a new more responsive and effective canvas for PEN.**

If you haven't already done so get clicking to the PEN blog at <http://blog.personalisededucationnow.org.uk/> and sign up to the regular E-briefing ezine which will get blog posts regularly to your inbox.

If you're a member of CPE-PEN and have given us your email address you should already be receiving the ezine as you did the previous e-briefing attachment format. If you're not getting it then either you've changed your email address and not informed us or we have an error on the address itself. Either way go to the blog above and enter your subscription details.

We have been delighted at the progress of the blog / ezine. We enable a wide range of material to get into the public domain and focus where possible on alternative perspectives not normally covered in the mainstream educational press. We don't shy away from mainstream stories where they relate to or contribute to ideas concerning personalisation and a landscape approach to education or that point up the need to move in that direction. We are also interested in reporting understandings about learning.

We get daily press contact from a wide range of organizations offering us material. Our next goal is to increase the amount of commentary, news and ideas from within our networks and supporters. When we can develop this sufficiently we will have a place where press and commentators will come to gather copy and comment.

This requires an all round effort from as many people as possible. Your input of ideas and news are welcomed. It doesn't matter whether you're an individual, ad hoc group or organisation - please keep the information flowing. If you have contributions or links to your own sites please use the ‘contact us’ page on our main website at <http://www.personalisededucationnow.org.uk/ContactUsSubPage.php> or email us at [personalisededucationnow@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:personalisededucationnow@blueyonder.co.uk)

## **News: Dr Leslie Safran**

I'm sure members of CPE-PEN will join with us in congratulating Leslie Safran on gaining her doctorate.

Leslie is a mother of two children who have never been to school. Her PhD thesis, centres on how the experience of home education affects parents. In 1993 Leslie founded and continues to run The Otherwise Club, a community centre for families choosing to educate their children out of school, in NW London.

Each year she co-organises an annual home education conference at HESFES (see [www.hesfes.co.uk](http://www.hesfes.co.uk)) in June, and usually organises a Home Education Fair in central London in September.

Peter Humphreys and the editorial team

## 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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#### Copy Contributions

##### Journal:

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

*PEN operates an 'Open Source' policy: PEN resources and copy can be reproduced and circulated but we do request notification and acknowledgement.*

##### Blog – Ezine:

Contributions via

<http://www.personalisededucationnow.org.uk/ContactUsSubPage.php>  
[personalisededucationnow@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:personalisededucationnow@blueyonder.co.uk)

##### 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/>

#### Newsletters

July / August 2008  
Jan 2009

#### Journals

Issue 10 – Spring / Summer 2009  
Issue 11 – Autumn / Winter 2009/10

#### Learning Exchanges

24<sup>th</sup> October 2008 Chard Learning Centre, Somerset.  
April 5<sup>th</sup> 2009 AGM and Learning Exchange – Loughbrough.

#### 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

#### Subscription: £25

Send cheque made payable to the Centre for Personalised Education together with the details below:

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