



Alan Clawley 1943-2018

In welcoming you to PEN Journal 27 I would like to offer our warm appreciation for the life of our dear friend Alan Clawley who died in early May after living with cancer since August last year. Alan and his wife Hazel were trustees of CPE/PEN from 2003 to 2017. We remember with much gratitude the energy, warmth and generosity Alan brought to the role of trustee. In this issue we have reprinted Alan's article, *Educating Architects*, which was published in Journal 15, Autumn 2011.

The early members of what was then Education Now, like Alan, together helped to create and develop the vibrant community we now experience as CPE/PEN. The most recent expression of this was the inaugural event of Light-On Ed at Liverpool Hope University on 28th April, a collaboration between CPE and the Childhood Research Forum of the university.

The thinking behind this new initiative is to provide a meaningful and sympathetic platform for new and early career researchers seeking an outlet and audience for their work on educational alternatives and perspectives. Currently much valuable work is done by post graduate students which is then never published and is effectively lost. Light-on Ed aims to provide a way to capture, appreciate and build on such work. This is mutually advantageous for both organisations as well as for the researchers and research world in general.

A number of speakers fell precisely into this mould with two speakers being either current or recently graduated Liverpool Hope students. Speakers in a similar research position from other universities also presented and it is hoped that a network of support and research exchange can be encouraged to grow from this promising start. In addition, some 'old hands' with more established pedigrees of academic and professional success and experience also contributed. The mixture itself was a valuable one and a genuine insight into the significance of such a multi-level meeting of minds.

I put this Journal together in the warm, sunny days of late May, appreciating the energy and creativity of life all around me after our harsh winter. I am touched by how these inspiring articles resonate with the spirit of spring, offering us the creativity, life and possibility that is always available even, and perhaps particularly, in challenging times.

Josh Gifford, Editor

Contents

Educating Architects <i>In this personal and professional history, Alan Clawley shares his appreciation of the enlightened philosophy and practice of The Architectural Association.</i>	2
But What About Routine? ASD Within Democratic and Self-directed Schooling Provision <i>Helen Whitehead challenges our limited perceptions of autism and explains how students with ASD can thrive in communities based on difference, critical thought and acceptance.</i>	4
From Education in Emergencies to Education in Transition <i>With her international perspective, Rowan Salim urges us to be courageous and innovative, wherever we are, in meeting the convergence of crises we face.</i>	6
The Otherwise Club <i>Leslie Barson celebrates twenty-five years of building and nurturing an education community.</i>	8
Troublemakers: Lessons in Freedom from Young Children at School <i>Sean McDougall is moved by the poignant stories in this wonderful book.</i>	10

Educating Architects

Alan Clawley

Alan's learning experiences with the Architectural Association in the 1960s look incredibly progressive and enlightened with their radical self-directed approaches.

Introduction

Formal education for architects is relatively recent. The Royal Institute of British Architects was only given its royal charter in 1837 and began 'recognising' schools of architecture in 1904.

The biggest and oldest school belongs to the Architectural Association or 'AA' which is a society of architects that was started in 1847 by a group of dissatisfied articulated pupils whose primary aim was to establish a better system of architectural education. The AA is a professional and learned society and a centre of progressive architectural thought. The first ever full-time day school for architects was founded by the AA in 1901 in London. I was a full-time student at the AA in Bedford Square from 1963 to 1969.

The AA is the only architectural school in Britain which stands outside the national or local government education systems and university system. In theory this allows the AA to do just what it likes when and as it likes but the recommendation by the Oxford Conference on Architectural Education in 1958 that the best environment for architectural education was within a university, undoubtedly put pressure on the AA to conform. In 1964 the School was set to become the fourth college of the Imperial College of Science and Technology, South Kensington in parity with the Royal College of Science, the Royal School of Mines and the City and Guilds College. Fortu-

nately, in my view, the merger never went ahead and an independent AA and School remained in Bedford Square where they have been since 1917.

The AA Philosophy

The essential feature of the relationship between the School and the AA is the invigorating contact of the School with a body of practising architects joined together in the AA specifically to 'promote and afford facilities for the study of Architecture and to serve as a medium of friendly connection between the members.' (AA Charter Article 1).

In the School Prospectus for 1998-9 the Chairman of the School, Mohsen Mostfavi, described the educational agenda of the AA as inexorably linked to questioning the status quo by focusing on a range of issues from the urban to the political, from the architectural to the emerging process of production, from landscape to alternative strategies for cross-disciplinary research, from technology and technique to ethics of sustainability and conservation, from the specific to the typicality of the everyday. He went on, 'Partly planned, partly left to the fruitfulness of chance encounters, the diversity of the units is explicitly intended to lead to new discursive formulations and proposals which by definition violate disciplinary boundaries. In this sense, the AA has always been clear in its wish to be much more than a school that merely imparts knowledge: rather our main task remains to enquire and provide the best circumstances for dedicated individuals who are committed to producing the thinking and the work that will make a difference.'

My own experience

Although I had decided at 16 that I would study architecture I left Lancaster Royal Grammar School in 1962 without getting a place in one of the northern university schools of architecture. My grammar school had no ex-

perience of sending pupils to such places and gave me little support. My father asked Albert Walker, a Salvationist architect, if he could give me a job in his firm's office in central Manchester. I became an office junior on £3 a week plus luncheon vouchers, but it gave me the chance to prove my worth to established professionals who advised me that the AA was the best place to go. The senior partner, David Gosling, wrote a glowing testimonial and I went down to London to sit the AA entrance examination in 1962. My parents were not well off so I was eligible to take another examination for a bursary of £100 a year to supplement the local authority's discretionary grant for the fees and maintenance. There was some uncertainty because the fees were higher than those charged by universities.

Because of the open studio system at the AA every student had to buy a special reinforced lockable wooden box made in the AA's own workshop. Inside was a set of recommended books, a scale rule and some drafting gadgets.



A studio at the AA School. Note the screens and the 'architect's box'

It was made clear from the first day that students weren't told what to do. We had no one to blame but ourselves if we messed up. After the regimentation of a traditional boys' grammar school this came as quite a shock. We were shown an empty studio and it was up to us to put up screens and trestle tables to make private spaces where we could put up a drawing board and keep our architect's box. Groups were formed and theories of architecture and the progress or lack of progress of assignments dominated discussions whether in the studio, Chings Head (the basement café), on an arranged visit, or walking the streets of Central London.

In the first three years the School set the same assignments for all the students in the year. The yearly intake was 100 but we were divided into Units each with a Unit Master (still male dominated in the early sixties). We met our Unit Masters about once a fortnight to discuss progress, but the final presentation of the outcome was known as 'The Crit'. Each student pinned their work on the wall in turn and explained it to the rest of the students

in their unit or any other visitors who dropped by, but especially to the invited visiting architects or 'Jury'. Afterwards the Unit master wrote a summary of the discussion and placed a copy in the student's pigeon hole. Feedback was taken very seriously.



Second Year Assignment 1965: Benedictine monastery, Gloucestershire

During my second year (1964-5) the student body decided that the Principal, Bill Allen, was no longer fit for the job, and called successfully for his removal. Dr Koenigsburger was appointed but when I returned to the AA for the fourth year (1967-8) after a year in Runcorn new town, John Lloyd had been appointed. He brought in a radical system of self-managed learning. Students were now responsible for setting their own assignments and deciding what objectives they wanted to meet. It was a risky strategy. The danger was that students spent too long gathering information and too little time coming to any practical conclusion, but this was a lesson we had to learn by experience.

I remember that during my fourth year John Lloyd invited Michael Duane, the Head of Risinghill School, to visit the AA to talk about his educational philosophy. Working in groups was encouraged but was entirely optional. I did assignments with three other students.



Self-selected fourth year project for the Chelsea Drug Addiction Centre [with Alan Glover]

At the end of the five years there was no graduation ceremony. I remember our fifth year master Peter Cook (not he of Beyond the Fringe) telling us to think of the Diploma as a useful ticket that we could spend later if we wanted. I left without that piece of paper because I objected to having to supply a set of slides of my final thesis. Months later the AA relented and sent my Diploma by post in a cardboard tube.

Not all graduates of the AA became practising architects. Some, like well-known journalist Janet Street-Porter, valued the liberal education of the AA for itself. After leaving I worked in the Greater London Council for two dismal years designing housing estates in Expanded Towns in East Anglia. The Royal Institute of British Architects decided in its wisdom that with my limited experience of supervising builders on site I was not ready to belong to it. I concluded in turn that RIBA membership was not for me.

The educational philosophy that I was exposed to at the AA and an interest in architecture and built environment have stayed with me. The history thesis on the Edwardian architect Charles Harrison Townsend that I wrote in my final year at the AA convinced the Twentieth Century Society in 2009 that I could be trusted to write a book about Birmingham architect John Madin, which was published by the RIBA in March 2011.

The AA has constantly upheld its founders' principal aim: to open up architectural practice and education to critical debate at all levels. Its ethos and teaching methods have been profoundly influential internationally, and today architects come from many areas of the world to study, work and teach at the AA. Amongst the AA's alumni are Denys Lasdun, Lord Richard Rogers, Zaha Hadid and, surprisingly, Thomas Hardy.

Alan Clawley's first experience of self-directed, personalised learning was as a student at the AA School of Architecture in London when training as an architect. For some years he was an independent consultant to the many and varied community organisations, voluntary groups and religious congregations that work in inner city Birmingham where he lived from 1975. Alan led the campaign of support for the modernist Birmingham Central Library, threatened by the Council with demolition. From 1979 to 1991 Alan and his wife Hazel shared in the home-based education of their two children. He was also a Green Party member and activist and a Trustee / Director of CPE-PEN.

But What About Routine?

ASD Within Democratic and Self-directed Schooling Provision

Helen Whitehead

A question I'm often asked in relation to autism and democratic and self-directed education is "but what about routine? How can this work without routine?"

As context, at this point, I should probably offer some information about myself. I qualified as a teacher eleven years ago. I've worked principally with children with additional educational needs, mostly those with ASD and/or social, emotional and behavioural needs. As deputy head of a democratic school that provided principally for students who were on the spectrum, I have had ample opportunity to see how this model works in relation to other, more formal models. And, as an individual with Aspergers, I have been able to experience each of these models through the lens of someone who has a particular insight into what may be needed educationally for someone with this particular form of neurodiversity.

I want to be clear before I begin, that I don't believe that there is a perfect school, or perfect approach overall. I do believe, very strongly, that there is a perfect approach for each child. That comes through knowledge, and understanding; and often trial and error. I have seen many systems work very well for students on the spectrum; because the spectrum isn't, as we're often taught to view it, linear. Personally I find the best way to view it is as a literal spectrum; a colour wheel. Points on the outside of this wheel denote particular skills; executive function; sensory needs; analysis; detail focus; social awareness. Along the "spokes" of this wheel our abilities can vary hugely; there can be huge contrasts between each skill set. We are not "low functioning" or "high functioning". We each have highly specialised and different skill sets, just as all humans do; and it is the balance of those that helps to determine what kind of environment is likely to work for us. My son is also on the spectrum and has high analytical skills, a relatively low emphasis on detail focus (although that may change over time), high sensitivity to sensory stimuli, and sometimes needs support in relation to social rules and executive function. This combination tends to result in him being quite rigid, and he is in a school that provides him with a strong routine that he responds very well to. That is what enables him to enjoy school and learn to the best of his ability.

I, however, am very detail focused with very good analytical skills, fairly skilled at social masking, with low tolerance to sensory stimuli, especially sound and with deficits in some areas of executive function. This particular com-

bination means that self-directed education works incredibly well for me.

An example that I've often thought of as we've been setting up East Kent Sudbury School is an instance from my late years of primary school. My primary school, on reflection, was struggling during my later years in education there. My class had a succession of supply teachers, some good, some not so good. But what that period accidentally gave me was freedom. If classroom management is difficult, then it becomes easy for students to slip away and pursue their own interests. The teachers at that time were more than happy for me to disappear to a quiet part of the classroom and follow my own projects and ideas. And during that period, in spite of the seeming disruption, my vocabulary and writing and artistic skill blossomed, because my ability to shut out the rest of the world and focus for long periods on my interests without prompting suddenly had a focus and reason and could be used to its fullest extent. I honestly credit that period for a huge shift in the way I viewed my own capabilities.

Please note that I am not recommending wholesale disruption as a testing ground for discovering the skills of autistic students; merely demonstrating that many of our skills are often under used within conventional classrooms. ASD often comes alongside an ability to focus intently and for incredibly long periods of time. This means that knowledge acquisition can be rapid, and subject mastery can come very quickly. But alongside these skills needs to come social balance.

Democratic and self-directed learning can provide both of these simultaneously. The form of democratic schooling provides the perfect ground for understanding the function of social rules and their creation as you actually see the rules evolving; you see the cause and effect happening in front of you, rather than not being part of the reasoning that led to the initial rules that you are simply told to follow, as within more conventional forms. In many schools the "existing rulebook" approach can be very challenging for students with ASD, as they will often want to apply all school rules very rigidly, as all that is available is the rule, without context; this can cause issues with relations with staff (the "little teacher" phenomenon) and with social interactions with students when the rules are applied rigidly to them. The setup of democratic schools, however, and the emphasis on the school community developing their own rulebook for community life demonstrates the context from day one.

Students see, in a concrete and understandable way, the process that leads from one student disturbing another, to the school meeting, to a discussion about why disturbing each other is upsetting, to the formation of a rule to deal with that, to the consequences that flow from it, to a continual demonstration of why and how emotions and

logic have shaped the creation of this system. It's logical, easy to breakdown, but still involves peer interaction and emotional intelligence to comprehend and apply the rules effectively. And these are skill sets that can and should be used and stretched, rather than simply defaulting to "Ah, X will never be able to understand this because he/she is on the spectrum." It simply isn't true. Yes, it depends on the individual skill set of each child, but within the right environment many of these soft skills can be acquired, both through opportunity and through the ability to self-regulate.

Which brings me on to self-directed learning and how that can potentially be incredibly beneficial. Students on the spectrum will have been internally managing their own needs throughout their lives. What we view as "not coping" is, in fact, the physical manifestation of a very sophisticated coping mechanism. Students who are stimming are often viewed as not coping, when in fact they are self-stimulating to soothe, to try and manage a challenging situation, or simply expressing happiness or excitement; us registering actions as out of the ordinary is simply that; it is us registering something different. More often than not we expect autistic individuals to adjust to a normative view of the world; to not employ the coping techniques that they have carefully developed. And yet we rarely ask ourselves to adjust to their needs when we view ourselves as more "flexible". The usual reaction isn't to acknowledge the stimming, check for any overly stressful situations and then just accept it, to the point that it isn't even noticed other than as a peripheral "check"; but to try and stop the stimming in some way, when in fact it's a deliberately compensatory reaction. We are happy to ask the child that we believe may be more rigid than us to change, but are not willing to change even our perception to enable their coping mechanisms.

Self-directed learning, in a somewhat contradictory fashion, provides security through providing more freedom. For those students whose abilities suit the model, the freedom from a "set" way of working provides the opportunity to take self-regulation and adjustment to a new level. A student who finds a room too loud or too bright for their liking can choose to move to another one, without fear of recrimination which would likely lead to an overwhelming anxiety as to whether to mention the sound/lighting. A student who wants to seek out social stimulation can do so; but can manage it by picking a chosen individual, rather than being limited by a class grouping, and can manage their own expectations and boundaries in that way. A student who wants to focus on their special interest can do; and in aligning with the democratic process (in requesting extra resources/events surrounding it) can not only discuss it in an academic and inter personal sense with peers, in an environment where they will be heard, but can also experience how the

community experiences that special interest, from “I’m finding what you’re learning about fascinating, do you mind if I join in with you one day?” to “I miss you when you’re this focused on something. Can we make time to talk this week?”. Feedback of this kind, within a community of peers, is invaluable for all students to hear and be part of; but for autistic students it is, I believe, essential, as it provides them with a true reflection of their external selves whilst providing support and framing for internal growth.

We too often think of autism in terms of limitations, when in fact the skills and abilities of students are limited only by our perceptions. Viewing autism through a democratic and self-directed lens enables us to see what autism brings to a community and how it is enabled within it, rather than requiring it to be viewed in terms of difference that requires managing. Although it may appear contradictory, the emphasis on self-regulation and the freedom that enables that, can, for many autistic students, be the key to developing coping mechanisms and social skills that they will carry with them and develop further throughout their lives. But equally importantly, the students and community that grows up alongside them will also carry with them an understanding of autism without the tempering of an “othering”.

Communities like this function precisely through difference, critical thought and acceptance. These qualities play to the strengths of many autistic individuals; and through inclusion and understanding these qualities will also become present throughout the entire community. Self-direction and the use of democratic principles to underpin community interactions reinforces the value of individuals and the power of an individual voice; for many students with additional needs, this power can unlock strengths and nullify anxiety. For some autistic students, it can have the power to change everything.

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From Education in Emergencies to Education in Transition

Rowan Salim

Crises come in many shapes and forms. They can be sudden and devastating, like the earthquake in Haiti in 2010, they can be prolonged and bring years of uncertainty and chaos, like the wars in Syria and Yemen, and they can have a slow onset with unpredictable, global and potentially catastrophic consequences. The convergence of crises we face today, climate change,

health, food, water, soil, biodiversity, pollution, the economy, housing is unlike any we’ve faced before.

When crises happen, we react. Within the humanitarian aid sphere, reaction has until relatively recently been focused on life saving responses which ensure that people have the food, shelter, water and medical care needed to remain alive.

Education in Emergencies

A number of early efforts within the humanitarian sector recognised the need to have an education response in emergencies. One such program was the UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees which has, since 1949, been providing education for Palestinian refugees, possibly spurred by the recognition that this refugee crisis was likely to be protracted. By the 1980s, UNHCR started seriously looking at the inclusion of education response in its refugee programmes, publishing its guidelines and strategies in its handbook for emergencies in 1988.

The Children’s Rights Convention and the Universal Declaration of Education for All suddenly made education (unfortunately almost exclusively interpreted as schooling) a national and global priority which could no longer be relegated as a secondary priority. The 1990s then saw a proliferation of guidelines, conventions, conferences and books paving the way for education to be considered one of the major pillars of humanitarian response. Education would no longer be an add-on bonus, but a necessity in facing crises, equipping new generations with the skills, knowledge and capacities to work their way out of conflict and to join the rest of the world in a pre-set development trajectory.

This launch forwards in framing education as the missing lynchpin in humanitarian response was a result of decades of international interagency coordination and collaboration and the eventual establishment in 2000 of the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies to consolidate the work and move it forwards through steering groups and task teams. They published good practice guides, technical kits, brought experts together, organised global consultations and developed the immensely influential Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies.

The Hyogo Framework for Action in 2005 set this global initiative on a new track to use education to build countries’ resilience to emergencies, rather than education being purely a response. And by 2008, and later with the emergence of groups such as Boko Haram, and the targeting of Education in Emergency activists such as Malala Yousafzai and Jackie Kirk in conflict zones, the need to protect education from attack in

crises came to the forefront, bringing together a wider range of actors forming the Coalition to Protect Education from Attack.

Throughout this trajectory, the INEE managed to maintain a process which on the one hand celebrated and valued 'expertise', and on the other was wide reaching and inclusive in its reach, with global consultations and meet-ups taking place regularly, allowing both policy makers and affected individuals with access to help frame the conversation.

Education by Whom and for What?

Yet throughout this whole process, it feels like education has remained a product. It is designed and delivered, to be consumed by affected people. When I worked in Jordan from 2007–2009 on a programme to support the Iraqi refugee community back into education, I was the expert. At the age of 26, with my western university degree, my perfect English, my familiarity with donor jargon and my purported altruism, I was placed in a position where I was charged with teacher training and curriculum development. When it wasn't me, it was other experts, other authority figures with access to funding and influence. We consulted, and we conducted participation exercises, but the vision and potential outcomes of education were pre-set, counted in numbers and reported back to donors. In particular, they were pre-set to equip youngsters with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to follow a predetermined and fallible development path. The precarious conditions of refugee communities afforded them little room to manoeuvre and determine their own educational journeys. Apart from the posters and the covers of glossy guidebooks, the learners themselves were relatively absent from any planning process or decision making.



Saleem teaches his children how to keep pigeons on a rooftop outside of Zaatari refugee camp

When I visited Zaatari refugee camp in 2014, a camp so large that it is now the second largest urban area in

Jordan after the capital, Amman, I met a family where the parents had chosen not to send their children to school. They wanted to home educate, or unschool them for all the reasons that many of the readers of PEN will share and understand. But they were stigmatised and their choice was made more difficult through the linking of humanitarian assistance to school attendance. Eventually they sneaked out of the camp, and in 2017 I visited them again on a small plot of land where the father was teaching his children how to keep pigeons and grow food on the land – the livelihoods they had left behind in Syria – hands rough and dusty smiles gleaming in the sunshine, a sensation the children will never get in a classroom. That said, the family's situation was not simply joyful as the older boys, still teenagers, had to work as day labourers to support the family's choices since through displacement, their access to land and market was limited.

Education for Transition

And that brings me back to England. It brings me back to Personalised Education Now. It brings me back to recycling schools, democratic children's communities, to self-managed learning, to flexi-schooling, to home educators and unschoolers. It also brings me back to the convergence of crises at hand. The crisis of the unknown – climate change and the ecological imbalance and social upheaval which has been caused by the very development trajectory which the educational paradigm outlined above is working so hard to help us get back onto. And it brings me back to hope.



Len Garrison on the Brixton Pound: Local currencies are one mechanism which the Transition Town movement is using to foster production and trade.

As with the sharp, acute crises of the present, the world is reacting to this convergence of crises through working together so that communities will have access to their basic necessities when the time comes. Through networks like the Transition Town movement, communities around the world are self organising to regain the knowledge and connection they've lost with the local, with land, with nature and with communities. As with humanitarian aid, food, energy and housing have been the cornerstones of this reimagination of livelihoods.

The beauty of these localised efforts is not only in their grassroots nature, their organic emergence and their uniqueness and specificity to place and geography, but it is also in how the very nature of the response endeavours to simultaneously protect, build resilience and respond to crisis.

It took the humanitarian aid world several decades to recognise the significance of education in the response to traditional crises. Today I attend events and seminars, workshops, gatherings and funding bids to support my local community's transition to a more localised, carbon neutral future. But throughout these events and gatherings, I have found it starkly noticeable that the simultaneous transition of education into a more localised, personalised, grounded, relevant, self-managed form which supports the other transitions has been missing. There is a sense that we need to learn to grow our own food, that we can live in self maintained housing co-ops, that our energy can be sourced locally and that we can learn to live together within a global network of local communities, all while sending our children to top down, authoritarian institutions where they learn to consume and regurgitate knowledge, to compete with each other and to squirm at worms.

So in the face of an impending crisis of unknown proportions and consequences, this is a call to bring education and learning into the transition movement. It is a call to align the diversification of livelihoods which will be needed to negotiate change, with 'edversity', or the diversification of educational options, the development of networks, choice, localised experiences and self managed options rooted in trust. (Rudd, Sutch and Facer 2006 in PEN Journal 5, 2006). It is about aligning the localisation of our future with the localisation of our present. It is a call to prioritise collaboration over competition.

Emergencies create a degree of helplessness which necessitate aid. Yet even in the harshest and most acute of emergencies, the most courageous, innovative and relevant responses come from within. Yet the imbalance of power can result in a dependence on solutions from outside. These solutions are not always the most courageous, innovative or relevant.

The convergence of crises we are facing has not exactly struck us yet, though we are feeling its ripples. And this is where the hope comes in. We, and by that I mean the countless we's in every community anywhere in the world, are in a privileged position to be in control of our own futures. We have room to be courageous, we have the freedom to innovate and we are still rooted to place, allowing us to develop responses which are relevant, and personalised.

Rowan Salim is director and facilitator at Free We Grow @ Dacres Wood, a new democratic children's community in South London. She also works for the Phoenix Education Trust and is a community gardener.

The Otherwise Club

Leslie Barson

It is almost inconceivable that The Otherwise Club is twenty-five years old. This is partly because of the nature of time. It feels like only yesterday that the children were small and we were playing with the families that we knew then. But partly because when it all began I remember thinking that after a year and a half I would stop being the co-coordinator and maybe stop being involved. In fact, I have made so many friends over the years, many of whom I still see, that the club has become the centre of my social and work life.

The Otherwise Club began in my house in 1990, maybe 1991, as I saw there were lots of occasions for home educators to socialise together but there weren't many when they would work together regularly over time. They only did so occasionally at workshops or museums. I felt that relationships built over time when you work consistently together are another way of socialising that I didn't want my children to miss out on. It wasn't really important what work you did, just that there was some work to co-here around as a group.

We started with ten children aged four to nine at my house meeting every Tuesday. The day hung around a different project. The first one was the ancient Greeks. We look at different aspects of the culture and history. One of these was plays. I asked the young people to write a tragedy and one of them wrote about a neighbour killing another neighbour's dog. We put this on in a local hall at the end of the year. The parents served Greek food and the group wore the 'kitons' (ancient Greek clothing) that they had made. It was a great success. The young people named the group The Croxley Club after the name of our road. That went on for three years.

Meanwhile the members were growing up and getting bigger. It was thought that we should move to a community centre and leave the house which seemed too small by then. We moved in February 1993. That was the birth of the Otherwise Club. It ran for two days a week. One day was, like the Croxley Club, running what was now called the History Group. Here we did projects on topics the group chose, mostly hands on work. The other day was a family day when people of all ages came and activities happened, depending on who came. Sometimes it was organised long in advance. For example when we

had police dogs and their handlers visit, and sometimes it was organised a week ahead or nothing might be organised and we would see what happened. These two days continue to the present.



When the club started my children and I were planning a big trip to Japan in a year and a half. I decided to be involved in the club until we left for our trip. In June 1995 we went to Japan for six months. On our return in January 1996 we found that the club was still going but only just. In fact, while I was away I had shifted my attentions. I had planned to train as a child psychotherapist but I realised through my experience of the club that I preferred to work with groups rather than individuals. I decided on return to spend my time and energy at the club.

At that stage we did pottery upstairs and had a big hall where the history group was held. That year we looked at the American War of Independence and put on a crazy version/play at the end of the year, again devised by one member of the group. We had fairs and events in the main hall. One of the parents was a wonderful baker and anything she didn't sell on a Thursday she brought to the club for us to eat. Those were delicious times!

I have written before about how the Otherwise Club is organised in a chapter of a book published by Educational Heretics Press 'Personalised Learning: Taking Choice Seriously' (ed. Mark Webster) so I won't repeat that here. I would just like to reiterate a few important points about the organisational style of club. It is important to have someone/several people holding a shared vision to give longevity to the project and hold it in its place as that project. It could easily change into a more mainstream organisation without constant vigilance. There is a story from our third or fourth year that illus-

trates this. We had meetings once a month at that time. A new family at the end of the meeting suggested we ring a bell at a certain time and everyone sit down to lunch together. I thought, "What a lovely idea". Why hadn't we thought of that before? But I also had an unnamed disquiet about the idea. From the back of the room and loud voice shouted 'Never!' It was shocking that this person would behave like that over such a simple and seemingly innocuous suggestion. They continued, "This is not a school!". It was then that I understood the power of the reaction and how insidious is the pull to 'school' an organisation from above. I learnt from this experience that I have to watch myself constantly, as well as feed my home education muscle with the creativity and inspiration of young people under eighteen, so I do not lose it.

The idea is that people can self organise though being heard and valued, people have the skills even if they are not articulated skills, even if they don't know they have those skills. It's vital that we listen to each other, be patient and allow things to run their own course; that we allow people to make mistakes, accept that difficulties will arise and work together to resolve them. To allow some chaos. That is the most binding process. The slow burn problem is important and it is important that it is dealt with not by those on high but by the group itself.



Reflecting on my experiences at the club I have come to see school as prison, as Roland Meighan said to me so many years ago. At the time I thought that was a bit extreme but now I see what he meant. Any place where you cannot leave no matter how nice it is, is a prison. You are not allowed to follow your own path. That is more damaging than people realise. And to build confidence and self esteem you have to allow people to follow their own way, make their own mistakes and deal with the consequences.

For me, this has led to a changed view of childhood. The modern idea of childhood as a garden of Eden, as John Holt described it, is actually also a prison. People justify their direction of young people with the phrase 'for your own good'. When you hear this you know you're in trouble. Someone is trying to stop your efficacy, creativity and self-worth by saying they know better than you what you need. Occasionally this may be true but it is certainly not true of any state sponsored institution.

I have countless memories of plays projects, markets and trips both in the UK and abroad over these 25 years. I couldn't begin to recount them all but I suppose if I have some overall snapshot of 'what I have learnt' it is not to judge people. People are endlessly surprising, inventive and creative even when they are showing you the worst side of themselves. Don't pigeon hole them as that. People of all ages left to their own devices, with support and love around them, go far. They don't need a huge, costly strapping institution. Just love, attention and community. We all need that through our whole lives just as all learn through our whole lives. Age has become one of the most divisive tools of the mainstream.



Going into the future the club is moving into more community organising. Since the Youth and Community Service has been scrapped by Brent Council and has left The Granville, The Otherwise Club has been receiving grants to replace some of the services that the Youth Service ran. It now runs summer schemes for local people under 18 and will soon be running weekly term time evening arts, music, drama and cooking classes for local people and home educators. Having spent 25 years at the Carlton and Granville buildings, the club has become the oldest tenant in the buildings and now holds the history for them too. This carries a new responsibility of fighting to retain these spaces where self-organising forms of community can be created by peoples of all

ages for themselves. This role seems to light the way ahead for the future with the hope that it can spread autonomous learning and organisation as it goes forward into the next 25 years.

Book Review

Carla Shalaby

Troublemakers: Lessons in Freedom from Young Children at School

New Press (2017) 240pp., ISBN: 978-1620972366

Reviewer: Sean McDougall

This is a wonderful book that will make you pause four times to wipe away tears and reflect on the pathological need for obedience and conformity that has become the hallmark of contemporary school systems in the United States and here in the UK. All royalties go to the Educational for Liberation Network, a US-based coalition that views education as the practice of freedom.

Author Carla Shalaby writes loving and sensitive profiles of four children that she describes as "canaries" - people who are the first to fail in a dangerous environment and who therefore serve as a warning to others of a developing catastrophe. The term, which she applies to the school system, comes from the deep mining industry but it is also one that has been used in the design sector for many years, where the mantra of looking for causes of failure and then evolving the design to address them is what drives improvement. Sadly, schools have been very slow to adopt the philosophy, often concluding that the problem driving poor behaviour lies within the child and not the system itself.

By the time you have finished reading the book, you may be wondering whether these children are canaries or lions. One thing is for sure: each of the children who form the focus of this book poses profound problems to their school management systems. All four end up on medication, yet in each case it seems plausible that changing the system rather than putting them on prescription might have been more humane. Even if medication was the appropriate response - and Carla appears torn on the issue - she wants us to consider that these four children were acting as alarms in a system that is bad for all of us. Rather than dealing with the issue, she suggests that the school system prefers just to mute the alarm, with long term effects on adult social, economic and political structures.

First up is Zora, a beautiful African/Puerto-Rican/American girl who finds herself in a school that is overwhelmingly white and described as outputting "white-bread Americana" by her hard-working, deeply committed and experienced Reception teacher. Zora is one of those children who stands out without being outstanding, in the school's vernacular.

At home, her self-confident parents teach her to be proud of her culture and identity. They celebrate her creativity and teach her that she has as much right to be loved as any other person. Her bedroom features a quote from Karl Marx (that great friend of white America): "Philosophers have sought to understand the world. The point, however, was to change it." And so she goes to school, her hair set in exquisite braids, full of energy, sure of her right to be loved and treated fairly, and quickly discovers that her school has been designed for a different type of person.

Zora is naturally sociable and a great communicator. Troubled by the cultural disparity between home and school (being happy to blend in versus being happy to stand out), she fronts it out, using humour to attract the other children's attention and then being reprimanded by the teacher for getting the whole table laughing. Thus, she has to live in a paradox - she thinks she deserves attention but, when she gets it, she is told off for being naughty. At home she is encouraged to think of herself as a change-maker; at school she is told not to challenge any of the conventions that keep the system working. As the other children learn that they are not supposed to laugh without permission, this six year old girl finds herself having to adopt ever more disruptive strategies to secure attention.

As her sadness at being isolated turns to defiant insistence, her hard-working and deeply invested teachers also find themselves living within a paradox. They argue that Zora needs to learn how to take her place in a conformist, white culture business world, but they also worry that they are suppressing her ability to show a white world how it might benefit if it embraced cultural diversity. They see that the other children are learning that female black children don't fit into the system very well, and that Zora is learning that she just isn't up to the task.

Trapped in a system designed for a different type of person, Zora is encouraged to secure praise by suppressing her need for social connection, much as children at boarding school are taught that suppressing their emotions is the best way to secure approval. It is equivalent to taking someone in pain and, rather than treating the cause, threatening them with more pain if they don't suffer in silence.



Dmitry Gorbunov, flickr.com

Eventually, her inability to fit in (or is it principled refusal to give up on her core needs?) leads the school to invite her mother to a meeting with her teachers and a psychologist. Alone in an office, she listens to their analysis: that Zora's exuberance, creativity and sense of drama are causing her to become isolated and fall behind in maths; that she could make so much more progress if only she could control her impulses. Reluctantly, she agrees to their suggestion that Zora be given medication for ADHD. It feels like the family have been asked to medicate their culture.

Thus, aged seven, Zora finds herself living in a world where mundane tasks remain mundane, but the happy rebellions of the past are no more. Her mother has trusted the school in agreeing to medicate her daughter; the daughter has trusted the mother in taking the medication; and in one of the saddest passages in the book, the author imagines a future in which Zora finds a place in white society but loses all that made her so much like her wonderful, assertive, fun and successful parents.

The question of whether Zora would have been diagnosed with ADHD if she had attended a multi-racial school hangs heavy in the air. Zora's attempts to be what the author describes as "hyper-visible" are met by an equally strong desire to make her invisible - to eliminate behaviour that might cause her to stand out. At another school, perhaps one with a black head and many black teachers, she might have blended in right from the start and been celebrated for her dramatic flair and sense of fun.

This principle is explored in relation to two other children, both of whom attend a multi-racial, multi-income, highly inclusive school with staff that represent many races, genders and sexualities. It is a school where teachers are known by their first names and there are highly visible messages promoting tolerance, emotional sensitivity and even encouraging protest against unfair systems and practices.

One of them is Sean, a red-headed Irish-American boy whose mother combines single-parenthood with a career in marketing. On a home visit, the author notices that Sean is able to sit quietly next to his mother watching a documentary about the making of wasabi. However, he struggles at school. His teacher, Emily, is highly committed to the idea of students as independent learners but it has to happen in a room designed for traditional 'chalk and talk' lessons. As such, the space often feels cramped and Sean is unable to get the attention he takes for granted at home.



Autumn Walk by Sameli Kujala, [flickr.com](https://www.flickr.com/photos/samelikujala/)

Despite being busy, Sean's mother is happy to take time to explain things, to negotiate and let the timetable slip a bit to accommodate the here and now. These, she thinks, are good life skills - but at school they cause huge amounts of disruption. Maths lessons overrun, sports lessons finish early and all the children are eventually banned from sharing food because the teacher doesn't want to apply the ban just to Sean.

It emerges that the emphasis on independence clashes fundamentally with Sean's need for close emotional contact. The school has not noticed how the loss of his father has left a huge gulf in his life, and when he demands attention the staff respond by sending him to the naughty step. He starts to fall behind academically because he is rarely in the classroom when exercises are being explained, and does not have time to complete the task before the lesson ends.

As Sean becomes more upset, he starts fighting with his friends. His mother then has him assessed for ADHD and he is medicated. He becomes more focused but starts to cry and the author is torn between two possibilities: that the medicine is enabling him to release pent up emotion, or that it has left him drowning in a pool of sadness that he used to avoid by deliberately and consciously distracting himself.

We never find the answer to the question and as a reviewer I am not in any way qualified to do more than report the author's perspective. However, while he is clearly a very troubled child who may well be suffering from ADHD, it seems equally obvious that an education delivered at home by his mother would be significantly less troubling for him than one delivered by strangers in a crowded room.

These two examples highlight the common theme of the book - that all four "trouble-makers" are in fact very young people struggling to articulate entirely valid needs in a setting that is unable to meet them. Whether the school is teaching uniformity or individuality, the response is to ask the children to suppress their needs, and (especially with traditional schools) to ask families to live according to conventions that align with the needs of the school.

It's hard, in this context, to see how a natural-born actress, warrior, hands-on learner or artist is going to get the support that he or she needs, until school has decided the time is right. Carla argues that a child whose natural inclination is to see the whole community move forward together must live in a world where individual achievement is emphasised; children who are unique and proud of it must learn to suppress their identity; others who look at an adult and see an equal rather than a boss must learn to subordinate themselves; children who like choice must get over it; and those who look to elders for guidance and support must get on with it on their own.

When they protest, it is not because they are uncaring - it is because they do care, and are desperate.

Carla finishes by highlighting a very troubling situation in Detroit - a city almost abandoned by the state, in which the schools are full of dangerous mould, with mice running freely through the classrooms. Faced with conditions that are educationally useless as well as physically dangerous, the teachers (who were banned from striking) all called in sick on the same day. Their managers subsequently asked whether it might be possible to strip them of their teaching qualifications.

This response - to punish the attempt to draw attention to a problem - is what Carla considers to be the natural long term consequence of being raised in a system that does exactly the same thing. She asks us, instead, to look at the person raising the objection and ask what might be motivating them to do so. We might, for once, stop complaining about "attention seekers" and consider what is better - someone who points out problems, or someone who has given up and withdrawn.

Equally, we might consider the concept of childism, as defined by Dr Chester Pierce and introduced to me by Sophie Christophy. It is "the basic form of oppression in our society... for it teaches everyone how to be an oppressor and makes them focus on the exercise of raw power rather than on volitional humaneness." Should we isolate children who recognise this and protest, or (as Carla suggests) re-make schools as places where such approaches would be put in the same category as slavery?



In a Cage, Dalibor Leviček, [flickr.com](https://www.flickr.com/photos/daliborlevicsek/)

Troublemakers is indeed a deeply troubling book. As Carla says, "It seems impossible to blame a caged bird for its own death in a toxic mine, but we nonetheless manage to do so." It seems fitting to finish by quoting a poem in defence of those who dare to speak up in an environment that demands their acquiescence:

His wings are clipped and
His feet are tied
So he opens his throat to sing.

And his tune is heard
On the distant hill
For the caged bird
Sings of freedom.

Sean McDougall is a trustee of the Centre for Personalised Education. He is also MD of Stakeholder Design, an innovation agency that uses design thinking to re-imagine education and the wider public services. He previously worked at the Design Council, where he led the future learning team.

PERSONALISED EDUCATION NOW

The vision of Personalised Education Now built upon a funded Personalised Educational Landscape

- 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, community learning centres, small schools, mini-schools, and schools-within-schools, flex-ischooling and flexicolleges, networks of groups or individuals, both physical and virtual.
- Recognition that **learners** themselves have the ability to make both rational and intuitive **choices** about their education.
- The 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, UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms**.

PERSONALISED EDUCATION NOW

Maintains that people learn best:

- when they are **self-motivated** and are equipped with **learning to learn tools**.
- **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 they **can invite support / challenge and co-create** their learning pathways from those educators and others they trust.
- when education is seen as an **active life-long process**.

What is meant by 'Personalised Education'

Personalised education 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 uninvented teaching, and assessment at the learner's request. Its slogan is, 'I did it my way – though often in co-operation with others' and it operates within a general democratically-based learning landscape that has the slogan, 'alternatives for everybody, all the time'.

Within the context of the UK 'schooled society' there are already some key 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 rich and successful, but undervalued personalised learning heritage, from which we draw strength, and which we celebrate.

Personalised Education is legitimated by the latest understanding about the brain, and how we develop as learners and human beings throughout our lives. It operates within a framework of principles and values resulting in learners whose outcomes are expressed in their character, 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. Learner success is therefore measured in terms of good physical and mental health, in peaceful existence, freedom from crime, usefulness of their contributions and work, and levels of active citizenship. In reality, these are more significant than the limitations and delusions of over-emphasis on assessment scores and paper accreditations.

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