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Welcome to PEN Journal 28, my last edition as editor. I have so enjoyed my contact with all the contributors during the last three years and I appreciate the range and depth of the wonderful articles which they have offered for inclusion. In this introduction I would like to share with you the eight articles I would take to a desert island, a selection which comes with much gratitude for all the articles I have published. I hope this encourages you to reread them or you may like to make your own selection, perhaps from the full range available in the 28 journals!

My first choice, from Journal 24, is *A Painful Kind of Exclusion*. In this, I appreciated how Clare Lawrence combined the personal, parental and professional in a thoughtfully compelling article about shared education.

In Journal 25 I was touched by how Mark Webster wrote about Walsall and *Caldmore Community Garden* with such warmth and affection, really celebrating a sense of place and community. It can be difficult to know and understand another person, including ourselves, so it was great to read of the values and insights which inform the lives and work of Nikki O'Rourke and Sean McDougall in *A Life of Learning*. I feel this would be a richly rewarding title for future journals.

The articles at the beginning and end of Journal 26 featured two different, but related aspects of our work - action and reflection. The Journal opened with *The Power of One Becomes the Power of Many*, an inspiring narrative of action by Julia Black demonstrating how, with her parental and professional perspective she engaged, with determination and creativity, with the school system. It closed reflectively with *On Oceans and Swimming Pools* by Rowan Salim which I found to be beautiful, touching and spacious.

In Journal 27 I very much enjoyed rereading *Educating Architects* by Alan Clawley because it reminded me of a dear friend of CPE and how some of the educational practices in the 1960s were so progressive and enlightened. I admired Sean McDougall's book review of *Troublemakers: Lessons in Freedom from Young People at School*. It takes real skill to write such a beautifully crafted review which stands alone even if you don't go on to read the book.

Finally, from this Journal I would choose *Reflections of a Flexi-School Teacher* by Lynda O'Sullivan. As I spent twenty-five years working in the state school system I appreciate all that it takes to keep your heart open in that environment. So it's wonderful to hear a teacher celebrating her work, delighting in children and being happy in her school. May your heart remain open in these challenging times.

Josh Gifford, Editor

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SvobodUm: Self-Directed Learning and Community Centre in the Czech Republic

Michal Kandler



The name SvobodUm is a play on words in Czech language meaning “Freedom House”.

SvobodaUceni.cz (Freedom to Learn NGO) is promoting respect towards children and their self-led education. It has created the first community centre and base for self-directed education in the Czech Republic. SvobodUm was inspired by concepts such as the British Summerhill School and a playground for self-directed play called The Land.

VOLUNTARY EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY

The SvobodUm is located in the village of Jindřichovice pod Smrkem, close to the border with Poland, one hundred and thirty kilometers from Prague. It was founded as an informal educational and leisure time laboratory for short and long term activities, for self-directed education or unschooling supporters. Unschooling is based on belief that the most effective way to absorb information is the moment when a child is ready and manifests the interest. The SvobodaUceni.cz initiative is endeavoring to make self-directed education a legal alternative to the current obligatory school attendance system in the Czech Republic.

The facility is also available for lectures, courses, visits, out-of-school education stays, family holidays and meetings of all fans and supporters of voluntary education and is respectful of others regardless of age, education level, sexual orientation, neurodiversity or faith.

“We will try to form a fully-fledged and self-sufficient environment, with the potential to fulfil the educational needs of children and adults in a holistic way,

and not only being a supplement to the school system. The main difference is the atmosphere and approach of all that is happening in SvobodUm,” says Anna Třešňáková, the initiator of the SvobodUm project.

EDUCATION, SPORTS AND PLAY



The activities in SvobodUm are voluntary and free from unsolicited evaluation. What, when and how to learn is determined by the children themselves; there are always respectful adults nearby. SvobodUm visitors can take part in any of the activities they like, individually or in a group. These could be mutual education, discussion, yoga classes, walks, work, games, adventure games, individual talks and group discussions, cooking, rough-and-tumble play, sports, dancing, singing, bonfires or just doing nothing. The principle is a free choice for an individual and an absence of educational pressure, whatever they would like to do.

LOCATION

The property can currently house up fifty people and has an additional camping area. It is surrounded by two hectares of grassland providing a wide range of possibilities. This new space will allow for experimentation and further development of these concepts and the future development of the property.

FUNDING

The SvobodUm project is funded by private donors, long time supporters’ contributions and the payment for holidays and other services. SvobodUm is not dependent in any way on grants and subsidies of the Czech Republic or EU.

REGULAR SEASONAL RETREATS FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

We have a specific format for meeting the supporters of self-directed learning, which is also its main

focus. It is not a programme of concrete activities but an unstructured mix of a variety of activities. The main role of the organisers is to facilitate a safe and creative environment in which children and adults have the opportunity for self directed discovery and exploration without fear of being themselves. Anyone who comes to the retreat has our full trust. We will not decide on how his/her time is spent. He/she/it will not be forced, coerced, evaluated or measured. We will respect his/her lifestyle with everything that belongs to him/her. We ask however that he/she/it will also respect us and other participants. This is our role; as safety facilitators and respectful atmosphere mediators.

There are occasions where the needs of different individuals and their individual wishes might be in a conflict. This is normal and even desirable, presenting a great opportunity for the whole community to learn how to seek consensus and to develop honest and open communication. For example, if someone chooses to stay awake all night, there is no need to tell him/her why he/she/it should sleep - the issue is how best to avoid disturbing those who wish to sleep.

Our perception of ethics is based on the so-called Non-Aggression Principle (NAP) and this includes children. If anyone with an issue or problem doesn't know how to solve it themselves, we are here to assist - whatever the problem, they can turn to us for help (advice, intervention, mediation). At each retreat, we always have at least one sharing evening for questions and problem solving together with other participants. This ensures a safe environment of nonviolence and tolerance of differences and diverse needs. This sharing is also the main purpose



of the retreat. We welcome all new challenges and thus have the opportunity to learn from each other.

The key principle is respect for the autonomy of others, children and adults. The main philosophy behind it is anti-adulthood or amicitation in the meaning by Hubertus von Schoenebeck. It can be simplified as Children are people too which means they are fully responsible for themselves and for their own development (of course they can ask for advice or assistance and parents, other adults, teenagers and older kids can care for them as respectful guides). Activities are all voluntary and there is no coercion to join any activity. The content, time and mode of learning, play, and other activities are determined by children themselves, in cooperation with or without adults, according to their own choice. In education, there is no obligation to learn and there is no teaching pressure. Heterogeneous age groups are formed naturally in this environment.

Decision making is open to anyone who is involved or affected directly, whether children or adults. The specific form of joint decision-making is not a dogma, but a seeking and developing experience. Above all it is a space for mutual interpersonal interactions. The organisational team has a special voice in questions of basic safety, payments and property protection.

The role of adults is partnership and supportive. Together they create a safe and inspiring environment with a wealth of incentives. They are close and act as partners of children, not formal authorities. In 2018 we held four retreats in winter, spring, summer and autumn with more than 200 unique visitors which included teenagers, adolescents and families with toddlers. We have also started a co-housing community with one family in a caravan and one foreign volunteer living in the main building.

FUTURE PLANS AND EDUCATIONAL EXPERIMENT

In the near future we would like to offer long-term accommodation and a self-directed education environment for unschooling & worldschooling families and young people. We are preparing an educational experiment to legalise self-directed education in the Czech Republic. Homeschooling is legal here for five to fifteen year olds but parents have to ask for permission and register with an official school. Homeschoolers have to prove their knowledge and skills with regular obligatory evaluation (every year in kindergarten / five years and every half a year in elementary School / six to fifteen years) and incorporate the school and National Curriculum. This means

that there is no guaranteed right to homeschool your children, it's a form of exception from compulsory school attendance defined in Czech Constitutional Law. Regular and obligatory evaluation is structured by the National Curriculum and is a huge limitation for unschooling families who would like to give their children full freedom what to learn, when to learn, how to learn and with whom to learn.

We would like to verify, through experimentation, that informal learning is a viable alternative to compulsory schooling. Our aim would be to use this as a pilot for the extension of educational opportunities in the Czech Republic to include informal / self-directed education as a fully-fledged variant of formal and non-formal education.

This educational experiment also aims to evaluate the skills acquired directly from self-directed education and to make self-directed education a legitimate and legal possibility for fulfilling compulsory school attendance. We would like to provide critical input for draft legislative changes as well as general recommendations on the inclusion of informal / self-directed learning.

CASE STUDIES

A Teacher and Father (thirty-five years old, two children) attended the course To Respect and Be Respected† a few years ago and practices a respectful teaching approach with his students in the High School and respectful parenting with his two sons. He asked for support and internet counselling when he experienced difficulties with his respectful teaching approach. He felt alone and not accepted among other colleagues in the High School.

His feedback from the Summer Camp was: “Respectful communication between children and adults, where everyone tries to understand the needs of others and finds solutions. An absence of complaining, commanding and adultism. I experienced support, assistance and belonging.” For the first time he saw a large group of people who did not evaluate and compete but shared and learnt from each other. He gained practical insights on how to improve communication, gaining confidence in himself and for his children. He felt accepted, free and normal and is now able to open and share new ways of managing these issues with others.

A Student (eighteen years old), a talented musician and financial-entrepreneur, contacted the core member team a few months ago. She wrote a blog about her learning career full of struggles and disappointments with the formal education system.

She is active and looking for her own way of self-development, discussing this with her family and others.

Her feedback from Summer Camp: “For me personally, it was enormously valuable and enriching in many areas. It is not a group of people who shared a common theme and where everyone has to be in agreement with each other, but each person had their say - and that inspired me ... It really went smoothly without anything being organised. It provided an opportunity to observe how parents deal with children in difficult situations and how children cooperate, argue, get acquainted, play, contradict and enforce their will. It was just a safe, wonderful place where one could just be, flow, observe, and when needed to ask, learn and discover. I learned a lot about myself, it opened many personal topics, my family and I met beautiful people.”

After Summer Camp she made a decision, with her parents, to quit her High School and to start to teach herself through her art and start-up projects. She has just published a book about dropping out her High School.



† Czech course about respectful parenting and teaching, similar to Nonviolent Communication by Marshall Rosenberg or Parent Effectiveness Training (P.E.T.) and Teacher Effectiveness Training (T.E.T.) by Thomas Gordon

Do you know any families who are practicing unschooling / worldschooling / slow-travelling with children and would like to attend and share their experience? Please invite them to join us and other

international families at our Worldscooling Summer Camp on 12th - 21st July 2019 in Czech Republic.

Website: www.svobodum.cz

Video: <https://youtu.be/NXbpjc4WABo>

Instagram: <https://instagram.com/svobodum.cz/>

Michal Kandler worked for fifteen years in social and educational services, NGOs, and in the private and public sector. Initially he took responsibility for publicising and translating articles and videos about Self-Directed Education as well as facilitating and moderating meetings and events in Czech NGO 'Svoboda učení' (Freedom to Learn). Subsequently he became a member of the board and jointly responsible for strategy. He is now working as a facilities and accommodation manager in Svobodum, currently focusing on research and evaluation of participatory approaches in education.

The Real 'Free Schools' Don't Call Themselves Schools

Danny Whitehouse

Since the Academies Act in 2010, almost 500 new 'free schools' have been established across the UK, and although they don't have to follow the National Curriculum and can set their own operational and HR policies, the freedom the new structure provides is primarily enjoyed by 'business managers' within schools, exercised in the context of cash flow: contracting external services of leadership consultants, and catering providers. Education's main stakeholders - the students and the teachers - do not report any new freedoms. Indeed, free schools are free to be less democratic and inclusive, with no obligation to include parents or students on the governing boards of their schools, for instance. Myself, and many other educators, parents, researchers and young people, have a different vision of freedom in education.

When I first heard about a real 'free' school, during a conversation with friends... a school where children were not divided according to any arbitrary age categories, where they learned what, where, when how and with whom they wanted to, I got on the next

plane to Germany. When I stepped into the grounds of Freie Schule Leipzig, I felt I'd come home. Children gathered around me with excitement, curiosity and bright eyes. 'Who are you? Where do you come from? You're English? We started an English class here because we want to speak the language and travel there together. You can come to that class if you like!' They didn't see me as an authority figure, but as another human being, someone to get to know and learn from. This is a natural learning relationship, based on trust, equality and a spirit of collaborative enquiry, with adults and children as partners in a process of discovery.

This is what I mean when I talk about freedom.

And, after a boom in the emergence of alternative education models across Europe offering increased freedom and democratic involvement to students, it seems as though the idea is coming home, proliferating across the UK. Although the England football squad were unable to bring the World Cup home this summer, you can be assured that pioneering educators and passionate parents across the country are committed to establishing game-changing alternatives to conventional education here in England. Freedom to learn is coming home.

Phoenix is at the centre of a hub of innovative alternatives-to-school, that provide greater freedom to children and young people, to learn in an atmosphere of mutual trust, respect and care. At the end of this article is a list of 17 established independent schools and learning communities, and there are at least ten more currently in the pipeline, due to open soon. All of them are governed according to true democratic values of freedom and equality.

'Learning Communities', not Schools

The vast majority of new education start-ups are not calling themselves schools. Their founders are keen to side-step connotations of conventional transmission models of education, with their inherent dominance-based hierarchies, and didactic mode of classroom instruction. Instead, they recognise that learning happens through living and they facilitate a form of education that derives from the self-chosen activities and life experiences of the young people in their communities. 'Community' is an important concept for many of these projects, as they are governed by egalitarian modes of decision-making

(such as direct democracy, sociocracy and holocracy), and see adults and children as equal partners in the learning process.

Another reason that they do not call themselves schools is that they are not schools. Indeed, many of these learning communities operate for 18 hours or less per week, meaning that they do not need to register as schools. Instead, many are registered as charities or childcare providers, avoiding academic-centric assessments, and often designing 'emergent curriculums' in response to the needs and interests of individual children. The Ofsted criteria for childcare provision is a much more holistic framework, to which many of these learning communities are happy to subscribe.

There are several, more established, learning communities that have been modelling more democratic and self-directed modes of education, which are registered as independent schools, such as Summerhill School (established in 1921) and Sands Schools (established in 1987). There is greater freedom in operating independently in this way. And, if more independent schools and learning communities can showcase a different way of doing education then we may reach a tipping point that prompts a shift in government policy, so that all children can experience an education in which they are truly seen and heard.

These independent schools and learning communities are springing up across the UK, in yurts, on allotments, community centres and at the heart of council estates. They are dispersed geographically, serving some especially isolated communities, such as West Yorkshire, Manchester, Stroud, Bath, Suffolk, Sussex, Devon, Hertfordshire, Kent, West Wales, Wicklow and Sligo. With almost thirty of them established or in the process of starting up, we can feel optimistic that these sites of hope will bring about a transformation in education in the UK.

It's important that these pioneering projects are able to connect and collaborate, to share ideas, expertise and resources. By amplifying the collective voice of alternative approaches, we can influence mainstream media narratives about the purpose and scope of education, and present a compelling case to commissioners, community members, local authorities and MPs, to ensure the sustainability and resilience of these flourishing initiatives.

If you would like to learn more about learning communities across the UK, you can often find contact details through the websites listed at the end of this article. In addition, Phoenix is coordinating a network for people to offer and receive support from each other, so please do get in touch if you'd like to be part of that or learn more about it.

List of independent schools and learning communities:

Summerhill School, Suffolk www.summerhillschool.co.uk
Sands School, Devon www.sands-school.co.uk
Park School, Devon www.parkschoolonline.com
Self Managed Learning College, Sussex www.selfmanagedlearning.org
A Place to Grow, Gloucestershire www.placetogrow.org
The Garden, Bristol www.thegardenbristol.org
The Greenhouse Project, Bath www.ourgreenhouse.org
The Cabin, Hertfordshire <https://www.downatthecabin.com>
Free We Grow, London www.freewegrow.co.uk
Wayfinder Project, London <https://www.facebook.com/groups/thewayfinderproject>
Hebden Bridge School, Yorkshire www.hebdenbridgeschool.co.uk
Curious Minds, London <https://www.facebook.com/groups/745160882237499>
The Wooden House, Surrey <https://en-gb.facebook.com/gardenandforestschool>
Tipi Woods, Essex www.facebook.com/tipiwoods
Alexandra Park Children's Learning Community, Manchester <http://www.alexandraparkclc.co.uk>
Roots and Shoots, Devon <https://www.facebook.com/rootsandshootschagford>
Stonebury Small School, Bristol www.stoneburylearning.co.uk
Lumiar, Kent <http://www.lumiarkent.co.uk>

In the pipeline:

East Kent Sudbury School www.eastkentsudburyschool.org.uk
Coed Cariad, Carmarthenshire, Wales <http://www.coedcariad.org>
Curiouser & Co, London <https://www.curiouserandco.co.uk/>
The Children's Allotment, Oxfordshire <http://thechildrensallotment.org>
Turtle Learning, Sussex www.turtlealllearning.co.uk
The Lighthouse, West Wales <https://www.facebook.com/lighthouselearningwales>

Get in touch:

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Facebook: [PhoenixEducationTrust](https://www.facebook.com/PhoenixEducationTrust)

Danny Whitehouse is the executive team member leading the Trust's activities and development. Having spent time at more than twenty democratic schools around the world, he has a keen awareness of how to co-create the dynamics of an effective, egalitarian learning space. Underpinning all of his work and ideas is Article 12 – ensuring that young people are involved in the decisions that affect them. Some career highlights have included facilitating a board of young people making decisions about county council commissioning of youth services, setting up many youth councils and school councils, developing toolkits for councillors, supporting the development of England's first representative body of secondary schools. Juggling multiple projects across diverse communities, Danny spends his spare time writing songs and recording audiobooks of radical pedagogical texts. He is an example of the kind of creative and resilient disposition that young people today need in order to navigate uncertain futures. Danny strongly believes that the root of these capabilities is creating conditions fostering autonomy and agency, through relationships of mutual trust and respect, to enable children to grow and develop.

Reflections of a Flexi-School Teacher

Lynda O'Sullivan



It's great being 'cutting-edge'. It helps, of course, when your Head Teacher comes from the world of 'Why Not?' and is both brave enough to do the

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scary stuff, and pragmatic enough to allow evolution so that everyone's needs are met, parents, teachers and, of course, the folks who are at the centre of all we do – the children in our care at Hollinsclough Academy. We are in the tiny hamlet of Hollinsclough in the Staffordshire Moorlands, at the foot of Chrome Hill and not far from the source of the River Dove (if it sounds idyllic, that means I've done it justice). Our whole team is amazing and everybody plays a critical part; there are two full time teachers, three teaching assistants (one of whom looks after our 'outstanding' Early Years provision), two caretakers who daily perform miracles, and our senior leadership team – the Principal and Bursar. We have support from other specialists too, to support our offering, such as a peripatetic music teacher, sports specialists and a forest school practitioner. Our after school and lunchtime clubs include lego, chess, penpals, sports, school newspaper, computing and soroban. Reading this, I'm wondering how we fit it all in!

Thanks to the success of the model that has evolved in our very small school, we have grown from just five children in 2009 to over fifty in 2017, around three quarters of whom are normally home-educated at least one day per week. Of course we are affected by fluctuations in cohort numbers – ten children left us last summer at the end of Year Six and only three have joined us in Early Years so we are down at the moment, and that will affect our funding, but we've advertised and our parents are great at spreading the word, so we hope we will grow again. Not easy when your setting is in a very rural hamlet with no real catchment other than our offering.

Evolution has been part of our secret. At first, home-educating families came to use our resources every once in a while. Next came the fortnightly hub for this purpose. We had only twelve children on roll at that time so space was hardly a challenge. Those children decided they liked it so much that they wanted to come more formally, so we then had children coming for any number of days they liked, on any day they liked. As you can imagine, this was a planning nightmare and so we moved to three core days (Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday) which allows time at home for learning, and gives the children a chance to adapt to our routines. It doesn't suit everyone – some children have just not

coped but we don't claim to be 'one size fits all' – we never have.

Our moral compass remains steadily pointing towards what's best for the children, but we do get distractions, for example when we are asked (as we frequently are) why some of our children's attainment is not in line with the Local Authority or National standards. Patiently, we explain that number one, statistical validity goes out of the window when the cohort size averages seven or eight, and number two, we offer Flexi-schooling for a reason. The children who choose to come to us have, in many cases, struggled massively with 'normal' attendance in bigger schools and some have only joined the world of formal education in the year in which they are then required to do SATs. It is progress where our pupils shine, and with the right parental support, they can outdo the full-timers. We have many success stories we could share. Like the young lady who joined my class at the start of Year Four 'hating maths'. She attended two days per week (this was before we moved to a minimum three-day attendance) and was also educated at home by her parents and the wider family, including Grandad - a published scientist. She took the entrance exam for a grammar school after leaving us at the end of Year Six, and her Maths score was the highest amongst all the entrants that year! Her brother, who had left us the year before, and had (prior to joining us) struggled massively with attending school, achieved a result in the top ten entrants overall in his entrance exam. We have had children who have had significant anxiety problems go on to flourish in our setting. An excellent partnership between school and home, with flexibility, is key to help enable this, and I think we do this really well.

So, would I leave my setting for a more 'normal' teaching post? It would mean opportunities for extra money for subject leadership, and suchlike, but the rewards of working at Hollinsclough that are not financial far outweigh the material ones. Every day I feel like I'm making a difference and it's not just a cliché. Just last week, I commented to one Year Six child that his resilience had increased massively since he joined us last year. His friend's reply: "I think this school does that to you."

After a career spanning twenty-five years at British Telecom, in a number of roles from

Customer Service to Project and Programme Management, I decided to bite the 'voluntary redundancy' bullet and have a complete career change. I joined the world of education in 2011 and progressed from Special Needs Teaching Assistant through Higher Level Teaching Assistant, and then, one first class degree and a journey along the Assessment Only route to QTS later, became a fully-fledged, qualified teacher in January 2016. I am subject lead for Maths, Science and Computing, and am Deputy Safeguarding Lead. I am married with two amazing daughters; we share a smallholding with three horses, two dogs, nine sheep, countless chickens and a goldfish. When not working I love to spend time with the family, read, walk and play with the animals. Apart from the goldfish – he's getting on a bit now.

Algebra, Not for All

Wayne Jennings



Stuartpibrow, [flickr.com](https://www.flickr.com/photos/stuartpibrow/)

Most state departments of education regularly require all students to take algebra I and algebra II. In Minnesota, the legislature made algebra II a mandatory subject for high-school graduation. Requirements for advanced algebra were the result of recommendations made by Achieve, a national organization promoting rigour (a code word that means that every student masters difficult school subjects).

Many students failed the advanced algebra course and thus could not graduate leading to parents protesting against the mandate of algebra II for graduation. Subsequently, the legislature came up

with an alternative plan. If students failed the algebra II course exam three times, they could take an equivalent course. This turned out to be a ridiculous alternative as there were no other courses with that level of difficulty. School districts largely ignored the draconian algebra requirement, and fewer students chose algebra II.

Advocates of algebra questioned the value of algebra for all students, nevertheless recommending it for its mathematical importance in scientific fields, statistical analysis, business decisions, and other fields. OK, absolutely. Schools should offer algebra and other high-level Maths courses.

Modern technology offers ways for adults to learn any subject at any time, in effect, leading to just-in-time learning. In fact, most universities must reteach higher level Maths courses, even for students who passed those courses in high school. Many have forgotten or never really understood algebra.

Some consider algebra to be a "gateway" subject as a predictor of other high-level courses, even a predictor of college success. Baloney! No research supports improved critical thinking or success in university courses as a result of studying algebra in high school.

Algebra II and much of algebra's alleged rigour for success in college are measures of student attendance and diligence. These traits alone account for more college success, irrespective of the actual content of the algebra.

While simple algebra has some practical value, courses and textbooks extend far beyond a practical level. Most parents would be thrilled if their children had a good grasp of addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions, decimals, simple geometry, estimating, using large numbers with or without a calculator,—and rudimentary algebra. These are all areas students will find useful for life. Many students surpass this level of competence because of interest or career aspirations that require a deeper knowledge of Maths.

Legislators, as examples of reasonably intelligent and successful adults, would fail an algebra test. Marion Brady in a Washington Post column wrote about a Florida school board member who failed the Florida tenth-grade state exams. He was a success-

ful businessman and had thrived as a high school student. The story, well vetted, went viral: tinyurl.com/yceyxzqk.

I have a reasonable grasp of Maths, so when the practice eighth-grade test, with answers, was printed in the local newspaper, I took it on my own. Of the 40 questions, I didn't even know what 11 of the questions meant. Of the rest, I got about half correct. Why and what are we doing and spending time on with students? We need to rethink learning priorities.

Countless well-educated adults tell us that they've never used high school algebra during their entire lives. Many students in high school algebra courses feel a high degree of discomfort with their level of competence and understanding. If they passed the course, they breathed a sigh of relief and considered themselves lucky.

I used to conduct workshops for teachers and used a test made of randomly selected questions from most of the subjects taught in my junior high school. The graduate-level teachers were perplexed. They recognized the lack of common sense in many school exams. I am convinced that teachers in a different subject area would fail tests used by their colleagues across the hall.

Back to algebra. If I thought algebra II was essential for successful citizenship, productive careers, and lifelong learning, I would support this requirement. Lauren Resnick, University of Pittsburgh and former president of the American Educational Research Association points out that workers in many career areas, say, carpenters, develop job Maths solutions different from those taught in school Maths classes.

I want to be clear. I support giving students appropriate challenges to help them become successful in future activities. Those considering careers in engineering, for example, may need Advanced Mathematics, and high schools should provide it. We should teach mathematical content if important for careers.

We have not yet become adept at helping most students achieve a state of comfort with arithmetic much less with advanced mathematics involving cube roots, polynomials, and quadratic equations--this despite the strenuous efforts by elementary and

secondary teachers from kindergarten onwards. Every day, people are baffled or taken advantage of because they lack the simple arithmetical skills required for personal finance, to budget, estimate costs, understand interest rates, and appraise contracts.

Requiring algebra scarcely addresses vital skills and knowledge for the Maths of daily living.

Wayne Jennings, Ph.D is a retired teacher and principal. He founded nine schools over a sixty-year education career. He is the author of the 2018 book, *School Transformation*.

Book Review

Kalwant Bhopal and Martin Myers.

Home Schooling and Home Education: Race, Class and Inequality

Routledge (2018) 142pp., ISBN: 978-1138651340

Reviewer: Wendy Charles Warner

This book is unashamedly aimed at the academic reader, rather than the casual browser of books related to home education. Its innovative focus is on concepts of risk, both from the point of view of society as a whole and from the subjects in the detailed case studies. By examining home education from the point of view of risk, this book is successful in giving a voice to home educators choosing the approach specifically to manage risks within their children's lives.



Homeschooling - Gustoff family in Des Moines - Flickr.com

The book is not without fault, not least in primarily electing to study families for whom home education is a short term choice, rather than including experienced home educating families, who have made a conscious choice to home educate from the outset. This is not a grave criticism, as it can be difficult to recruit home educating families to research projects, due to the innate suspicion within home educating circles of such research. However, factual error is less forgivable in a book of this stature and the authors clearly do make such an error in stating that there are no National guidelines in respect of home education. In fact, England has the 'Elective Home Education Guidance for Local Authorities' and Wales the 'Elective Home Education Non Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities'. Further complaint may be had in the authors citing non-academic works by unqualified authors as authoritative, in places. These faults do not detract from the content, but nonetheless gave cause for consideration.

Particularly compelling, were the case studies and how these brought out the motives and views of the subjects. Those opinions were at times uncomfortable reading and laudably, the authors did not flinch from sharing them. We met subjects whose children had clearly suffered within the school system and at the hands of the prejudiced, parents who considered themselves to be somehow superior and parents who openly acknowledged that they provided no education to their children. Uncomfortable reading indeed.

These case studies did prompt reservations however, as after many decades of contact with home educating families, some did appear to be selected to proffer public stereotypes of home educating families, rather than those we generally meet. Having said this, it is those stereotypes which need challenging and by admirably presenting those families as protecting their children from risks, rather than being a risk to their children, this work adds to the small body of literature on home education which professionals in the field should own.

Wendy Charles-Warner is a trustee / director of the Centre for Personalised Education. She is a tireless, experienced lawyer, advocate and campaigner on a range of issues including elective home education, home education and the law, relationships with local authorities and government.

PERSONALISED EDUCATION NOW

The vision of Personalised Education Now is 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-schooling 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 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 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.

The Centre for Personalised Education Trust (CPE)

Personalised Education Now 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.

To find out more, visit our web sites:

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Blog: www.blog.personalisededucationnow.org.uk

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Flexischooling Families UK - Facebook Group

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If you would like to join Personalised Education Now please complete the form below and send it to Alison Sauer with a cheque made payable to the Centre for Personalised Education.

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