



**We Need to Fund the Education Revolution**  
by Richard Fransham

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## **Introduction**

From my experience, the transformation of education requires four general personal growth stages. In point form they are:

1. Obtaining a full understanding of how authoritarian schools are bad for children, bad for humanity, and obstacles to achieving social and environmental justice
2. Deschooling ourselves, which involves learning to trust that young people are the best architects of their learning.
3. Determining the most common sense and constructive approach to deschooling the world
4. Figuring out how to make the change happen.

I attended public schools and graduated as damaged goods. I had little confidence in my ability to learn without being told what to do and I didn't know how to use a library beyond signing out a book. My schooling rendered me a slow learner and it took me years of struggle, from the 1960s to around the year 2000, before I felt that I was on solid ground with the first three stages. For the past 20 plus years, I have been working my way through stage four. I offer the following article as what I see as action needed to bring about the change. It is written for people who feel they have a good grasp of at least the first two stages. It is not written from a place of frustration, but rather from the perspective of solving a problem. There are two aspects to it that could work against it accomplishing its goal which I wish to address in advance of people reading it.

The first is that I use the word “blame”. It can be taken as negative. I view blame and accountability as much the same thing. If something is going wrong, those responsible need to be held accountable, as do those most capable of correcting the problem. From this perspective, I think the word “blame” is useful. The first step to solving a problem is to thoroughly understand it. Determining who is responsible for creating the problem and who is best positioned to correct it need to be determined early in the problem solving process. Inaction by these people cannot be acceptable. The solution requires holding them accountable. I am among those I am holding accountable with this article. I am only just beginning to see how I could be working smarter to accelerate the adoption of a new world view of young people and the transformation of education. With respect to blame, it’s not a matter of beating ourselves up for having failed to do better. It’s about getting on with the job as best we can.

The second aspect is that the article can be seen as coercive. People who believe in non-coercive education may be particularly sensitive to the discomfort of being coerced and quickly stop reading. My experience has been that most people are not going to change their views on education without being coerced to do so. I’ve concluded that unless people who are adverse to coercing others accept that some degree of coercion is needed to bring about change, change will not happen, or it will happen in a less than positive manner and result in a new normal inferior to what it could be. A question to be answered is: “Will our aversion to coercion turn out to be our fatal flaw?”

### Who Is Accountable?

The worldwide, subjugating, authoritarian school systems have got to go. We know this, yet still they persist. If we look back to the late 1960s and early 70s we see much good discussion about new directions for education, but in the decades since, schools have remained fundamentally the same. Some people argue that they have actually gotten worse and that school boards appear as content as ever to keep the general public ignorant of the kinds of learning environments that best serve all young people. So who is to blame?

The tendency has been to put the blame on school board authorities who keep perpetuating the same old. They are blinded by their own success, but to establish where the blame is most appropriately placed, we need to consider this question: “Who does know the harm schools are doing, and what are these people doing about it?”

The unschoolers, the advocates of democratic schools and self-directed learning, organizations and academics promoting youth empowerment and equal rights for children and youth, and scientists researching human body and brain development know the harm being done by traditional schools. In numbers, in knowledge, and in the energy they are putting into bringing about change, they are impressive. For simplicity, these people will be referred to here as “cultural creatives”. It is a term borrowed from the documentary film titled [The \(R\)evolution –](#)

[Cultural Creatives](#). It helps to envision the dream that these people will transform our culture for the good by changing how young people get their education.

Many cultural creatives have given up on public education. They see it as an institution unable to be reformed from within, and its employees as unwilling or incapable of exploring possibilities that fundamentally challenge their thinking. While opting out of it is the necessary path to wellbeing for many young people, it has its downsides. The vast majority of students attend public schools. Forsaking the public systems therefore has the effect of exiling oneself to the fringes of society and out of sight of most people. It reduces access to many good learning resources; it cuts young people off from school clubs and sports; and it makes it harder to form good friendships with neighbourhood families. We must also not ignore that no matter what our situation, the quality of our lives is impacted by what schools are doing to students and consequently our communities. While cultural creatives may decide not to send their children to public schools, they still have a critical role to play in shaping the kinds of communities in which their children grow up as well as the future the young will inherit. They are the ones with the vision to lead the transformation of public education to community learning hubs that cultivate healthy relationships, and that serve as stable bases from which people of all ages can launch themselves into learning about whatever interests them in our highly diverse and changing world.

Currently the work of these cultural creatives can be described as a hodgepodge of disconnected actions. They tend to work within their silos and when they do get together, the talk is best characterized as preaching to the converted rather than strategizing about how to slay the giant. It was noted in the documentary that cultural creatives often stick to themselves for fear of criticism and unschoolers make a particularly good example of this.

It must be noted before expanding on this thought that the fear of homeschoolers in some parts of the world goes well beyond the fear of criticism. There are places where homeschooling is forbidden and parents who practice it risk losing their children and could be sent to jail. Homeschoolers, particularly the unschoolers, are to be commended, not threatened. They are providing safe space for their children to flourish and they are a valuable resource for how to develop the ecosystems of community learning destined to replace our antiquated state schools. If anyone should be going to jail, it should be those forcing children to attend institutions that are causing them harm. It is understood that people living under the threats of backward governments must protect themselves with silence, making it even more urgent for those living where homeschooling is legal to speak out. They need to expose those opposing homeschooling as relics of the Industrial Age and unfit to be in leadership roles as we enter the Age of Autonomy. By uniting globally, cultural creatives can cause any authority opposing homeschooling to seriously reconsider their thinking. This is not to suggest that homeschooling is the answer. Community learning hubs that blend the best of home, community and school learning opportunities are what need to be pursued, but even in countries where homeschooling is legal the obstacles created by governments and school boards to exploring the possibilities are forbidding. Those who can, must not remain silent.

While talk about education and school focuses attention on learning, the wellbeing of young people is primary. A person lacking mental health is a diminished learner.

Turning back to countries where homeschooling is legal, unschoolers are hesitant to talk about what they are doing, even with their children's grandparents, to avoid being judged as somehow deficient. This produces the kind of quiet Arundhati Roy refers to when she says, "The trouble is that once you see it, you can't unsee it. And once you've seen it, keeping quiet, saying nothing, becomes as political an act as speaking out. There's no innocence. Either way, you're accountable." The cultural creatives are accountable, but they have not yet imagined that by working together they can orchestrate the transformation of education. They need to assert themselves, and until they do in far greater numbers, it is fair to see them as most responsible for children continuing to suffer in stagnant, authoritarian schools.

The tendency to stay within one's comfort zone must be overcome. It is not where life is most interesting, and it is definitely not where people create the future they want. Eleanor Roosevelt said, "Do something that scares you every day." Cultural creatives are in effect creating a contradictory message for the young. They need to provide examples of how to confidently and diplomatically act on what they believe to be good and right. To not do so either projects a lack of courage or the feeling that their voices don't matter. If the voices of the adults are perceived to be powerless, then their children will likely replicate the relative silence of today's cultural creatives, and so it goes.

### **Attacking the Financial Imbalance**

From here, this post will focus mostly on ways to attack one of the greatest obstacles to transforming education – the financial imbalance. The emphasis is on getting substantially more funding to people building public awareness of young people's rights and the benefits of self-directed learning.

School boards are well funded in many parts of the world. They pay large salaries for full-time employees to perpetrate what they do and to sell the message that they know what they are doing. By contrast, funds for championing non-coercive education are scarce leaving the movement greatly disadvantaged in the battle for public opinion. It's an imbalance made worse by the fact that parents who pull their children out of public education are often still required to pay school taxes to support the system they reject, and it leaves them less able to support the development of options that better serve them. It falls to cultural creatives to address this imbalance and it requires tapping into sources of funding beyond their own pockets.

### **Books, Subscriptions and Films**

Community libraries offer part of the solution. There are thousands upon thousands of them around the world and there is nothing to stop someone from requesting books that help people to imagine how education can be different. Cultural creatives can make it their mission to have every library provide books like those listed on [the Youth Rights Day website](#). This will get funds

to passionate authors challenging status quo and the funds don't stop with them. Authors often pass along proceeds to others driving the movement.

There are benefits beyond the financial to getting books into libraries. Librarians are sharers of knowledge. They can direct distraught parents asking for information on education to where they are found in the stacks, which helps to legitimize self-directed education. It also supports the awareness building efforts of cultural creatives when they can recommend books found in their library. The more that people know of these books, the more likely they are to buy copies for themselves and to give them as gifts. We need to appreciate that libraries will be hesitant to provide books that they think no one will read.

Peter Gray, a champion of [self-directed learning](#), points out that we have two publicly funded institutions for learning, libraries and schools. He describes libraries as places where self-directed learners from cradle to grave go voluntarily to pursue topics of interest to them. In contrast, he describes schools as places K-12 students are forced to attend and made to study what others think they should know. Libraries are becoming much more than book lending institutions and cultural creatives can help them evolve into multi-dimensional, community learning hubs.

In addition to books, we need libraries to provide online periodicals such as [The Progressive Education Bulletin](#). With more libraries and others subscribing to these publications, more cultural creatives will be able to work fulltime producing them. For those who can afford to do so, giving gift subscriptions, particularly to those on the verge of joining the movement, has added advantage. It is an ongoing reminder to keep thinking about how things need to be different if they are to become significantly better.

All that has been said about books and other publications can also be said about documentary films such as [School Circles](#), [Class Dismissed](#) and [Beyond Measure](#). We need libraries to make them available for sign-out, and for those who can, to willing pay to watch them online to help the producers carry on their work.

Modern libraries have meeting rooms and they encourage people to take advantage of them. Cultural creatives can use these rooms as meeting places for book and film clubs. An additional goal of these meetings could be to help develop libraries as community learning hubs.

### [Conferences, Membership Fees and Donations](#)

The following statement far from applies to everyone, but the problem it presents is prevalent enough to demand attention. Cultural creatives are not immune to the capitalistic Costco/Walmart mentality that everything must be obtained at the lowest possible cost, without consideration of the price it costs others. The concept of fair trade needs to be exercised by those wishing for a new era of social and environmental justice. It is not in their interests to object to paying a fee for webinars, nor the full price of conferences. Nor are they wise to complain if yearly membership fees for organizations fighting for them come close to

what it costs to attend one professional sports event or to have one nice dinner out. Circumstances call for a change of mindset.

Conferences held by the educational establishment are more likely than not to be organized by salaried employees of public institutions or funded by foundations and corporations that, intentionally or not, preserve status quo. These events are often held on the elaborate premises of these institutions at no cost to the organizers, and it is common for the expenses of attendees to be paid for by their employers.

The situation for those challenging status quo is entirely different. The expenses of their conferences, with few exceptions, are covered by people who are not considered wealthy. The organizers are more likely than not to be working voluntarily or for compensation considerably less than they could be earning elsewhere. The attendees most commonly cover expenses out of their own pockets. Rarely are the venues for their events available for free. As can be imagined, school boards and supporters of status quo are generally not receptive to providing spaces for events that are critical of what they do.

This situation foiling efforts to cultivate the much needed global debate on education needs to be called what it is. Discrimination. It suppresses freedom of speech, and it marginalizes thoughtful, caring citizens who are working to bring about a better deal for young people. The consequences of this injustice are more grave than most realize. If our stagnant, unimaginative school systems remain in place, the needed reboot of our civilization, as discussed by Zak Stein in [Education in a Time Between Worlds](#), will not occur and the future into which we will default will be far from anyone's first choice. The message from the documentary film [Schooling the World](#) points the way. If you want to change a culture, change how its young get their education.

Rather than being frugal, cultural creatives need to embrace the idea of paying full price for events that further their cause; they need to willingly pay membership fees to their organizations and provide sustaining donations for the work they do. Not everyone is in a position to contribute financially from their own pockets, but everyone is capable of bringing in funds in other ways. Time is money and most people can make some time for what most matters to them.

### Making Time

This brings us back to the Arundhati Roy quote above. Cultural creatives either get out of their comfort zones and become visible, or they remain perpetrators of a culture they dream of growing beyond. There is no innocence. It is imperative that everyone who can, both those with and without spare cash, work to bring more funding to the cause. Following are some ideas on how this can be done.

Children and youth are increasingly showing that they want to have a role in finding solutions to world problems. Those who get involved cultivate the behaviours of good democratic

citizenship and create quality learning experiences. When it comes to funding the self-directed learning movement, a quick search of the internet provides numerous ideas of fundraising activities that can be conducted by young people. The Canada Helps website, for example, lists [20 Fundraising Ideas for Kids](#). Important to note is the opportunity they create to build public awareness of the kinds of learning environments young people need if they are to flourish. To give fundraising campaigns some legitimacy and bring attention to particular groups, they might be conducted in association with a local unschoolers collective or a democratic school. Getting the most out of a fundraising effort requires planning how to leave a strong message with each contact. Inviting those who donate to enter a draw to win related prizes such as a subscription to a publication, membership to an organization, registration for a conference, or tuition for a course would further help to raise awareness of the advocacy taking place around the rights of young people. If cultural creatives unite, one thing they might orchestrate is an annual global fundraising day for the cause.

The second example looks at the potential of school councils and parent/teacher associations to accelerate the movement. Cultural creatives need to join them with the intent of raising awareness of non-coercive education practices. In Ontario, Canada, schools are required to have school councils made up of parents, school staff and members of the community. The [Ottawa-Carleton Assembly of School Councils](#) was established to address the common concerns of well over a hundred of these councils of the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board. Representatives of the councils meet monthly and advise the board accordingly. The assembly is therefore in a position to get information to families and influence the direction of the school board.

People who serve on school councils more often than not are products of the system and disinclined to question it in any fundamental way. Often the chair of a school council is a parent recruited by the principal of the school, chosen as someone who will not rock the boat. The agendas for meetings deal mostly with mundane issues, and after a couple of meetings of rolling their eyes, cultural creatives are apt to decide that school councils are not for them. It is understandable that they would feel this way, but they must not concede the territory to those who keep perpetuating the same old. This is the primary battleground and cultural creatives need to be in there fighting. They will be a minority at first, but with respectful sharing of views, they can become [catalysts that create movements](#) within their schools. One has to accept that it will be lonely initially, but if cultural creatives around the world unite, they can establish support groups and define effective approaches to building a school council's awareness of the need for students to be self-directed. Success on this front will help to fund the movement. School councils can easily raise funds and provide for people to register for related conferences and courses. They can encourage the viewing of films on unschooling and the purchase of related books and subscriptions for school libraries and for home. They might even raise funds to support programs being run outside of public education that demonstrate how young people flourish in environments where they feel respected.

Cultural creatives who have put heart and soul into providing alternatives to public education needn't worry that efforts to transform public education will result in fewer people attending

their programs. It can be expected that as the failings of public schools become more widely recognized more people will seek other options. This will increase the negotiating power of change agents to obtain public funding for their programs without compromising their principles. The power of united cultural creatives to preserve these principles and realize the full vision of worldwide ecosystems of community learners is not to be underestimated. The dream is within their grasp.

Employers are another place to look for financial assistance. They complain that school graduates are deficient in the skills needed for today's workplace. The 4Cs: creativity, critical thinking, collaboration and communication are among the skills they have in mind. These abilities are not nurtured in environments where students are told what to do and where they have virtually no meaningful say in decisions that affect them. Cultural creatives need to form partnerships with employers. They could seek employers to sponsor courses like [The Learning Expedition](#) offered by Evolving Education. It's designed to inform educators, facilitators and parents about how to support young people's development of key life skills, like autonomy, empathy and critical thinking. As is the case with school councils, the more that cultural creatives unite, the more they can support each other in this kind of endeavour and define how to make partnerships with employers mutually beneficial. Sympathetic foundations might similarly be approached to provide financial assistance for people ushering in a new age of learning and living together.

## Concluding Remarks

There are healthy and unhealthy forms of competition. Faith Hill gives a sense of the healthy in her song *I Want You*. "A champion wants a challenger who might just have the strength to take him down." It expresses respect for the challenger and the desire of the champion to keep on learning. Grades as used by schools create an unhealthy form of competition. Best friends may withhold knowledge from the other in order to obtain the higher grade. It fosters a me-first mentality and creates feelings of superiority and inferiority in life generally based on very narrow criteria. Cooperative and project-based learning are gaining attention as ways to get beyond the ill-effects of grades. Competition is absent in situations where students are enthusiastically collaborating on tasks of genuine common interest.

It is known that humanitarian organizations fighting the same cause compete for dollars much as students compete for grades. Funding for their cause is limited and they each want as big a share of it as they can get. This is the case with organizations established by cultural creatives as defined here. They compete for limited funds and time. Time is a critical factor. People have only so much to share and cannot actively support every worthy effort. By uniting, cultural creatives can turn this unhealthy competition into healthy cooperation. The goal becomes one of growing memberships by working collaboratively to attract more people to the cause as opposed to actions that limit each other.

There are cultural creatives spending considerable time and energy lobbying elected officials to enact measures that respect students' rights. These elected people are also most commonly



the products of authoritarian schools and their success leaves them believing that the schooling they received works. The effort required to turn their thinking enough to champion even a small change can be enormous, and their support can be very fleeting depending on the political flavour of the day. It's important to continue these efforts for the gains they achieve, but cultural creatives need to put far greater thought and energy into fielding and electing candidates who are already the champions they need. The campaigns of these champions can be designed to build public awareness of the need to transform education and how it can be done. Progress gets made win or lose. By uniting, the cultural creatives can make great headway on this front. Currently, if these champions take it upon themselves to run, they are likely to feel ostracized in their communities and hung out to dry by their global community of cultural creatives.

In conclusion, cultural creatives have got to take matters into their own hands. Schools train us to think that other people will look after us and provide solutions to our problems. We go into adulthood with the mindset that we just need to do as we are told. There is no saviour other than us collectively saving ourselves. It is incumbent on all of us not to just do as we are told, but to do what is right and just, and to offload our problems onto someone else to solve is childish. In short, we have to overcome the school system that keeps people infantile.