On The Cusp of a Movement

How the Rights-Centric Education Network Offers to Accelerate the Emergence of a Community of Practice

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This paper is presented as a contribution to the global debate about a new social contract for education. It is written in support of the Rights-Centric Education Network and the dedicated people working to pull education into alignment with the evolution of human rights. It aims to speak unfiltered truth, but everyone has their own truth, and so it is to be taken for what it's worth. One truth, common to many, is that we cannot keep going down the path we are on. This has been known for decades, and now we are running out of time to turn things around.

The path to recovery is not easy. Tough problems need to be defined, and when people are identified as the problem they can feel blamed and respond unconstructively. The fact is, none of us are innocent, and as much as is possible, we need to stay focused on solutions.

People who have been discussing the problems in education for some time complain that we don't need another talkfest, that what we need is action. In fact, we need both. Much talk is needed for the uninformed to position themselves to act, but for those who want action, then it is for them to act. They need to find their tribes in their neighbourhoods and insist on learning options that respect human rights. Where community schools remain intransigent, efforts need to be made elsewhere to get public resources flowing from the old regime to the pioneers of the new who provide learning environments grounded in human right.

This document is based on the following premises:

1. The full entrenchment of human rights is central to putting our civilization on a firmer footing.
2. Public education is an essential institution for cultivating healthy democracies, but in its current form it is not serving this function.
3. The required learning environments for strengthening democracies are ones that are democratic.
4. Adultism is so deeply ingrained in much of the world that change will be evolutionary.
5. Extended lived-experience in well-developed, self-directed learning environments is the best way for young and old to accelerate liberating themselves from adultism.
6. If public education is to cultivate human flourishing to its fullest, its schools need to become the hubs of local learning ecosystems that include their entire communities and beyond. With current technology these local learning ecosystems can be networked to create a vibrant global learning ecosystem.

To help convey that the number of people working to pull education into alignment with human rights is substantial, this document references the work of many of them, and yet it includes only a small fraction of all the activity going on too much out of sight of the general public.

This paper is divided into the following three parts:

Part 1: The Nature of Largescale Social Change
To understand the problem with education, it needs to be viewed from an historical perspective. The work of Thomas Kuhn on paradigm shifts and the subsequent Two Loops Model are drawn on to illustrate that public education is in the midst of a paradigm shift where conventional schooling remains dominant despite a wealth of knowledge indicating that it is fundamentally flawed. Helping the old regime to die with dignity is presented as critical to accelerating the adoption of the new regime.

Part 2: The Simplified CHIP Program
The CHIP Program ran for two years under the roof of a publicly funded secondary school. It gave twenty-five grades ten to twelve mainstream student substantially more control over their learning. Details of the program and what it revealed about how to transform education are the primary topics of this section of the paper.

Part 3: Research and What Cannot Be Unseen
The dominant education paradigm not only controls the kind of education provided for young people; it also controls what kinds of research is undertaken, and rarely does it fund research that challenges its basic assumptions. Thomas Kuhn observed that paradigms compete and dominant ones will do what they can to keep contenders out of sight. Given the widespread dissatisfaction with conventional schooling and the benefits to rights-centric education, the playing field needs to be leveled. Research money needs to flow as freely to those studying education based on human rights as it does to those studying how to make conventional schools more effective. This part of the paper also presents a sampling of fundamental flaws in how conventional schools operate. The more aware people become of these flaws the more likely they will be to exert pressure on the authorities to genuinely and vigorously conduct studies that explore the possibilities of rights-centric education.

Prologue – Another Inconvenient Truth[1]

Herman Melville said of Moby Dick,

"This whole book is but a draught - nay, but a draught of a draught.
Oh, Time, Strength, Cash, and Patience!" [2]

This document is also but a draught of a draught. Melville made his statement in reference to the unfolding story of whales. This document is about the unfolding story of human rights and how they play in education. Its starting point is the Free School Movement of the 1960s. An AI overview of the "Movement" describes it as "a grassroots educational reform movement that took place in the United States and Canada in the 1960s and 1970s. The movement sought to change the traditional school system by creating alternative, independent schools that emphasized student freedom, autonomy, and independence."[3]

A flavour of the times was captured by George Leonard in *Education and Ecstasy,*[4] one of many books about education published at that time. It started with these words:

"Teachers are overworked and underpaid. True. It is an exacting and exhausting business,
this damming up the flood of human potentialities."

In the more than half century since Leonard wrote this, the "damning up the flood of human potentiality" continues with students today appearing to be no better off, and some argue worse off than they were in the 1960s, despite all that has been learned about child development and human rights in the intervening years. So why is this still the case?

Jonathan Kozol in his 1972 second printing of Free Schools,[5] points to the answer with this 1969 statement from George Dennison[6]:

"One hears more frequently now of parents banding together, finding teachers, and starting
little schools . . . There are no signs that a movement exists,
but there are many signs that one might . . ."

Amazingly, there are still no signs that a movement exists. The proponents of what is now a clearly defined new social contract for education have failed to create a movement. Ironically, they wonder how it is that people can't see something so obvious as children needing to be in

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[1] This title is used with reference to the documentary film about climate change titled *An Inconvenient Truth,* which was inspired by the work of Al Gore.
[2] Melville, H. (2022). *Moby Dick: The Original 1851 Edition.* Printed by Amazon.
[3] Obtained from a Google search using the term "Free School Movement" on November 26, 2024.
[4] Leonard, G. (1968). *Education and Ecstasy.* Dell Publishing, New York.
[5] Kozol, J. (1972). *Free Schools.* Houghton Mifflin, Boston.
[6] George Dennison was an American novelist best known for *The Lives of Children*: The Story of the First Street School. (1970). Internet Archives. Retrieved on November 30, 2024 from https://archive.org/stream/LivesOfChildren-English-GeorgeDennison/LivesofChildren_djvu.txt.

charge of their learning, while they remain unable to see that they are complicit in education remaining so much the same. They, for whatever reasons, seem to be oblivious to the fact that all their proselytizing without a movement amounts to nothing more than noise from the fringes.

Although public education has remained fundamentally unchanged, research on brain development, multiple intelligences, neurodiversity, and a growing number of exemplary prototypes of what could become a vibrant learning planet are telling us that *we* must find the capacity to transform the system before it self-destructs. One of the most promising signs that a movement might materialize is the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on November 20th, 1989. A reading of the Convention leads to the conclusion that traditional schools are systemically violating the rights of children and youth to the point of being criminal. People in the 1960s did not have the Convention to support their arguments.

Well-meaning people perpetuating the injustices are likely to stop reading this opinion paper at this point. In their minds they are doing what is right for children and it is unfathomable, and just too painful to entertain the thought that what they are doing amounts to crimes against humanity. Worse, and what will sound utterly outrageous to people steeped in adultism, conventional schools are incubators for man's inhumanity to man. The "power over" nature of schools is reflected in the bullying that occurs as the oppressed become oppressors and troubled victims cry out with extreme acts of self-mutilation, suicide and school shootings. With too little appreciation for human rights, adults think that being caring and nice to children equates to helping them thrive. Many have no idea that they too are victims of a system that fails to cultivate human flourishing because it is designed to produce servants of the economy, the latter actually best achieved by achieving the former.[7] This is not to say that all educators are unaware of how traditional schools are failing. Many are leaving public education while others feel trapped in something they can do nothing about. Liberating oneself from years of schooling and a deeply entrenched global mindset is a difficult process that does not happen overnight. A good way to accelerate the liberation is to acquire extended lived-experience in mature democratic schools where people are accustomed to directing their own learning in community with others. A sense of the overall wellbeing of learners in these schools can be a stark contrast to that of learners in conventional schools, and a sense of wellbeing frees a person to learn at full capacity.

Following are four recent concrete developments that suggest a movement might be hatching. In 2021, UNESCO published a report titled *Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education*[8] that aims to catalyze a global debate about transforming education. Recognizing the need for this debate, the Learning Planet Institute[9] created the annual Learning Planet Festival[10] held in conjunction with the January 24th International Day of Education. The

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[7] One of the best studies to support this claim is titled, *Democratic Schooling: What Happens to Young People Who Have Charge of Their Own Learning.* It was published by Peter Gray and David Chanoff in the American Journal of Education, Vol. 94, No. 2, (Feb., 1986), pp. 182-213, The University of Chicago Press. Retrieved November 26, 2024 from http://www.alternatifokullar.com/files/2014/01/dem_oku_mak_gray_chanoff.pdf

[8] UNESCO. (2021). *Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education.* https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379707

[9] The Learning Planet Institute: *Facing the challenges of today and tomorrow: co-creating a learning society*: https://www.learningplanetinstitute.org/en/what-we-believe-in/

[10] The Learning Planet Festival: https://www.learning-planet.org/learningplanet-festival/

Festival is organized as a global, decentralised invitation for individuals and organizations to autonomously design and submit their event onto the Festival's platform. It serves as an example of how people can organize in a way that shares the workload and allows them to express themselves in whatever way they choose, whether it be lecture, workshop, a drama production, singing and dancing, and the events can be in-person, virtual or hybrid. It holds great promise and is what everyone decide to make of it.

The second development is the 2019 Two Loops Model video.[11] It has been said that it is a bitter person who tries to live outside their time in history. Knowing one's time enables a person to better manage their emotions and direct their energies in a most positive manner. It produces some of the wisdom necessary to live according to Reinhold Niebuhr's Serenity Prayer.

> *"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."*

In less than fifteen minutes the video presents the nature of a paradigm shift. It shows how paradigms compete, how dominant ones go into decline as they increasingly prove to be inadequate, and how the scattered voices of a contender come together into a community of practice that constitutes the movement ultimately replacing the old regime.

Third is the coining of the term "conscious collaboration"[12] by World Systems Solutions founder John Jones. Well-exercised, it can establish a movement and accelerate it once formed. It amounts to a recipe for how to create the community of practice needed to make change happen.

The creation of the Rights-Centric Education Network is the fourth concrete development that recently emerged with over 160 founding members. In essence, it is an ally of the United Nations helping to achieve human rights goals. It is not an organization as such, but rather an invitation to everyone who wants to see education pulled into alignments with human rights to help grow a movement. Put in terms of the Two Loops Model, it equates to establishing the critical final stage of the education paradigm shift, the community of practice with human rights as the special something that binds it, the community of practice that gets resources flowing from the old regime to the new. It is driven by more than doing the right thing for children and youth. It is above all about respecting the inherent rights of nature. This paper is based on the belief that the health of the planet in all its forms is dependent upon the full implementation of human rights. If we are individually disconnected from our humanity, all that we touch will be at risk, and it is illogical to think that there is anything more important than insuring young people do not become disconnected from themselves. The term "becoming human" is a symptom of something gone wrong. We begin life human.

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[11] Systems Innovation. (2019). *Two Loops Model*. [Video], YouTube. Retrieved November 24, 2024 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LQWKmtx8L2s
[12] Jones, J. *Conscious Collaboration*. Retrieved December 16, 2024 from https://wssnow.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Conscious-Collaboration-4.pdf

Part 1 - The Nature of Largescale Social Change

Humans are slow to receive messages. Years ago while giving a keynote address at a gathering of educators, William Purkey, the author of *Inviting School Success,*[13] said, "If you ever wonder whether or not to give a message, give it anyway. You never know when it will be received." The fact that we have put ourselves in peril by taking so long to receive the message about climate change tells us that delays can carry a heavy price. James Moffett was far from the first when he delivered another important message over thirty years ago and signs are only now starting to appear that the general public is receiving it. He warned,

> *Far from creating an enlightened electorate, compulsory state-set education has resulted in a populace that is currently throwing democracy away.*[14]

We have never had fully democratic nations, and it would not be wrong to label even the best of them as fledgling. Inequities and inequalities plague them all and leave them vulnerable to tyrants. But democracy is the form of governance that promises to honour human rights, and that promise will not be realized without embedding those rights IN education. The recent coming together of people under the title of the Rights-Centric Education Network expresses this belief with its aim "to pull education into alignment with the evolution of human rights." Including the word "evolution" is to acknowledge that much work needs to be done to entrench the human rights of all people.

Coercion is the devil and it is thriving in education today turning the young into commodities for the economy and consumers for those who seek to accumulate monetary wealth on the backs of working people. This detaching of people from themselves by use of extrinsic motivations is creating a sick world where mental health is alarmingly wanting. The Ottawa branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association lists social justice and self-determination as its top two core values. Social justice translates to everyone feeling respected. Wherever one goes, they feel neither superior nor inferior to others. Self-determination is about people having the freedom to unfold their own unique blueprints while respecting the rights of others to do the same. Addressing the mental health problem is therefore dependent upon people appreciating that:

> *Mental Health = Social Justice + Self-Determination*

This little formula is a key to healing our people and our planet. Applying it is the challenge. Public awareness building campaigns can have some effect, but ultimately it will require providing people with opportunities to gain extended lived experience in environments based on social justice and self-determination. Former Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau once said that the government has no business in the bedrooms of the nation. By this he meant that the

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[13] Purkey, W. (1978). *Inviting School Success: A Self-concept Approach to Teaching and Learning.* Wadsworth Publishing Company, Missouri, USA.
[14] Moffett, J. (1994). *The Universal Schoolhouse; Spiritual Awakening Through Education* (p.5). Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco.

home is sacrosanct. Families get to decide what goes on in them according to their cultures and beliefs. The state is only to step in to protect the vulnerable from serious abuse. This makes public education the primary place to guarantee young people the opportunity to experience life in environments grounded in social justice and self-determination. Thanks to countless pioneers, primarily outside public education, we know the nature of these environments. The challenge is to make them mainstream in time to heal our planet and strengthen our democracies before we self-destruct. Zak Stein, author of *Education in a Time Between Worlds*,[15] says civilizations are mortal. In times of crisis, they either find a way to reboot themselves or they collapse. This is what is at stake.

A talk by Ken Robinson[16] recorded at the start of the COVID pandemic shortly before he died supports much of the above, and something he says is, "I think the planet is going to be fine. *We* may not make it, but the planet will." We aren't fighting for the planet. We are fighting to keep it habitable for human beings. There are those who go a step beyond Ken saying that the planet would be better off without us. Let us not for the sake of our children and grandchildren allow this thought to take hold. We must do what we can to secure for them lives worth living.

Insights into the nature of the learning environments that nourish human flourishing are provided below, but first, a look at what is happening in education today is needed to put them into perspective.

The Paradigm Shift of Greatest Consequence

The term "paradigm shift" was coined by Thomas Kuhn in his 1962 book titled *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.*[17] The book became a sensation among academics, but it is a difficult read and not something that would be tackled by most people. The term however became common although too few people appreciate the depth it was intended to convey. It became so trivialized and overused that an editor of a social justice publication said she was no longer accepting articles that used the term. A high school principal serves as an example of what the editor was finding. He was presenting to his staff a new form of report card that public school teachers were being required to use and he referred to it as a complete paradigm shift. People need to have in mind something much more significant.

The Two Loops Model video, mentioned in the Prologue, presents the scope of a paradigm shift. Its creator, Systems Innovation Network[18] credits Margaret Wheatley and Deborah Frieze from The Berkana Institute[19] as having first pointed to this model in their paper titled Using Emergence to Take Social Innovation to Scale.[20] The following draws on the model using much

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[15] Zak Stein, (2019). *Education in a Time Between Worlds*. Bright Alliance, USA.

[16] Robinson, K. (2020). *My thoughts for the Call to Unite*. [Video], YouTube. Retrieved November 24, 2024 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QU4Q17t4muY

[17] Kuhn, T. (1962). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

[18] Systems Innovation Network website. Retrieved December 2, 2024 from https://www.systemsinnovation.network/spaces/13504261/page

[19] The Berkana Institute website. Retrieved December 2, 2024 from https://berkana.org

[20] Wheatley, M. & Frieze, D. (n.d.). *Using Emergence to Take Social Innovation to Scale*. Berkana Institute. Retrieved November 24, 2024 from https://www.margaretwheatley.com/articles/using-emergence.pdf

of its language to present the idea that the movement we need will evolve from establishing a community of practice with human rights being the special something that binds it.

Change comes with its own set of problems. The automobile was hailed as the solution to the problem of streets littered with horse manure, but now we're faced with the problem of having moved the pollution from the ground to the air. The more we can understand the nature of a problem and what appear to be promising solutions, the more we can steer change in the most positive direction. This is true of the education dilemma and the starting point for solving it is to consider the potential of public education.

Public schools can be a force for the common good, community builders cultivating equity and inclusion while celebrating diversity. They can lay foundations for healthy democracies with flourishing populations. They carry the dream of everyone pulling together and looking out for each other. They also already have in place the funding and resources the new regime requires. Starting something new from the ground up is a more difficult proposition than correcting what exists. It is still to be determined if those in control of public education will permit a full exploration of rights-centric education, and if not, then they will impose upon the rest of us the more difficult route to transforming education. It would result in them becoming the losers in changing times, like the Luddites who could not read the future.

Like the streets of cities before the automobile, public education is a mess that needs to be cleaned up. To provide their children with healthier spaces, parents are resorting to homeschooling, starting micro schools, and paying for private schools deemed to be more suitable. To help stem the exodus from public education, some school districts are offering school choice. These are options that people know have the downsides of disassociating children from their neighbourhood friends and ending their participation in extra-curricular activities that were meaningful to them. They are also aware that turning children into commuters when they could be walking to school with siblings and friends is not ideal, but as was the case with the automobile, there are downsides that are not so obvious. The exodus is creating worrisome visions of fragmented societies where schools form on the basis of race, religion, elitism or special interests such as the arts where talent is congregated in its own somewhat closed community diminishing the prospects of it enriching the lives of others. It also conjures up thoughts of people descending even further into a me-first mentality with parents competitively shopping around for the best learning options for their own children with little regard for the children of others, a phenomenon that widens the gap between the haves and the have-nots.

The answer is not to force children to attend unsuitable public schools. It is in transforming public education into an institute based on human rights, or in replacing it with some other publicly funded institution such as libraries to become the hubs of local learning ecosystems. As already mentioned, the least disruptive option would be for schools to become the hubs, but as is said in the Two Loops Model video, the longer people remains in denial, adhering to old practices that are fundamentally flawed, the more difficult change will be.

Choice is fundamental to democracy and so it needs to be fundamental in education. As with the term "paradigm shift" being only superficially understood, choice in education is also poorly understood. School choice for example is not real choice. It can be nothing more than trading one

conventional school for another thought to be better, plus it has the above mentioned downsides. Real choice provides for learners to pursue what they most want to learn in the ways that are most suitable and convenient to them. This is what self-directed, democratic schools offer and there is no reason community schools cannot work on this basis other than adults being obstacles to it. Yaacov Hecht[21], the founder of the first school to be called democratic, is now opening people's imaginations to the idea of education cities[22] inspired by Charles Montgomery's book *Happy Cities*[23], where one's entire surroundings and beyond are the place of learning. In a short video by Wondering School, Yaacov describes his vision.[24] Local libraries or transformed public schools could be the launchpads for endless learning possibilities while giving young people a place to belong, a strong sense of community and of being cared for while learning to care for others.

People who have left public education and are providing private schools that respect students' rights and promote the democratic way of life need not shudder at what has been said about school choice. They are the pioneers of possibilities who have illuminated the kinds of learning environments children need if they are to thrive. So long as people cannot find in public education what they need, those who have options really have no option but to pursue them. While public school educators continue to ignore what is in front of them, the public must demand that the resources of the old regime flow freely to those paving the path to human flourishing. If the pioneers of possibilities are freed from the mundane tasks of trying to keep their projects financially viable, they could dedicate themselves entirely to what Thomas Kuhn called the normal science of a paradigm. It is all the work that goes into solving the problems arising from developing a paradigm to its fullest. In tangible terms, it is what took flight from an idea first demonstrated with the Kitty Hawk to where it is today. No one could have imagined back in 1903 what flight would become. In education there are the equivalents of many post Kitty Hawks flying in the form of democratic learning centres, and visions are forming of what they could become if human ingenuity were fully unleased to establish a learning planet. Some of the documented early prototypes are Summerhill[25], Self-Managed Learning College[26], North

[21] Hetcht, Y, (2020). *Democratic Education with Yaacov Hecht*. Child Friendly Community Conference, [video]. Retrieved December 16, 2024 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnN-js2uvwc. Yaacov is also the author of *Democratic Education: A Beginning of a Story*. (2010). Developing a Culture of Innovation Company Ltd, Israel.

[22] Education Cities. HundrED. Retrieved on December 16, 2024 from https://hundred.org/en/innovations/education-cities

[23] Montgomery, C. (2013). *Happy City: Transforming Our Lives Through Urban Design*. Penguin Books, Canada.

[24] Hecht, Y. (2020). *Democratic Education & Education Cities - Yaacov Hecht*. Wondering School, Brazil. Retrieved on December 16, 2024 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YVethJuT9JU
 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YVethJuT9JU

[25] Summerhill. Retrieved on Dec. 21, 2024 from https://www.summerhillschool.co.uk. A.S. Neill founded Summerhill in 1921 and is considered to be the first school operating on self-directed learning. His book *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing* (1960). Hart Publishing, NY. has greatly influenced the development of self-directed learning.

[26] Self-Managed Learning College. Retrieved on December 19, 2024 from https://smlcollege.org.uk. Ian Cunningham founded SML College in the early 1970's and has written extensively about it. Among his many publications is *Self Managed Learning and the New Educational Paradigm* (2021). Routledge, UK.

Star[27], and two of the Sudbury International[28] schools, the original Sudbury Valley School[29] and the Sudbury School Amersfoort[30]. The School Circles film[31] is a notable additional reference that documents how sociocracy is applied in several schools in the Netherlands where students are self-directed. The flexibility of these learning environments makes them ideal for exploring the limits of local learning ecosystems.

It can be anticipated that as these pioneers more fully illuminate how powerful local learning ecosystems can be, they will become available in more and more communities. Public school boards need to weigh if they can secure their futures by proactively making their schools the hubs of local learning ecosystems. Failing to do so, could spell their demise and put society through a more disruptive and less predictable change process than necessary. As for those running democratic schools, they need to see themselves as more than providing a better option to some children. They are "cultural creatives"[32] ushering in a new age, and they might best achieve their end goal by seizing opportunities to work with public school administrators who want to pursue with them a society well-grounded in human rights and democratic values. This time between worlds can be shortened if people are not too idealistic. Pilot programs presented further on in this paper provide examples of how some compromise can result in greater progress than in being overly hard core.

We are at a crossroads in education and it requires us to be clear about its purpose. We can choose the path that pursues possibilities for bringing us together, or we can allow the trend that divides us to continue. We went from the horse to the car in what can be described as default mode, just taking what comes without much foresight. It is possible that if we do not proactively steer the transformation of education towards human rights that it will evolve to serve dictators rather than nourish a democratic way of life.

While many people have given up on public education, UNESCO and the Learning Planet Institute[33] are giving hope to those who believe it can be transformed. This document is in large part inspired by the UNESCO report titled *Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education*[34], and another report published collaboratively by the Learning Planet

[27] North Star. Retrieved on December 20, 2024 from https://www.northstarteens.org/liberated-learners-movement. Ken Danford writes about the developing Liberated Learners movement in *Learning is Natural, School Is Optional*. (2019). Golden Door Press, MA, US.

[28] Sudbury International. Retrieved on Dec. 21, 2024 from https://www.sudbury-international.org

[29] Sudbury Valley School. Retrieved on December 21, 2024 from https://sudburyvalley.org. Daniel Greenberg wrote extensively about the Sudbury Valley School. One of his books *Free at Last* (1987) (Sudbury Valley School Press, MA) provides answers to many of the questions people have about non-coercive learning.

[30] Sudbury School Amersfoort. Retrieved on December 21, 2024 from https://sudburyschoolamersfoort.nl. Peter Hartkamp founded this school in 2007. In his book *Beyond Coercive Education: A plea for the realisation of the rights of the child in education* (2016) (The Quantum Company, Netherlands) he presents eleven myths about conventional education.

[31] Shread, C. and Osorio. (2018). *School Circles* [Documentary film]. Retrieved on December 19, 2024 from https://schoolcirclesfilm.com

[32] The term "cultural creatives" is used with reference to the documentary film The (R)evolution - Cultural Creatives. Retrieved on December 6, 2024 from https://vimeo.com/121432700. It is about people who are breaking from the norms. Unschoolers and people providing democratic learning environments fit the definition.

[33] The Learning Planet Institute: *Facing the challenges of today and tomorrow: co-creating a learning society*. Retrieved on December 22, 2024 from https://www.learningplanetinstitute.org/en/what-we-believe-in/

[34] UNESCO. (2021). *Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education*. Retrieved on November 6, 2024 from https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379707

Institute, Global Education Leaders Partnership[35] and Dream a Dream[36] titled *Exploring Local Learning Ecosystems in the Global South: Pathways to thriving for every child*[37]. The aim of the UNESCO report is to catalyze a global debate about transforming education and nowhere do we see this aim being more promisingly pursued than with the Learning Planet Alliance[38] and the annual Learning Planet Festival[39].

UNESCO and the Institute work from a big picture perspective that links education to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)[40]. The vision is of education that cultivates a global population with the capacity to overcome the challenges we face. The scope of the worldwide change being sought is a paradigm shift of the greatest magnitude, far beyond that of the Copernican Revolution in how it affects our daily lives and our existence. It's a change that challenges all who have grown up within the walls of conventional schooling to change themselves. The global debate is intended to help people overcome old mindsets to freely imagine the possibilities. The visions that emerge don't need to be vivid images of final destinations, but rather visions of the frontier to be explored, the frontier that constitutes the endless quest for social and environmental justice. A thought to keep in mind is: "If education is key to establishing a flourishing global population and securing its future, it follows that mis-education has played a big role in putting our civilization in peril."

Hospicing the Culprits

Speaking informally to a group gathered in the cafeteria of the Long Island University Post campus while there to give a keynote address at an annual AERO conference[41], Sugata Mitra, best known for his Hole In the Wall[42] experiment in a New Delhi slum, said with respect to change, "You have to look after the culprits." By this he meant that the people who perpetuate the old system and who are resistant to change need to be respected. They too are sons and daughters who are victims of conventional schooling. The Two Loops Model video puts it in terms of hospicing – helping the old regime "to die with dignity". The challenge requires that together we pursue the needed solutions with the open-mindedness defined by the great John Dewey.[43]

Open-mindedness is the active desire to listen to more sides than one;
to give heed to the facts from whatever sources they come;

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[35] The Global Education Leaders' Partnership (GELP) is a global network of leaders of education systems, institutions and capacity-building organisations: https://www.gelpglobal.org

[36] Dream a Dream is a non-profit organization helping young people facing some of the most adverse circumstances to thrive: https://dreamadream.org

[37] Global Education Leaders Partnership, Dream a Dream and The Learning Planet Institute. (2023). *Exploring Local Learning Ecosystems in the Global South: Pathways to thriving for every child*. Retrieved on November 7, 2024 from *https://drive.google.com/file/d/1PmRUCQ5JcQ-6KVYBkipN0uNDXfe3GIV4/view*

[38] The Learning Planet Alliance: https://www.learning-planet.org/partners/

[39] The Learning Planet Festival: https://www.learning-planet.org/learningplanet-festival/

[40] United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. https://sdgs.un.org/goals

[41] AERO is the Alternative Education Resource Organization founded by Jerry Mintz over thirty years ago to promote young people being in charge of their learning: https://www.educationrevolution.org

[42] *Sugata Mitra & The Hole In the Wall - 2013 TED Prize winner*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HE5GX3U3BYQ

[43] Visit https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Dewey for a brief account of John Dewey's contribution to educational philosophy.

to give full attention to alternative possibilities;
and to recognize the possibility of error even in the beliefs that are dearest to us.[44]

One way to look at the challenge of transforming education is through the lens of the scarcity versus the abundance mentality.[45] The scarcity mentality is consumed with a lack of resources while that of abundance seeks new possibilities even if resources are lacking. They compare to the commonly known fixed versus growth mindsets[46].

A major obstacle to public education transforming itself is that teacher unions remain too much under the spell of the scarcity mentality, and this could not be more evident than in the documentary film *Backpack Full of Cash*[47]. The film presents good arguments for maintaining public education and it rightly portrays public school educators as dedicated, talented and decent people doing their best under difficult circumstances, but it clings to the idea that all can be made right with more funding. While there is no question that some schools are underfunded, it's not the reason that public education is in crisis. The film unwittingly depicts the teaching profession as its own worst enemy. It is almost devoid of any thinking about student voice, community learning ecosystems and how subjecting young people to years of authoritarian rule isn't the way to foster wellbeing, democratic societies, and people with the capacity to solve the pressing problems threatening our very existence. It promotes school as usual with students having little say in their education, dutifully doing as told, and as having bought unquestioningly into conventional schooling. Only a brief mention of project-based learning in Union City public schools gives any hint that the people behind the film have given serious thought to how schools need to be different. Without a change in the mentality of those leading the teaching profession, it is hard to imagine that civilizational collapse can be avoided.

Another aspect of the film that needs scrutiny is its claim that corporations are attempting to privatize education. The Walmart Foundation[48], the Gates Foundation[49] and the Broad Foundation[50] are all accused of being forces attempting to dismantling public education by investing in private charter schools. Charter schools were originally created to be learning labs that would inform public educators about how to better meet the needs of students and society in general. The documentary presents evidence that charter schools are failing to fulfil that purpose, but it cannot be concluded that corporations investing in them have motives other than to help with the pursuit of a new social contract for education that is good for all. Take for example the Gates Foundation funding of the Empowering Student Voice in Educational Practice: Student Voice to Student Outcomes[51] research project. It was led by Dana Mitra, a Professor of Education Policy Studies at the Pennsylvania State University and founding editor of

[44] Watkinson, A. (1999) *Education, Student Rights and the Charter*. Purich Publishing, Saskatoon, SK. p.12.
https://www.amazon.ca/Education-Student-Rights-Charter-Watkinson/dp/1895830133
[45] The idea of scarcity versus abundance mentality was first introduced by Stephen Covey in his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. (2004). Free Press, Washing, D.C.
[46] Dweck, C. (2007) *Mindset,* Ballantine Books. NY.
[47] Mondale, S. (Director). (2016). *Backpack Full of Cash*. Stone Lantern Films and Turnstone Productions, Nyack, NY.
Retrieved on December 23, 2024 from https://www.backpackfullofcash.com
[48] The Walmart Foundation: https://walmart.org
[49] The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation: https://www.gatesfoundation.org
[50] The Eli and Edy Broad Foundation: https://broadfoundation.org
[51] Mitra, D. et al. *Empowering Student Voice in Educational Practice: Student Voice to Student Outcomes.*
https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1V3GSii1kzbjulPXj1S8TK7Cw58ns6DTpe6hnuRtd2Uo/edit#slide=id.p

the *International Journal of Student Voice*[52] and co-editor of *The American Journal of Education*[53]. The funding of this research was not motivated by corporate greed. It was about helping to transform education for the common good. Of note is the number of organizations that have already joined the Learning Planet Alliance,[54] and as the alliance becomes better known, it can be anticipated that corporations will increasingly join as partners, further dispelling the notion spread by the film that big business is not genuinely wanting to fix education in a good way.

It is said that the worst people to clean up a mess are the ones that created it, and this is perhaps the story behind the failure of charter schools. The vast majority of them were not fundamentally different from conventional schools because the people who founded and manned them had little to no knowledge or vision of what human rights IN education entails. They were steeped in adultism and didn't know it. It was, however, a noble endeavor that does not need to be abandoned. What is needed is that the money for charter schools flows to those running democratic schools and self-directed learning centers, the people who are demonstrating that they can imagine something that promises to accomplish what charter schools were created to do.

The film in effect is also a disservice to dedicated public school educators who are not content with status quo and who are trying to bring about change. Jackie Scully[55] and Amy Bowker[56] are two frontline educators, not unlike the authors of *The Wisdom of Nurses: Stories of Grit From the Front Lines*,[57] who speak for many in their profession. Jackie and Amy have been working within the system to grow the education debate with an eye to creating opportunities for teachers to test out promising ideas. The more that others like them can find each other and collectively become a distinct partner in the global debate about a new social contract for education, the more the mentality in public education will shift to one of abundance. Perhaps within the not too distant future, a new documentary produced by public school teachers who have an abundance mentality will stimulate people's imaginations about the possibilities when innovative teachers are unleashed.

The Two Loop Model video warns that an "old regime will get a sense for the new and try to copy it based upon the old logic." We see this in schools that claim to honour student voice with project based learning. The students may be given a say in what topic their class will undertake. They might have a choice between studying about bears or about whales, and once the decision has been made, all of the students are expected to fall into line, because, after all, it was a student decision made democratically.

We also see this lack of appreciation for what constitutes genuine student voice when it comes to Student Councils. One school board states that they "help to communicate students' opinions,

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[52] *International Journal of Student Voice.* https://ijsv.psu.edu/
[53] *The American Journal of Education.* https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/journals/aje/about
[54] A list of the Learning Planet Alliance partners is found at https://www.learning-planet.org/partners/. Retrieved on December 23, 2024.
[55] Jackie Scully: https://www.jackiecscully.com
[56] Amy Bowker: https://www.amyebowker.com
[57] Archibald-Varley, A. and Fung, S. (2024). *The Wisdom of Nurses: Stories of Grit From the Front Lines.* HarperCollins. Canada. https://www.harpercollins.ca/9781443468718/the-wisdom-of-nurses/

interests, and concerns. They are the student voice. Students want student councils to be all-inclusive, share leadership and focus on students' concerns and priorities." The board then adds that, " With the support of adult partners, students are working together to create genuine engagement between themselves and their school communities. This includes helping to raise funds for school-wide activities, promoting social events, championing community projects and helping people in need." [58] There is no hint of students being able to question the very nature of learning nor the relations students might like to have with their teachers. It is a reflection of the teacher mentality conveyed in *A Backpack Full of Cash*. The entire webpage on Student Councils and student voice amounts to only 123 words. This number alone reveals how little regard there is for student voice by dispensing with the topic so frivolously. A search of the school board website using the term "student agency" resulted in a list with a link at the top to a twenty-five page document titled Promoting Positive Student Behaviour[59] that did not mention student voice even once. Other search terms applied to the board's website such as "student rights" and "youth empowerment" were equally fruitless revealing that the board had little more than a very dim sense of the new paradigm. People searching other school board websites with the same terms are likely to get similar results.

What we see from this look at student voice and how old regimes are trying to copy the new based on old logic is tokenism and manipulation. In general, the old are either ignoring or failing to grasp what Adam Fletcher says in Facing Adultism[60], which is an introduction to how adults discriminate against youth. His handbook titled Ladder of Meaningful Student Involvement [61] is an invaluable resource for those wanting to evolve schools into democratic institutions. Its ladder was inspired by Roger Hart's Ladder of Children's Participation[62] first published in the 1992 UNICEF document Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship,[63] but Adam takes Hart's work to a new level with insights into how to manage, in rights respecting ways, the complex relationships that exist within today's schools. In his latest book, Democracy Deficit Disorder,[64] he argues that the assault on democracies currently taking place throughout the world is best countered by authentically including young people as equal partners in daily life. Helping the teaching profession to overcome adultism corresponds to hospicing. Ridding oneself of deeply ingrained attitudes and behaviours is difficult, but the revival of public education and the restoration of faith in democracy depend on it.[65]

[58] These quotes come from the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board webpage about Student Councils. Retrieved on December 26, 2024 from https://www.ocdsb.ca/secondary/beyond_the_classroom/student_council. .

[59] *Promoting Positive Student Behaviour*. (Update April 30, 2024). Ottawa-Carleton District School Board. Retrieved on December 27, 2024 from https://www.ocdsb.ca/workspaces/one.aspx?objectid=2594974

[60] Fletcher, A. (2015) *Facing Adultism*. CommonAction Publishing. https://adamfletcher.net/books/facing-adultism-by-adam-fletcher/

[61] Fletcher, A. (2015). *Ladder of Meaningful Student Involvement*. SoundOut, Estacada, Oregon. https://soundout.org/2015/02/02/ladder-of-student-involvement/

[62] Ladder of Children's Participation – Organizing Engagement. Organizing Engagement The Ladder was conceived of in 1969 by Shelley Arnstein: https://www.citizenshandbook.org/arnsteinsladder.html

[63] Hart, R. A. (1992). *Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship*. Florence, Italy: United Nations Children's Fund International Child Development Centre, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/227219?ln=en

[64] Fletcher, A. and McDermott, J.C. (2023), *Democracy Deficit Disorder*. Peter Lang, New York, https://www.peterlang.com/document/1334750

[65] For more on adultism, see the spring 2024 special issue of Taboo: *The Journal of Culture and Education*: https://taboo-journal.com/2024/03/10/taboo-the-journal-of-culture-and-education-volume-22-number-1-spring-2024/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAAR2HpGEjSAwoeqKlhnmucNVFDqwbi0Wc0eCKV5KIPX_JuiNpP37HA6ILeQE

Four Hospicing Programs

The push and pull in education is between coercive verses non-coercion practices. Sifaan Zavahir and Je'anna Clements speaking at the 2024 Learning Planet Festival presented it in terms of human rights, a rights-affirming education having to be non-coercive.[66] Since then they have helped to create the Rights-Centric Education Network and have worked with others to produce a *Declaration of Rights-Centric Education*[67] informed by the United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*[68], the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*[69], and the *Youth Declaration on Transforming Education*[70]. Sifaan and Je'anna are more than theorists. They have both founded in their respective countries what can be described as prototypes of rights-respecting ecosystems of community learning, respectively Kinder Republic[71] in Sri Lanka, and Riverstone Village[72] in South Africa. Most people have only experienced the highly coercive learning environments of public schools. They have little to no meaningful experience with how non-coercive learning works, but many of them see it as the direction education is headed and they are ready to give it a try.

Many public school pilot programs are needed to shed light on how students and teachers working as equal partners can begin to implement rights-centric education. Following are four different hospicing programs that can serve as starting points. They are based on clear visions of human rights IN education and offer ways to help the old regime transition to the new one with minimum disruption.

The success of each of these programs will hinge on certain conditions being met. One is that the programs have unwavering support from the top levels of an organization. Michael Fullan is a former dean of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education who has written extensively about creating change in public education. Speaking of the role of principals and district administrators in the change process, he says, "general support doesn't amount to much."[73] It is not enough to be not against a program. They need to be clearly for it. This also holds true with staff. Teachers need to want to work in these programs. If they feel coerced to do so, or if they participate in them thinking it is a way to advance their careers, the results are not likely to be favourable.

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[66] *The Biggest Barrier to Rights Affirming Education and how to dismantle it*
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10Bjvqj-WTg
[67] *Declaration of Rights-Centric Education.* https://wiki.rights-centric.education/index.php?title=Declaration_of_Rights-Centric_Educationone
[68] Universal Declaration of Human Rights. https://www.ohchr.org/en/universal-declaration-of-human-rights
[69] Convention on the Rights of the Child. https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child
[70] *Youth Declaration on Transforming Education* originates from the 2022 Transforming Education Summit convened by the UN Secretary-General at the UN Headquarters in New York on 16-17 and 19 September 2022: https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2022/09/tes_youthdeclaration_en.pdf
[71] Kinder Republic: https://www.kinder.lk
[72] Riverstone Village: https://riverstonevillage.org.za
[73] Fullan, M. (1982).*The Meaning of Educational Change*. OISE Press, Toronto, p. 163. The 5th version of the book published in 2015 is now titled *The New Meaning of Educational Change*. https://michaelfullan.ca/books/new-meaning-educational-change/.

Many good ideas have been discredited by people who have no real appreciation for them and so selecting appropriate staff for the programs is crucial.

Teachers wanting to work in these types of programs will find Derry Hannam's book, *Another Way is Possible: Becoming a democratic teacher in a state school*,[74] makes good prerequisite reading. Chapter 6 of the book gives a feel for the kind of student/teacher relationships to aim for, and they don't need permission from superiors to get started. Teachers who, on their own initiative, undertake this kind of professional development would be a good place to look for suitable staff to conduct these programs. A pioneering spirit that allows a person to live with a degree of unknown and who applies an abundance mentality when unanticipated problems arise is also a quality to look for when choosing staff for these programs.

The four programs are presented in order from the least to the most challenging to implement. They pertain to the kinds of education environments described in the documentary film *Schooling the World*[75] about the spread of conventional schooling, but they can be of value to communities in the global south less affected by the old regime. These communities have less to unlearn and may lead the way to the new regime. For them these programs can serve as guides to ensure the rights of learners IN education are entrenched as they move towards local learning ecosystems based on the needs of their people.

First of these programs is the idea of the Free Learner Designation originated by Heather MacTaggart, co-author of *Overschooled but Undereducated*.[76] School boards have designations for "special needs" students such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and oppositional deficit disorder (ODD). Once a student is identified as having one of these deficiencies, extra accommodations are provided for them. Students are labelled as deficient in these ways, but it is from the perspective of it being the schools, not the students, that are deficient, that Heather has proposed The Free Learner Designation. It still plays the game of labelling students, but in a positive way that points out deficiencies in the system and highlights the need for students to have more control over their learning.

At the start of COVID, Heather led a team of pro-public education AERO members who wanted to pursue her idea. They met many times and founded *Unschooling School*[77] to promote the concept of the Free Learner Designation. The designation provided for students who wanted to go to school, but who were feeling too confined by the system, to negotiate accommodations that would make school at least tolerable for them. Derry Hannam was one of the founders and during a team meeting he used the term "responsible subversives", which he acquired from Heather's book, to share a vision of how educators could appropriately receive a student wanting to be a free learner. *Responsible Subversives*[78] is a clip of what Derry had to say.

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[74] Hannam, D. (2020) *Another Way Is Possible: Becoming a democratic teacher in a state school.* FHREE (http://www.fhree.org) in association with ALLI asbl (https://alliasbl.lu). Available through Smashwords and Amazon.
[75] Black, C. (Director). (2010). *Schooling the World.* Provided for free by Films For Action: https://www.filmsforaction.org/watch/schooling-the-world-2010/
[76] Abbott, J. and MacTaggart, H. (2010). *Overschooled but Undereducated.* Continuum International Publishing Group, London.
[77] Unschooling School. Retrieved on December 27, 2024 from https://www.unschoolingschool.com
[78] Responsible Subversives recorded during a founding meeting of Unschooling School[78]. Retrieved on December 30, 2024 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ze_MrATumjl.

The second program is based on one called CHIP that ran in a public secondary school for the first semester of two consecutive school years. It provides students with a full semester immersive experience in having substantially more control over their learning in a mixed-age learning environment. Much was learned from this program about how to hospice the old regime and it is presented in detail in Part 2 of this paper. The Ottawa Public Education Remake Initiative (OPERI)[79] website describes the CHIP Program and its scalability.

The third program is the 20% Project proposed by Derry Hannam. He advises that 20% of students' time in school be self-directed with the idea that the percentage would increase as people become comfortable with the program. Derry's article titled, *The 20% Project for Schools – A Modest Proposal*[80], gives the details of his proposal. Before Derry gets to describing the proposal, he gives an account of what led to it, and community involvement was a big influencer. He had witnessed how whole communities become involved in public education when the conditions are favourable. One can envision from this how the 20% Proposal could be just the beginning of a transition to local learning ecosystems that are in essence education cities regardless of the size of the local population.

The fourth of the programs is that of a democratic school operating as a school within a public school. The Suvemäe school in Estonia makes a good example. Students of the main school are given the choice of Suvemäe or the conventional program. The documentary film by QUEST[81] titled *Suvemäe – Pioneer of Possibility*[82] tells its story. Charlie Moreno Romero who initiated the school credits Mari-Liis Sults, the head of the main school, as being the kind of school administrator Fullan says is needed for this kind of innovation. She is "for" each of the programs respecting the students' right to choose what works best for them, and if they decide after trying out Suvemäe, students can return to the conventional program.

William Glasser, author of *The Quality School: Managing Schools Without Coercion,* says that establishing schools within schools is the necessary route to the transformation of education, but he warns that if it's not properly managed the competing programs may try to sabotage each other.[83] This is true of all four hospicing programs presented here, but the competition is easily managed by the head of a school who makes it clear that the staffs of both programs work as one team with the best interests of each student at heart. Working together to solve the problems of transitioning from the old regime to the new is required to minimize the disruption a shift creates.

All four programs have similar end views of community learning ecosystems fully grounded in human rights, and given that they all seek to bring about change from within public education,

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[79] Ottawa Public Education Remake Initiative (OPERI). Retrieved on December 30, 2024 from http://operi.ca/

[80] Hannam, D. (Updated August 23, 2024). *The 20% Project for Schools – A Modest Proposal*. Progressive Education, UK. Retrieved on December 30, 2024 from https://www.progressiveeducation.org/the-20-project-for-schools-a-modest-proposal-by-derry-hannam-2/#:~:text=So%20–%20my%20modest%20proposal

[81] QUEST (Quality Education in Europe for Sustainable Social Transformation: https://quest-eu.org

[82] Schmallenbach, M. *Suvemäe – Pioneer of Possibility.* tells its story. More will be said about it later in this document.

[83] Glasser, W. (1990) *The Quality School: Managing Students Without Coercion*. HarperCollins, New York, p. 285.

much of what is said in Part 2 of this paper about implementing the CHIP Program applies to the implementation of all four programs.

One of Thomas Kuhn's observations[84] is that when a paradigm has proven itself to be inadequate, many fuzzy contenders can at first compete to replace it. In time, one will emerge to become dominant, and it could be a combination of several of the contenders. The fuzziness of the paradigms contending to replace conventional education arises primarily around the rights of young people and how much control adults should exercise over them. Another of Kuhn's observations is that dominant paradigms do what they can to discredit contenders and to keep them out of sight. Proponents of the conventional school model have been very good at this, but a society that has learned Kuhn's lessons will not permit this to continue. It will put promising contenders on an equal playing field where they can compete head to head and people can choose the one they prefer as easily as they can make a choice of cars when dealerships are next door to each other. The dealerships have equal opportunity to inform the public of what they offer, and potential customers are invited to test drive choices that might be best for them. This is essentially what the four programs are designed to do. Kuhn's also observed that frustration over a lingering old inadequate paradigm can result in people adopting a new one before it has fully crystalized. The view presented here is that the more that people can test drive rights-centric education, the sooner the new paradigm will be adopted and the sooner we will find ourselves in the period of relative calm Kuhn says follows a shift to a new paradigm.

The *Exploring Local Learning Ecosystems in the Global South* report provides eleven case studies that are early stage learning ecosystems upon which visions of the new paradigm can be cultivated. The studies emphasize that varied conditions throughout the world require that people work towards change based on local circumstances. The search is not for a new cookie cutter, but rather for core values upon which to build learning ecosystems appropriate for unique communities and their individually unique inhabitants. Although there are similarities in the case studies, each is distinct and they all reinforce the importance of support from a variety of organizations. The views presented by Irvin Scott of the Harvard Graduate School of Education in his paper titled, A New PK-12 Education Ecosystem Framework for a New Normal[85] help to put the case studies into perspective while outlining a framework for entire communities to become involved in the transformation of education. Some of the types of organizations he sees as having a role to play in the change process are exemplified by the case studies and the partners of the Learning Planet Alliance.

Scott's paper, as does the *Exploring Local Learning Ecosystems* report, focuses primarily on children and youth in the most adverse circumstances. It was, however, written when schools re-opened after COVID and people were yearning for a return to normal, and he states that "What was **normal** was never acceptable". The normal to which he refers is conventional publicly funded schools. With the vast majority of children and youth throughout the world required to attend these types of schools, it is the adversity they all face and how to overcome it that is the concern.

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[84] Ibid 12

[85] https://www.sir.advancedleadership.harvard.edu/articles/a-new-pk-12-education-ecosystem-framework-for-a-new-normal

Unlike the Copernican Revolution where people had a one or the other choice between the earth or the sun being the center of the universe, the transformation of education has the advantage of not requiring a flip-flop from teacher-centered to child-centered learning environments. This difference allows for the small steps approach to change advocated for with the four programs. Daniel Pink in his book *Drive* states that people will suffer if they're taken from highly controlled environments and plunked into settings of undiluted autonomy. He advises providing scaffolding to help them make the transition.[86] This scaffolding is in essence the maintenance of some level of coercion to be lessened as people become ready to handle greater autonomy.

Montessori schools and numerous other education options provide examples of less coercive learning environments. While they give students more control over their learning, adults still maintain some authority. Achieving independence, however, requires that young people be weaned from adult control and there's concern that many alternative places for learning aren't alternative enough. The International Association of Learner Driven Schools (IALDS)[87] requires that the schools it accredits have a commitment to continuous improvement. This encourages people to exercise the entrepreneurial spirit that took the idea of human flight from a dream to the age of supersonic transcontinental air travel and keeps on pursuing fundamental improvements. Some alternatives are stagnant, acting as if their cookie cutter is answer and that real continuous improvement is not required. With all that has been learned about human flourishing over the past half century, public education is positioned to take off if it adopts a true continuous improvement mentaility. If it can unleash the entrepreneurial spirit of those in its ranks, within a generation it could have us living in a supersonic age of learning.

Part 2 – The Simplified CHIP Program

The simplified CHIP Program[88] offers a way for secondary schools to accommodate young people who want to have a substantial experience with non-coercive learning without having to commit to it for more than a semester. It sets the stage for a scientifically managed, minimally disruptive transition by public schools to hubs of local learning ecosystems where whole communities, and beyond, become the places of learning. In terms of the ecosystems for human flourishing imagined in the *Exploring Local Learning Ecosystems* report, this pilot program is a very early prototype of what could become a new social contract for education, and it can be easily adapted for younger students.

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[86] Pink, D. (2009). *Drive: The surprising truth about what motivates us.* (p. 107). Penguin Books. London. https://www.danpink.com/books/drive/
[87] The International Association of Learner Driven Schools (IALDS). https://ialds.org/
[88] The name CHIP was derived from the first letters of these terms used to describe the program: Communication, Hands-on, Integration (of subjects and ages) and Problem solving. The word CHIP refers to the computer chip to suggest education for the age of technology.

Larry Rosenstock, a co-founder of the San Diego, California High Tech High network of charter schools[89], "considers the traditional school schedule, regimented into fixed chunks of time, the single greatest impediment to educational innovation."[90] The CHIP Program ran in the early 1990s at Lester B. Pearson High School (LBP), a grades seven to twelve publicly funded school in Ottawa, Canada. It provides a vision of how public education can begin to dismantle the typical high school timetable in order to establish conditions for the transformation of education. Within the context of the *Exploring Local Learning Ecosystems* report, the program would be best described as a pre-local learning ecosystem. It respected learner rights and promoted student agency, which allowed them to begin reaching out beyond the school walls.
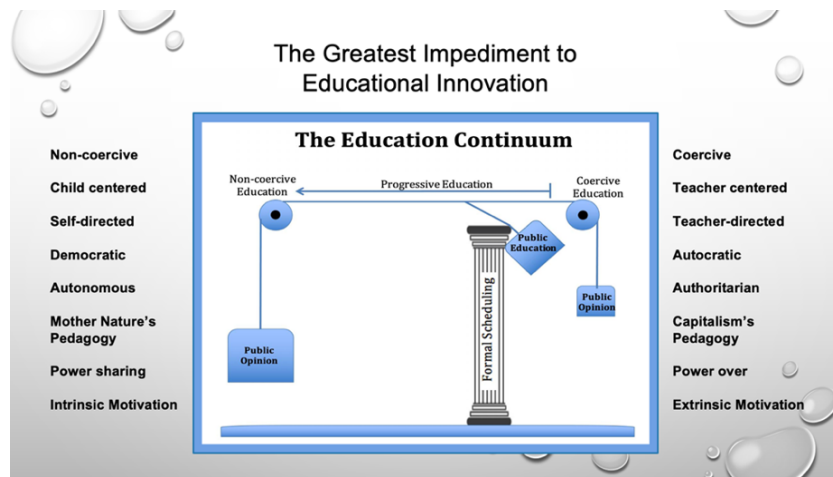

Figure 1. Diagram by R. Fransham published in *Rebooting Public Education-Part 2.* (August 20, 2022). Progressive Education. Retrieved on July, 20, 2024 from https://www.progressiveeducation.org/rebooting-public-education-part-2-by-richard-fransham/

The two teachers who proposed the CHIP Program had in mind a totally non-coercive learning experience for students based on the Sudbury Valley School. Fortunately for them, their principal was a responsible subversive. He said that there was no way that the board would accept their proposal, but he didn't reject it out of hand. He said, "Well this is interesting. Let's see what we can do about it," and then he outlined conditions the Ministry of Education, the school board authorities and the teachers' union would expect to be met before the program could be approved. They discussed the possibilities and the meeting ended with the principal saying, "Give me a one-page summary of what you are proposing and then leave it with me. I'll see what I can do."

A few days later, the principal followed-up with the teachers. He had discussed their proposal with his superiors and reported that their program would be permitted to run, but with conditions attached. There would be no new funding. Twenty-five grades ten to twelve students would be permitted to participate. They would operate out of one classroom in the main part of the school. To maintain the established pupil/teacher ratio of twenty-five to one, one of the teachers would be assigned to the program for the mornings, the other for the afternoons. They would both teach in the regular program during the other part of the day. The students would have to undertake four ministry courses that were limited to the subject specialties of the teachers. Students would have to write the same final exams as their counterparts in the regular program and follow all of

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[89] The High Tech High network of charter schools: https://www.hightechhigh.org

[90] Abeles, V., *Beyond Measure*, 2015, New York, Reel Link Books, p. 56: https://beyondtheracetonowhere.org/beyond-measure-book/. The book accompanies the documentary film directed by Abeles, https://beyondtheracetonowhere.org/beyond-measure/. She also directed among other films *Race to Nowhere*: https://beyondtheracetonowhere.org/race-to-nowhere/

the standard school rules pertaining to the student code of conduct, attendance and the hours to be in class. The program would be approved to run for only one semester with the possibility of being approved to run again the first semester of the following year, if it met a certain level of success. Success would be primarily measured in terms of whether or not the students maintained their grades in the mandated courses. Daniel Greenberg of the Sudbury Valley School, when asked to explain the success of his school said that age-mixing was its "secret weapon".[91] To take full advantage of this, the teachers had proposed to include a cross-section of the grades seven to twelve school population. Because of a new provincewide Ministry of Education program being introduced at that time to students in grades seven to nine, only students in grades ten to twelve would be permitted to enrol in the program.

It was a far cry from the non-coercive learning environment the teachers originally had in mind. The strings attached were the kind that often discourage teachers from trying to create change from within, and the CHIP teachers were concerned. They feared the constraints could lead to the discrediting of worthy ideas, but there remained enough that was positive to proceed. Essentially, students would have control over *how* they learned, but not over *what* they learned. It eliminated the need for formal scheduling by allowing the same group of students to be together all day for a semester, and this created the opportunity to cultivate a mixed-age community of learners based on democratic principles. The teachers could have no special status. Equality could prevail with group decisions being made on the bases of one person one vote, and a judicial committee styled after that of the Sudbury Valley School could be established to handle disputes among members of the community. The students would be free to learn their course material in ways that most suited them and to integrate their courses where possible. It added up to the possibility of students having a substantial experience in being more in control of their learning and created the conditions for the primary curriculum to become the skills required for living and learning in modern times. Students would exercise these skills learning the mandated curriculum, which would, in effect, make their course credits by-products of successfully applying the skills of independent learning. Another advantage was that any grade ten to twelve students could enroll in the program. This allowed for the program to become a demonstration of how self-directed learning can work in mainstream education as opposed to one stigmatized as an option for students "with special needs". The only criteria required of students to participate were that they had to be genuinely coming to school to learn and would be committed to cultivating a community of learners. These criteria were considered necessary because of attitudes and behaviours that develop in traditional schools. With young people who have not been schooled, it would be enough to say, "Come learn with us."

By conducting the program in the neighbourhood school and maintaining all the school rules, no changes to family life were required. It demanded nothing of parents beyond signing a form consenting to their children enrolling in the program. This helped to level the playing field for students whose parents were less able to advocate for them. Unchanged also was that students still got up at the same time each day and went to the same school, which allowed them to maintain their friendships and participate in extracurricular activities as usual. The consistencies provided scaffolding for students to make the transition to greater autonomy. To the surprise of the teachers, the mandated curriculum emerged as a valuable part of the scaffolding. The

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[91] Greenberg, D. (1987). *Free at Last.* (pp. 75-80). Sudbury Valley School Press, Framingham, MA. https://bookstore.sudburyvalley.org/product/free-last

students were familiar with what the courses required of them. They didn't flounder having to decide *what* to learn, which led to them being able to focus their attention on the skills of self-directed learning. Another benefit to the mandatory curriculum was that it alleviated concerns over obtaining the course credits students needed to graduate with their cohorts.

During the time since the program ran, it has been realized that it was actually more radical than it needed to be. The goal at the time was to make it as non-coercive and self-directed as possible while adhering to the demands of the different authorities, but the transformation of education requires a different mentality. The smaller the amount of legitimate change being proposed, the greater will be the number of people wanting to give it a try, and the lesser will be the resistance.

To increase the odds of a CHIP type program gaining approval, divisive discussions about how to apply human rights and non-coercive learning can be avoided. The program can be presented as nothing more than a response to employers' complaints that today's school graduates are lacking what are called soft skills. They refer specifically to the areas of the 4 C's – critical thinking, creativity, communication and collaboration. The related skills are also needed for successful living and they are exercised when students are required to assume responsibility for themselves and their education within a community of learners. It is not a matter of tailoring schools to train people for jobs. We have entered a time when learning for life and learning for work are being recognized as one and the same.

Also, talk of a judicial committee doesn't need to convolute initial discussions about offering such programs. If a need for one arises, the class can figure out how to fill the need, as did the class described in *Another Way Is Possible*. There's a different sense of time in programs that eliminate formal scheduling. The feeling that time is short overhangs regular programs with classes being hurried along to "get the curriculum covered". Students who have control over how they learn mandated curriculum find that they can cover the material in a fraction of the time it takes with a typical teacher-centered approach, leaving them free to do other things. This relaxes the learning environment. There's time to spare, time for students and teachers to really get to know each other, and time for informally resolving differences based on the best of what's known about conflict resolution.

To further simplify matters, teachers don't need to relinquish their authority. Derry gave his eleven year old students the freedom to decide how they would achieve the expected learning outcomes, but they understood that if it wasn't working he'd have to step in and take over.[92] In this time between worlds, when students accustomed to authoritarian rule need to go through a process of deschooling, teachers needn't declare themselves as equals - they just need to *be* equal. Derry never had to exercise power over his students. Thomas Gordon who created parent and teacher effectiveness training courses wrote in his book for the parents' course, "Children do not rebel against adults – they rebel against adults' attempts to take away their freedom." He went on the say, "My experience with children of all ages is that they are usually quite willing to modify their behaviour when it is clear to them that what they are doing does in fact interfere with someone else's meeting his needs. When parents limit their attempts to modify children's behaviour to what tangibly and concretely affects them, they generally find children quite open

[92] See footnote 74, p. 57.

to change, willing to respect the needs of their parents, and agreeable to 'problem-solve.'"[93] The same applies to teachers. The following words by Lilla Watson who attributes the thought to 1970 Queensland Aboriginal Activists, help to convey the spirit of how democratic teachers relate to their students.

> *If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.*

A Glimpse of How the CHIP Program Worked

Use of Resources

For their course work, students were provided with the ministry of education course syllabuses and all the resources teachers used in the regular program including the textbooks, course timelines, assignments, previous tests and exams. The students then faced the challenge of learning about the required outcomes for their courses and determining whether or not they had already achieved some of them, where they would most need to focus their attention, and how they could integrate their subjects. They consequently had to immediately start practicing the 4 C's, but that group of skills is only part of what empowers a person to flourish. Following are some examples of other skills and attitudes people need to thrive.

Skills and Attitudes

Analytical Reading and Math

At the time, a local college was finding that students were graduating from high school lacking the ability to read analytically. It was therefore introducing a mandatory first year analytical reading course. This led to math in the CHIP Program being treated as an analytical reading course. If the students could teach themselves math using the textbook for their course, then they would be empowered to teach themselves almost anything. If students were unable to grasp a concept from reading the textbook, they could take the book to the teacher and get a reading lesson, which was also a lesson in critical thinking. It would focus on where the student starts to become confused, and on the mental agility required to look at the explanation in the book from as many angles as possible. The one-on-one also offered the opportunity for the teacher to diagnose if a student had a reading problem or lacked some prerequisite knowledge. As it turned out, rarely did the students go to the teacher for help. The mixed-age environment meant that they had others they could turn to for help. It has been said that if you're having trouble learning something, your best teacher could be someone who has recently learned the concept. They're most likely to understand why you're getting stuck.

The Question of Structure

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[93] Gordon, T. (1970). *P.E.T.: Parent Effectiveness Training.* Plume, NY. p. 269.

It's often mentioned during discussions about self-directed learning that it's not for everyone, that some students need structure. This view needs to be challenged to avoid keeping students dependent on teachers. For those who like structure, independence requires that they learn to create structure for themselves. This they can learn in self-directed learning programs. Similarly, students who don't like structure, but who may have a scattered hit and miss approach to learning, can work on ways to avoid gaps arising from taking a more free flow approach to learning. Such gaps can result in people becoming discouraged and abandoning achievable goals they would be proud to accomplish. Attention is given to the idea that every goal achieved builds confidence and skills with which to take on bigger challenges.

Self-Discipline and Stick-to-itiveness

The pursuit of independence requires students to consider what's referred to as self-discipline, intestinal fortitude, and stick-to-itiveness. The person who wants to be able to play the piano well, but who never puts in the work makes a good example for young people to contemplate, many of whom are drawn to playing musical instruments. Discussions in the program included that sometimes raw willpower isn't enough to accomplish a goal. There was discussion how teamwork puts added pressure on members to fulfil their commitments. As with there being negative and positive cholesterol, there is negative and positive coercion. Extrinsic coercion is negative. Self-coercion is positive and how to apply it effectively was discussed as a skill to develop. A conversation occurred with one of the teachers and some students who were inclined to just squeak by in math when it was in their best interests to master the material. The teacher asked: "How much would I have to pay you to obtain an eighty percent grade in math?" The students expressed no doubt that they could achieve it. It was just a question of how hard they were prepared to work and they decided that for two hundred dollars they would put in the effort. The teacher then asked, "How much would it take for you to achieve ninety percent?" Tellingly, they quickly decided that they didn't want to work that hard. Two hundred dollars for eighty percent would be fine for them. The teacher then pointed out that there was nothing in it for him to pay them to do something for themselves and suggested a self-incentive. They could deposit with the school office two hundred dollars of their own money which they'd get back if they achieved eighty percent, and if not, the money would be donated to a charity of their choice. Predictably, none of them wanted to do it, but it confirmed what is well known - many students do poorly in school because they simply don't find the curriculum relevant enough to put in the effort to do well. This example shines light on how schools breed mediocrity by not permitting students to pursue what interests them. The discussion also helped to dispel the idea that highly successful people are those who are particularly brilliant or highly self-disciplined. Many are just ordinary people who are good at backing themselves into corners from which they have no choice, but to come out fighting.

The story of an electrical engineer who was a professor at a top rated university helped to reinforce the point with students. He acquired his credentials before the advent of digital electronics and as that whole other knowledge of electricity developed he felt increasingly like a fraud calling himself an electrical engineer when he knew almost nothing about it. He tried to get himself up to date with library books, and then with an expensive, comprehensive hands-on digital electronics learning kit, but he couldn't muster the resolve to get the job done. Applying the idea that if you want to learn something, teach it, he went to his dean and asked to be

assigned to teach a first year digital electronics course. The dean agreed and it forced the professor to learn enough each week to keep ahead of his students. After teaching that course a number of times,[94] he again went to the dean and asked to be assigned to teach the next level course. In this way, he created the conditions he needed to accomplish his goal. His challenge was similar to what teachers face today. As non-coercive learning gains in visibility, teachers who have no lived experience with it may be feeling it's unprofessional of them not to be fully informed of this whole other way for people to learn. As did the professor, they could go to their superiors and commit to a role that would force them to gain what they lacked.

Rigor was also included in the discussion with the students about math grades. One the of students commented that he would get the marks he needed when he needed them. This led to talk of how people need to be careful not to delude themselves. If the skills required to accomplish something that requires some real rigor have been neglected, it could be far more difficult to get those marks than anticipated. It was left that students might consider undertaking at least one rigorous course a year to hone their learning abilities and ensure that they could accomplish a demanding learning task when the need arose.

Professional Development With a Hospicing Mentaility

"Out of sight, out of mind" is a slogan repeated by cyclists who compete in racing events like the Tour de France. If a breakaway can get far enough ahead to be out of sight of the main peloton, then it's less likely to get chased down. The same can be said about the transformation of education. A breakaway group of educators is far less likely to influence the main pack if it's out of sight. Two of the most critical conditions needed to accelerate a controlled transformation of education are that the choices be equally visible and accessible. By operating out of a classroom off a main hallway of a traditional school, the CHIP Program met these conditions perfectly. One of the strengths of this arrangement is the opportunities it creates for informal professional development. The students and teachers of both programs mingle and share perspectives on learning.

A concrete example of the sharing of views that arose at the time is that the newly published booklet *What's Worth Fighting For? - Working Together For Your School*[95] was recommended to the staff by one of the program teachers. About twenty teachers purchased the booklet and a majority of them later met after school hours to discuss it. It's unusual for staff to respond in these numbers to a professional development activity that isn't initiated by the administration, and it's unlikely it would have happened had it not been for the program operating in their midst.

Another feature of the program was the ease with which teachers could drop in to observe it and even to work with the students. They had one period each day was a prep period for planning lessons, marking tests and assignments, and other activities that could be deemed part of their

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[94] It is said that to achieve mastery of a subject, teach it three times.
[95] Fullan, M. and Hargreaves, A. (1991). *What's Worth Fighting For – Working Together For Your School*, Ontario Public Schools Teachers Federation, Toronto: https://michaelfullan.ca/books/. Michael Fullan is a prolific author and former dean of the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education. He is currently the Global Leadership Director of New Pedagogies for Deep Learning: https://deep-learning.global

duties. It provided a time when they could visit the program, and a number of them did this, positioning themselves to join the program if the opportunity arose.

Schools within schools therefore offer an effective way to build awareness of how to arrive at a new social contract for education. The entertaining brief Youtube video *How to Start a Movement?*[96] tells a good story with visibility and accessibility being essential for mass participation. Teachers of pilot programs can serve as the early dancers.

Other Considerations

Evaluation

Not everything that matters can be measured
and not everything that can be measured matters.
- Albert Einstein

The obsession with grades in public education has people wanting to use them to measure the success of democratic programs, but there's much more of real value that students can acquire from a learning community. "Incidental learning" is a term used for learning that isn't defined as part of the formal curriculum. It can occur when students witness others enthusiastically pursuing their own interests. It occurs when conflicts are handled personally as opposed to being ruled on and enforced by a school authority. It occurs when students have lots of time to get to know each other and discover themselves. The term is intended to convey empowerment by natural learning. "The hidden curriculum" is another term to describe learning that isn't explicit in the curriculum, but *it* has a negative connotation. It refers to uniformity and conformity of assembly line obedience schools designed to mold young people into servant of the economy.[97]

If programs like the one at LBP are to be evaluated, it's far from enough to judge them on the basis of exam results alone. An anonymous quote to consider in, addition to the one above by Albert Einstein, states, "The only valid form of evaluation is self-evaluation." A form of self-evaluation is found with students featured in the documentary films *School Circles*[98] and *Suvemäe – Pioneer of Possibility*[99]. They express how their learning communities make them feel, and their wellbeing is central reinforcing that social justice and self-determination are central to mental health. The conditions exist for every young person to feel as valued as any other and free to learn what most matters to them. Only the students can fully know how close a

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[96] How to Start a Movement?: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lbaemWIljeQ
[97] *Weapons of Mass Instruction* (https://www.amazon.ca/Weapons-Mass-Instruction-Schoolteachers-Compulsory/dp/0865716692) by John Gatto, and *The Falling Rate of Learning* (https://www.amazon.com/Falling-Rate-Learning-Neoliberal-Endgame-ebook/dp/B00GU1F73I) by David Blacker challenge commonly held beliefs about the purpose of public education.
[98] Osorio, M. and Shread, C. [Directors]. (2018) *School Circles*. Wondering School, Brazil: https://schoolcirclesfilm.com
[99] Schmallenbach, M., Director. (2023). *Suvemäe – Pioneer of Possibility*. QUEST (https://quest-eu.org), Belgium: https://youtu.be/D1HtNAeYTV8?feature=shared

learning environment approaches this ideal, and so it's reasonable that their evaluation of a program be the one that most matters. If tools are to be used to evaluate school programs, they need to measure such things as mental health, quality of relationships with peers and adults, the richness of incidental learning, levels of independence, sense of community and caring, and love of learning to name a few. A comment by a mother whose daughter was in the CHIP Program helps to put evaluation into perspective. She said that as a result of the program her daughter had regained her interest in learning, and attacking the obsession of public education with testing she added, "I don't need to see grades. I can see my daughter learning." The following quote from *Paradigm Shift* puts a finger on it.

> *If you want to control, you design organizations for accountability.*
> *If you want to accomplish, you design for commitment.*[100]

Opt-in, Opt-out and Opt Back in Again

At the end of the semester the students in the CHIP Program returned to traditional schooling. They appeared to have no trouble readjusting and there were indications that some students who had been struggling in it before their experience with self-directed learning, actually did better. They seemed to have more understanding of the demands on their teachers and were less resistant to studying topics that seemed irrelevant to them. Mari-Liis Sults observed similar results with Suvemäe. She said that upon returning to the conventional program, students "value more the learning in the regular program and the teachers' work." It's a finding that, if shown to be true, strongly supports running the simplified CHIP Program in schools. If a semester of it leads to students doing better in the regular program, then the program might receive support from people who would otherwise resist it.

The easier it is to choose between a democratic and a traditional program, the more empowered students are to determine what works best for them. Democratic schools operating within local neighbourhood schools make opt-in and opt-out as easy as imaginable, and students can as easily be offered the option of opting back in again, which is essentially what happened when students opted to re-enroll in the CHIP Program. The value in this is seen in the documentary film *Class*

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[100] Tapscott, D. and Caston, A. (1993). Paradigm Shift: The New Promise of Information Technology. McGraw-Hill, New York, pp. 35-36. https://www.amazon.ca/Paradigm-Shift-Don-Tapscott/dp/0070628572

Dismissed.[101] It is the story of traditional education and the agony families can suffer when they try to escape its confines. The children of the family featured in the film lived in a wealthy community with a highly rated school, yet the school was not working for them. They opted for homeschooling, then opted to go back to school, then opted out again. They are far from being an exception and their experience provides evidence that the scarcity mindset portrayed in *Backpack Full of Cash* is hindering the development of a new social contract for education.

A reason for students opting back into conventional programs after experiencing self-directed learning is that it is harder and feels less safe than following orders. It exposes the spoon feeding done by schools that has employers' complaining about school graduates' lack of initiative and need for supervision. Andragogy, the term for adult education versus pedagogy for children's education[102], was fuelled by desires to make sense of the observation that many people who dropped out of school returned highly motivated to get a high school graduation diploma after discovering how tough life was without it, only to drop out again. They couldn't endure what schools required of them. Young people who quit school to homeschool and then go back only to quit again, can also be compared to students opting back into the CHIP Program after a semester back in the regular program. They've thought about what works best for them and are more ready to take charge of their learning.

"Deschooling"[103] is a term used to describe the process of returning to natural learning after spending time in traditional schools. A rough estimate of how long it takes to deschool oneself is one month for each year of traditional schooling. Indications from the CHIP Program suggest that this can be shortened and made less painful with scaffolding. The returning students who experienced "making it up as we went along"[104] the first year had a semester back in the regular program plus a summer to reflect on their experience. When they returned to the program they were full-speed ahead from day one. They knew what they wanted to do and got to work,[105]

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[101] Stuart, J., (Director). 2015. *Class Dismissed*. [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm1926187/?ref_=tt_ov_dr]. Stuart's more recent film, 2019, *Self-Taught* tells the life stories of people who were self-taught. *Dark Horse: Achieving Success through the pursuit of fulfillment* by Rose, T. and Ogas, O. is another reference challenging status quo with stories about people who have found their own way: http://www.toddrose.com/darkhorse

[102] Andragogy can be seen as adultism. Heutagogy . . . Steward Hase and Chris Kenyon, who defined heutagogy as the study of self-determined learning in 2000, name it an optimal approach to learning for the 21st century. Rights-respecting education is ageless. Creating a distinction between the learning needs of children and adults feeds the notions of inequality that young people are somehow different from adults, and it betrays an obliviousness of what it is to be a natural learner.

[103] Ivan Illich coined the term "deschooling". His book *Deschooling Society* (1971) has been much read by people seeking a new social contract for education: https://www.amazon.ca/Deschooling-Society-Ivan-Illich/dp/0714508799

[104] Derry Hannam gave chapter six of *Another Way Is Possible* the title *Creating a Democratic Class and Curriculum – Making It Up As We Went Along*. This is how the first year of the CHIP program felt to those involved. Young and old were willing to live with the insecurity of that frontier, which for others would seem too risky.

[105] Having had to study how course progressions for mastery of a topic are developed from the Ontario Ministry of Education directives, a next step for students in a simplified CHIP program could be for them to design their own individual course to pursue a topic of particular interest to them. This would promote 21st century learning skills and open the doors for students to learn beyond anything institutions can provide in times of change. With this experience behind them, students would be well positioned to undertake a major learning challenge like a capstone course described by Linda Aronson in her book *Unleashed to Learn: Empowering Students to Learn at Full Capacity*, Infinity Publishing, 2013. From the capstones developed by her students, one can imagine how the interests of others were expanded to areas they may have never considered. https://www.amazon.com/Unleashed-Learn-Empowering-Students-Capacity/dp/0741481960

serving as role models and helping the new students to adjust. Within a few days it would have been difficult to pick out the new students from the returning ones.

Homeschoolers, particularly those referred to as unschoolers who follow no set curriculum, and students in more self-directed programs like those discussed above are pioneers of possibilities as much as are the parents and teachers involved, and the frontier is a place of uncertainty and vulnerability. Returning to the familiar after being out in the wilderness provides comfort, but after recharging and reflecting they may decide that life on the frontier is more interesting and fulfilling. Having the option to return to the wilderness empowered by what they learned from their previous exploration can make for a life worth living. It follows that the transformation of education can be accelerated by providing students with easy opt-in, opt-out, and opt-back-in-again opportunities to explore the frontier as they chart their route through education in this time between worlds.

No New Spending, But Still a Cost

There was no new spending required to run the LBP program. It only required a reallocation of existing resources, but there was a cost to the traditional program in that those resources were taken from it. This creates the possibility of much resistance to change and is one of the conditions most requiring firm leadership from school administrators. Sections are the currency of formal scheduling in many high schools. One section is equivalent to a teacher assigned to teach one course in a four course per day semestered school. The LBP program therefore required four sections, a teacher for each period of the regular school day. To run pilot programs of this nature at no additional financial cost those sections have to come from somewhere. Compulsory courses with high enrolments is one possible source. A mandatory grade ten math course for example might require six sections for all students to be accommodated. By increasing class sizes, that number could be reduced to five thereby freeing up one section. Other sections could be obtained by cancelling elective courses. Finding only four sections for an innovation as modest as the LBP program consequently requires sacrifice from teachers in the regular program. They don't want larger class sizes and they don't want elective courses cancelled that they and the students value. A school within a school is easily scalable. It can be run year-round and made to accommodate more students, but with each expansion more sections must be found which increases the sacrifice made by traditional teachers. A breaking point where the number of sections needed for non-coercive learning exceeds the needs of the regular program to operate in its existing form seems inevitable, but solutions that are blends of the two programs are imaginable. As people explore the possibilities they'll increasingly discover how to create these blends that take advantage of the best of both paradigms. A major roadblock to change is that people wait until they have all the answers to questions before they act. In a short video recorded by Justin Reich and Peter Senge for Unit 1 of the MIT Teaching Systems Lab course titled Launching Innovation in Schools, the message is that if you wait until you have all the answer nothing will ever happen.[106] People cannot be afraid to make mistakes, and the level of support

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[106] Launching Innovation in Schools 2018, MIT Teaching Systems Lab:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OEl4S4iJu0g&list=PL69YeOR1vok-6MV7OFMT1G8clNfhaaWMM&index=22&t=12s

provided to those willing to make them will be one of the determinants as to whether or not public education can pass its high stakes test.

Funding for subject specialists to teach the mandatory curriculum in a formally scheduled high school commonly requires a minimum enrolment, unlike a democratic learning environment that can operate with any number of students. In Ontario for example, if enrolments in typical high schools drop below six hundred, schools will need additional funding to run a basic program. Declining enrolments often result in permanent school closures. Recognizing the devastating affects they can have on communities, the Ontario government has had a moratorium on school closures since 2017, but if public education adheres to formal scheduling and people increasingly pursue other options, school closures will likely become common. It appears that one way or another teachers are going to feel the effects of change as much as anybody. Thomas Kuhn also observed that there's much turmoil and angst at the height of a battle between paradigms, but that once a new paradigm is adopted, nagging, intractable problems of old paradigms can simply disappear or have easy solutions, and a period of relative calm ensues. The sections problem is one that doesn't exist in democratic learning environments, and there is the additional advantage of large amounts of money and time required to administer traditional education being freed up to apply directly to learning. By focusing on the prospect of better days, the pain of change can become more bearable. "No pain, no gain" is the athletes refrain that helps to sustain a growth mindset for rising to the challenges of change.

Part 3 - Research and What Cannot Be Unseen

The Pressing Need for Research

Education research has predominantly been the normal science[107] of the old paradigm. This research is geared towards preserving status quo, not transforming it. Boston College research professor Peter Gray is a co-founder of the Alliance for Self-Directed Education[108], and renowned among other things for his *Psychology Today* Freedom to Learn blog[109] and his book *Free to Learn*[110]. He once described the state of research pursuing a new social contract for education by saying, "I would have no trouble getting research money to study rats, but it's almost impossible to get money to study self-directed education."[111] Important related research that he and colleagues have managed to conduct finds that self-directed young learners do just fine in later life. An early study he did with David Chanoff titled Democratic Schooling: What Happens to Young People Who Have Charge of Their Own Education?[112] was of Sudbury Valley School graduates. More recently he and Gina Riley surveyed older adults who had experience with non-coercive learning and produced their results in the report Grown Unschoolers' Evaluations of Their Unschooling Experiences[113]. Both studies concluded that fears of unschoolers struggling more as adults than their peers who took the traditional route were unfounded. Advocates of self-directed learning believe that unschooled young people actually create more fulfilling lives for themselves relative to their public school counterparts and call for substantially more research to prove or disprove their theory.

Public education authorities attach much importance to evidence based change, but they do far too little to study anything that challenges their basic assumptions. As public servants, they have a responsibility to thoroughly explore all possibilities for how to best serve young people. Despite their lack of involvement, ample evidence already exists to legitimately demand that education authorities get serious about self-directed learning. Progressive Education provides a growing list of research[114] stimulating visions of a new age of learning. One reference is to another list created by Sustainable Education[115] titled Evidence base for Self-Directed Education[116]. For public education to pass its high stakes test, it needs to become a leader in the

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[107] Paradigms come with their own set of problems. Thomas Kuhn used the term "normal science" to refer to all the work that goes in to refining a paradigm and solving its problems. When pressing problems of dominant paradigms become seen as unsolvable, that paradigm can be rejected even before a contender has fully emerged.

[108] Alliance for Self-Directed Education, https://www.self-directed.org

[109] Gray, P., *Freedom to Learn*, (Blog), Psychology Today, https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/freedom-learn

[110] Gray, P. *Free To Learn*. 2013. Basic Books, New York, https://www.self-directed.org/resource/free-to-learn-book/

[111] Stated during an informal conversation and recently confirmed by Peter as something he would have said.

[112] Ibid 6 Gray, P. and Chanoff, D., *Democratic Schooling: What Happens to Young People Who Have Charge of Their Own Learning.* American Journal of Education, Vol. 94, No. 2, (Feb., 1986), pp. 182-213, The University of Chicago Press, http://www.alternatifokullar.com/files/2014/01/dem_oku_mak_gray_chanoff.pdf

[113] Gray, P. abd Riley, G., *Grown Unschoolers' Evaluations of Their Unschooling Experiences: Report I on a Survey of 75 Unschooled Adults.* 2015. Other Education: The Journal of Educational Alternatives. pp. 8-32, https://cdn2.psychologytoday.com/assets/Published%20Grown%20Unschoolers%20I.pdf

[114] Progressive Education's list of research contributing to the global conversation about transforming education, https://www.progressiveeducation.org/post-category/research/

[115] Suitable Education website, https://suitable-education.uk

[116] *Evidence base for Self-Directed Education*, Suitable Education, https://suitable-education.uk/evidence-base-for-self-directed-education/?fbclid=IwAR3YYR4pE1SAsvJF0YKOuUy3QHbRxvCmQkKLRomFs-twK4vQUGejeWvEGql

study of non-coercive learning and how to bring it to mainstream education. Instead of research focused on traditional education as if another way isn't possible, comparative studies could be done. For example, rather than measuring teacher job satisfaction by how many teachers in traditional school systems quit teaching within their first five years, studies comparing job satisfaction levels of teachers in typical public schools versus those working in democratic schools would be more informative. With respect to implementation, studies of LBP type programs and the least disruptive ways to expand them could be undertaken. Exploration of how to heal and strengthen communities by inviting people who have forsaken their neighbourhood schools to give them another chance would be helpful. There are no credible reasons why members of Liberated Learners[117], nor private schools such as New School[118] could not be incorporated into public community schools as schools within schools, and this would help to address discrimination against those who need something other than traditional education.

Research on how best to manage the transformation of education is critical. Although public education is faulted for remaining too much the same, there have been laudable attempts to transform it, but they have failed because of poor implementation. Typically, change in public education has been approached with the "do as you are told"[119] mentality that permeates the institution, and it doesn't work. *Living and Learning*[120], although dated to some extent on views related to equality, gender and children's rights, remains a superbly challenging government statement on education. It inspired many with its humanism, but it ultimately made little difference, its recommendations discredited by people who did not know how to implement them. Alan King in his *Early Russia* cartoon[121] well depicts the history of innovation in education. If entrepreneurial educators within public systems were free to solve the problems that are inherent in change, as happens with ideas like human flight pursued through scientific methodologies, then the new social contract for education might already be adopted and the work

'Is sticking in mud . . . We go back to old way.'

of constant improvement well underway. A taste of the philosophical underpinnings of *Living*

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117 Liberated Learners, https://liberatedlearners.net

118 New School, https://www.thenewschool.org.uk

119 Mike Weiman, an organizer of the 2005 IDEC conference (http://en.idec2005.org) and a co-founder of K.R.Ä.T.Z.Ä (http://en.kraetzae.de/#:~:text=We%20are%20a%20group%20of,and%20kids%20and%20youth%20protection) demonstrates the extent to which the "Do as you are told" mentality permeates western cultures with his poster *Go to bed now*, (https://gotobednow.com/posters/en)

120 In 1965 the Ontario Government commissioned a committee to determine the aims and objectives for education in the Province. *Living and Learning* is the title of the report published by the committee in 1968, https://www.connexions.org/CxLibrary/Docs/CX5636-HallDennis.htm

121 Alan King (https://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/obit-alan-king-was-an-editorial-cartoonist-self-taught-artist-classical-pianist) granted permission for his *Early Russia* cartoon to be used by *Uniting for Children and Youth* (http://ucyottawa.com) to promote discussions about the transformation of education.

and Learning is found under the heading, "The Search for Truth in a Democratic Society". It reads as follows:

> *If the loftiest ideals of truth can be sought only in a free society, then it is exceedingly important that education, the formal cradle of truth-seekers, reflect an awareness of those factors in our society which can throttle the free flow of individual thought and action.* - *Living and Learning*, 1968, p. 21

It's the case, in many if not all jurisdictions, that public education is too tied to political timeframes and agendas rather than managed scientifically. It can be in the interests of opposition parties to debunk reforms initiated by a party in power, and then to scrap promising programs should they get elected. How to minimize the influence of politics on education is an area for study.

School boards have discretionary funds that could be used to undertake studies that challenge status quo. Ministries of education could similarly use funds they earmark for innovation. Teacher unions and faculties of education could do studies on the needs of teachers in order for them to properly cultivate human flourishing, as opposed to training them for classroom management and curriculum delivery.[122] Some foundations and corporations are funding research directed at transforming education, but they're only a fraction of those that could be supporting it. Along with school boards and ministries of education, the private sector could create incentives for schools to undertake programs needed for research. One way to support change efforts would be to provide funding for extra staff for LBP type pilot programs. Funding for one teacher for one semester would eliminate the need to take sections from the regular program and help to reduce resistance to change.

What Cannot Be Unseen
A Public Responsibility
Funding for research and pilot programs is only part of the change process. Public education is a public responsibility. Its high stakes test is actually a test of the public's willingness to advance towards a new age of learning that serves the common good. The extent to which we inform ourselves and help to inform others of the possibilities will determine the outcome. It is our civilization that is being put to the test and no one is exempt, no one is innocent as Arundhati Roy[123] says in her famous quote:

> *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.*

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[122] Faculties of education that do this could find it rejuvenating and foster excitement among a new generation of teachers. In the mid 1980s, Professor Ruth Dempsy of the University of Ottawa conducted a three-year experimental teacher education program aimed at training teachers to be facilitators of self-directed learning. At the end of the three years, the program was deemed successful, but it was not continued. Among the reasons for ending it were that there were too few learning environments where the student teachers could be placed for practicums, and virtually no jobs in public school systems for teachers trained in self-directed education.

[123] Arundhati Roy is best known for her novel *The God of Small Things* (1997). She is a political activist involved in human rights and environmental causes.

We're seeing increasing evidence of people speaking out. In a 2009 documentary titled: *We Are The People We've Been Waiting For*[124], Ken Robinson[125], Richard Branson[126], and other high profile people speak out. They discuss how education needs to be transformed and conclude by saying, "It really is up to us, parents, teachers, employers, and young people themselves. If we don't work together now, then we face the very real danger that the world's problems will exceed our capacity to solve them. We owe it to these young people. They are the people we have been waiting for."

Children and Youth Speaking Out

Young people are now saying, "We are the generation we have been waiting for," and they're assuming that responsibility. Early evidence of this that remains at the forefront is the youth-led Fridays for Future[127] movement. It began in 2018, when fifteen-year-old Greta Thunberg pressured the Swedish parliament to bring its policies in line with the Paris Agreement. It has led to worldwide strikes where students skip classes and hold demonstrations on Fridays to convey the message that governments have got to do more to address climate change. Seventy-five hundred cities and over fourteen million people have now participated in the movement. Teach the Future[128], founded in 2019, is taking student climate action a step further by calling for changes to school curriculum. This group has been meeting with success in getting UK governments to improve education about the environmental crisis we face.

There are also examples of young people moving from the streets and boardrooms to the courts. In 2015, twenty one young Americans filed the lawsuit, *Juliana v. United States*. Their complaint asserts that through the government's affirmative actions that cause climate change, it has violated the youngest generation's constitutional rights to life, liberty, and property, as well as failed to protect essential public trust resources.[129]

More recently, October 2019, fifteen Canadian youth, representing seven provinces and one territory, filed the *La Rose et al. vs. His Majesty the King*[130] lawsuit in the Federal Court of

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[124] *We Are The People We've Been Waiting For*, (2009), Edge Foundation (https://www.edge.co.uk), https://vimeo.com/8311189

[125] Well known in the field of education, Ken Robinson has the most watched TED Talk, *Do Schools Kill Creativity*, with around seventy-five million views, which is an indicator of dissatisfaction with public education, https://www.ted.com/talks/sir_ken_robinson_do_schools_kill_creativity?language=en.

[126] In 2004, Richard Branson and Virgin employees founded the Virgin Unite foundation to support advancements towards a world where all people thrive. It funds Big Change (https://www.big-change.org), created in 2012 by Holly and Sam Branson along with four friends, which is committed to finding and backing pioneers who lead early-stage projects that support young people. At the Transforming Education Summit in 2022 (https://transformingeducationsummit.sdg4education2030.org/SummitSep22), Big Change launched its Big Education Conversation initiative to help grow the global conversation about a new social contract for education. At the 2024 Learning Planet Festival, it held its first Big Education Conversation Relay, https://www.learning-planet.org/event/big-education-conversation-relay-9am-utc/.

[127] Fridays For Future, https://fridaysforfuture.org/

[128] Teach the Future, https://www.teachthefuture.uk/about

[129] *Juliana v. United States*, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/571d109b04426270152febe0/t/57a35ac5ebbd1ac03847eece/1470323398409/YouthAmendedComplaintAgainstUS.pdf

[130] *La Rose et al. vs. His Majesty the King*, https://climatecasechart.com/non-us-case/la-rose-v-her-majesty-the-queen/

Canada. They allege that the federal government causes, contributes to and allows dangerous levels of greenhouse gas emissions and is responsible for the specific, individualized climate change impacts they are experiencing. Much can be gained from these legal actions. Arguments can be refined to better support the position of young people and they serve to remind the public that the young inherit what their elders leave behind.

Something that has not received much attention to date is "time" as a human right. It's said that time is money, but it's more than that. It's life itself and we have only so many hours to make the most of it. To commandeer people's time without their consent, no matter how well intentioned, is to steal parts of their lives. It's reasonable to think that as students increasingly find their voices that they could seize on "time", as they have seized on climate change to bring attention to their concerns. The *Youth Declaration on Transforming Education*[131] mentioned above provides support for students asserting themselves on the education front.

While the vast majority of people would prefer to live in a democracy than in an authoritarian regime, the Open Society Foundations[132] conducted a study that found "young people around the world hold the least faith in democracy of any age group." This, they say, presents a grave threat to its future.[133] It begs a follow-up study to determine if students who have a strong sense of agency are more apt to have greater faith in democracy, and more likely to invest in peace than in war. Comparing the views of students in democratic schools to those in a traditional setting could shed light on this question. Is taking time to live democratically with young people a prerequisite to having a population that appreciates the advantages of democracy?

Known downsides to democracy are that joint decision making is time consuming, and that it's prone to mob rule by fifty-one percent of the population.[134] Democracy can be regarded as an evolving art form with some democratic schools striving more than others to minimize the downsides. How well school meetings are conducted would be one distinguishing factor. Ted Weisgal, author of *Robert's Rules for Kids and Big Kids: A Guide to Teaching Kids of All Ages the Basics of Parliamentary Procedure*[135], believes that the better people are at applying Robert's Rules in their meetings, the more efficiently decisions will be made and acted upon. Schools in the Netherlands featured in the *School Circles* documentary practice sociocracy to base decisions on consent versus majority rule. A deeper study comparing the faith in democracy to the efficiency and sophistication with which schools apply democratic principles could also be informative.

Talk of students being partners in decisions that affect them creates fear of schools descending into chaos, and it's not unfounded. The Pinecrest School in Ottawa, Canada exemplifies how

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[131] Ibid 34
[132] Open Society Foundations. https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org
[133] *Open Society Barometer: Can Democracy Deliver?*. (2023). Open Society Foundations. https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/focus/open-society-barometer
[134] The following quote is often attributed to Thomas Jefferson, but it's origins have not been confirmed. "A democracy is nothing more than mob rule, where 51 percent of the people may take away the rights of the other 49."
[135] Weisgal, T. and Haun, M. (2017). *Robert's Rules for Kids and Big Kids: A Guide to Teaching Kids of All Ages the Basics of Parliamentary Procedure*. Wise Wit Publishing, Houston, Texas. https://www.amazon.ca/Roberts-Rules-Kids-Big-Parliamentary/dp/1973917599

things can go awry.[136] It appears that students were given more freedom than they knew how to handle and the results weren't good. Repeating what Daniel Pink says in *Drive*, people will suffer if they have been highly controlled and suddenly given a large measure of autonomy. The Pinecrest story speaks to the complexity of the relationships within schools discussed by Adam Fletcher. Depending on their previous experience, when given a voice some students will form healthy partnerships with adults, while others who have felt oppressed and underserved are more likely to misuse the responsibility.

The belief that young people are too irresponsible and inexperienced to be afforded full human rights needs to be challenged as much as the once common belief that women didn't have the capability to operate in the boardrooms of big business. Some people argue that young people cannot be included as equals because their frontal lobes, the seat of executive functioning, are not yet fully developed. With what is now known about the development of the brain, this could be a misread of the situation. The term "synaptic pruning" refers to "the natural process where the brain eliminates extra synapses that it does not require."[137] It's a "use it or lose it" phenomenon.[138] Babies are born with millions of brain cells and it's believed that the pruning process occurs primarily between the ages of two and ten. It could be that in cultures where adultism is rampant, frontal lobes are underdeveloped because young people aren't adequately exercising the cells of executive functioning. The research suggests that once gone these cells could be unretrievable. It could be concluded from this that traditional schools are physiologically permanently damaging young people, which might explain to some degree the lack of good judgment often observed in adult populations.

Pearl Oriele Perumal and Fardeen Blaq are among many young people who are speaking out. Pearl is the first winner of the Planetizen University Youth Design Challenge[139]. It was created by the Learning Planet Institute as part of its effort to include young people in shaping the future and provides youth with an opportunity to pitch "their dream learning programmes". Over seventy young people from thirty countries submitted their dreams with the results announced at the 2024 January Learning Planet Festival. Pearl's submission brings to mind the previously mentioned documentary *Schooling the World*[140], which exposes the devastating effects modern education has had throughout the world. Her program aims to undo some of the harm by addressing the problems of lost Indigenous knowledge and the disconnection of people with

[136] Miller, J. (Dec. 18, 2022). *Defiant students, fearful teachers and an elementary school in disarray: What really happened at Pinecrest Public School?*. The Ottawa Citizen. https://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/defiant-students-fearful-teachers-and-an-elementary-school-in-disarray-what-really-happened-at-pinecrest-public-school

[137] MedicalNewsToday. (Last medically reviewed on July 26, 2023). *Synaptic pruning: Definition, process, and potential uses.* Healthline Media UK Ltd, Brighton, UK. https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/synaptic-pruning

[138] Fauth, E.B. and Norton, M.C. (Retrieved June 3, 2024). *A Healthy Brain: Use It or Lose It!*. Utah State University https://extension.usu.edu/aging/research/a-healthy-brain-use-it-or-lose-it#:~:text=Even%20though%20the%20brain%20cells,brain%20cell%20loses%20its%20function

[139] Planetizen University Youth Design Challenge. https://www.learningplanetinstitute.org/2024/02/06/planetizen-university-2/. Information on how the Learning Planet has supported the 2024 challenge winners can be found here: https://www.learning-planet.org/2023-2024-youth-design-challenge-finalists-training-programme-update/. The challenge is being renamed to the *Learning Planet Youth Design Challenge*. Details about the 2024-2025 edition are found here: https://www.learning-planet.org/action-group/youth-empowerment/learning-planet-youth-design-challenge/

[140] Black, C. (Director). (2010). *Schooling the World*. Provided for free by Films For Action. https://www.filmsforaction.org/watch/schooling-the-world-2010/

others and the environment.[141] By selecting Pearl as its first winner of the challenge, the Learning Planet Institute signals that the transformation of education needs to take into account how children acquired their skills and knowledge before traditional schooling took over. Peter Gray has developed his theories about self-directed learning starting with how children of hunter-gatherer cultures obtained their education. Ji Mi Choi[142], one of the jury members who selected the top three submissions expressed her faith in young people saying:

"I'm looking over the top three prizes out of the hundreds of ideas that came in, and if Jay, Georgina and Pearl were collaborating, imagine how powerful their programmes could be! (...) It's not a one plus one, it turns into a one plus exponential."[143]

Fardeen Blag is a 2020 recipient of the Diana Award[144] and has twice been nominated for the International Children's Peace Prize[145]. He is a co-founder of Kikaocultures[146] with the mission to empower young people. This year he launched the YNot? Campaign with the ambitious goal of engaging a billion youth in conversations about children's rights and the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child. He's approaching this task by supporting the efforts of others, such as those working to achieve the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. He's currently involved in having his home city of Nairobi, Kenya declared by UNICEF to be a child safe city.

Helping to make the transition to rights-respecting schools are various student-led organizations whose leaders demonstrate the qualities of Pearl and Fardeen, and who appreciate that the transformation of education involves partnering respectfully with adults. The Australian Council for Student Voice[147], founded in 2019 is one such organization. It wants "to work with students, schools, governments, educators, and a wide range of other stakeholders towards an education system where student voice thrives." Another youth-led organization founded in 2020 is YouthxYouth[148]. It participates in Learning Planet Festivals and shone its 2024 April Activist Spotlight on Pearl.[149] Its mission is "to accelerate the process of young people influencing, designing, and transforming their learning experiences and education systems."[150] Speaking at a 2021 AEROx conference, Zineb Mouhyi, a co-founder of YouthxYouth, delivered a compelling talk titled: Why Young People Should Design the Future of Education[151].

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[141] For a brief overview of the contributions Indigenous cultures offer to addressing pressing world problems, see *Indigenous Worldview and Future Generations of Life on Earth.* (2021). Morobe Development Foundation. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QkQTeVmHn7M&t=165s

[142] Ji Mi Choi is a staff member of the Arizona State University and is the Desert and Pacific Region Director of the US National Science Foundation Innovation Corps Hub.

[143] Ibid 81.

[144] The Diana Award founded in memory of Princess Diana works to empower young people to make positive change. https://diana-award.org.uk

[145] The International Children's Peace Prize (ICPP) is awarded annually to a child who fights courageously for children's rights. https://www.kidsrights.org/advocacy/

[146] Kikao Cultures. https://www.linkedin.com/company/kikao-cultures/

[147] The Australian Council for Student Voice. https://www.studentvoice.org.au/

[148] YouthxYouth. https://www.youthxyouth.com

[149] April Activist Spotlight: Pearl Oriele Perumal. YouthxYouth. https://www.youthxyouth.com/blog/april-activist-spotlight-pearl-oriele-perumal

[150] See https://www.youthxyouth.com/about

[151] Mouhyi, Z. (2021). *Why Young People Should Design the Future of Education.* YouthxYouth. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=irHE6DvQKsk

Youth like Pearl and Fardeen are described as exceptional by some who have a dim view of young people, but they may just be the result of living in environments where they feel respected, empowered, and have good role models. Research comparing the upbringings of young people like them to those who seem disengaged and irresponsible could reveal that the frontal lobe is late developing not for natural reasons, but for cultural ones.

Mothers Speaking Out

Mothers are also adding momentum to the movement to transform education. The following are a few of their initiatives.

In 2019, Jo Symes founded [Progressive Education](#)[152]. She's a mother who sent her two boys to their local school without question, but it was a disappointing experience. Her sons quickly became anxious, stressed and unhappy. The school however said the boys were 'fine' (as they were very good at 'masking' their distress). School suggested that 'home must be the problem'. Jo was sent on a parenting course and the boys were sent to therapists. No-one was suggesting that the school system itself could be the root of the issue.

Finally, after a period of helping out at the school, Jo started to question whether the school environment was the best place for her children to thrive. She began exploring the history of schooling and alternatives to conventional education. This led to the creation of the Progressive Education Group on Facebook, in order to connect with others on the same journey, and she found she wasn't alone. The group grew rapidly and now has almost 10k members.

As is the case with the Learning Planet Festival, she was motivated to grow the conversation around how to provide for the wellbeing of young people, as opposed to selling her own views, but as is the case with parents who learn more, she has become an advocate for families to have more control over how their children learn. [Speaking at the same 2021 AEROx conference](#)[153] as Zineb Mouhyi, Jo tells her story of how it happens that a mother who was once prepared to go with the flow becomes an agent for change.

Je'anna Clements, mentioned above for her work to build awareness of the importance of fully respecting young people's rights, is the mother of two young people under twenty who have never been to school. She lobbies hard in South Africa for changes to its educational policies. Her *Helping the Butterfly Hatch* textbooks on education facilitation and her exploratory booklet *What If School Creates DYSlexia* are an inspiration for those who yearn for schools to become rights respecting. Her introduction to the Riverstone Village learning community she co-founded reads as follows:

"At RsV we believe that given the unknowable future humanity faces, confidence, courage, communication, compassion, collaboration, curiosity, creativity, critical thinking, initiative and effective self-management are far better educational bets than obedience, conformity, neat

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[152] Progressive Education. https://www.progressiveeducation.org
[153] Symes, J. (2021). AEROx mini talk. Progressive Education. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xpkIqQH4_Jc

handwriting, the ability to memorise information, and the ability to pass written tests. There's only so many hours in a day. Time spent on somebody else's curriculum is time not spent on finding and developing one's own unique strengths."

Karema Akilah is a former public school teacher turned unschooling mom of six children and the founder of The Genius School[154], an international network of micro self-directed learning schools. She's also the founder of the Geniī DAO, a decentralized autonomous organization, the first DAO for children and adults practicing decolonized parenting, deschooling and unschooling. On the My Life My Education[155] Discord server where education transformers meet to advance rights-affirming education, she says the "Geniī DAO is best suited to advance our global initiative of creating autonomy and consent for Learners in education." She describes her DAO as "a group of people meeting primarily online, creating self-governance, to accomplish a common goal with a shared crypto bank account that is controlled by our vote." To further her work, she has created the Geniī Community on Mighty Networks and the GENIE app "to document and translate our Unschooling lifestyle into langue schools and universities can understand." Her efforts directly support those of UNESCO and the Learning Planet Institute to grow the global conversation about transforming education. She trains people to lead Genius Conversations designed to help people discover for themselves what's not working with education. The Genii Community is currently raising five million US dollars to fund seven micro schools; four in the US, two in Kampala, Uganda and one in the Metaverse.

Naomi Fisher is a mother and clinical psychologist specialising in trauma, autism and alternative education who has struggled to provide her children with the education they need. She came to the fore with her book Changing Our Minds: How Children Can Take Control of Their Own Learning[156], published in 2021. She has followed it with the publication in 2023 of A Different Way to Learn,[157] which is "a deep dive into self-directed education and neurodiversity". She continues to speak out through webinars, podcasts and other social media avenues.

Lacey Price is adding her voice to the cause as a result of years of schools failing to provide for the learning needs of her son. She eventually pulled him out of school and was amazed at how he came back to life once out from under what were for him repressive conditions. In 2021 she co-founded the Liberation of Education[158], which has since held annual conferences to build a community of parents, innovators, and educators all working to build a better future "where kids' individual needs are seen and heard, and where kids get to experience the joy of learning out of curiosity, not coercion". It aims to provide parents with the support and resources they need "to liberate their kids from the mediocrity of public school". While the language sounds anti-public education, this is not the case. The concern is that public education in its current form is failing to fulfil its mandate and doing harm to students.

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[154] The Genius School. https://www.thegeniusschool.org
[155] My Life My Education. https://www.mylifemy.education/about/
[156] Fisher, N. (2021). *Changing Our Minds: How Children Can Take Control of Their Own Learning*. Robinson, London. https://www.psychologicaltherapybooks.co.uk/product/changing-our-minds-how-children-can-take-control-of-their-own-learning-2/
[157] Fisher, N. (2023). *A Different Way to Learn: Neurodiversity and Self-Directed Education.* Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London. https://www.psychologicaltherapybooks.co.uk/product/a-different-way-to-learn-neurodiversity-and-self-directed-education/
[158] Liberation of Education. https://liberationofeducation.org

Another new initiative in its start-up stage is Evolving in Education (EIE)[159], not to be confused with the impressive undertaking by Luz Olid and David Caballero called Evolving Education[160]. Amber Smith, the mother of five year old twin daughters, founded it knowing that she wants something other than school as usual for them. She's an avid supporter of public education, and what she is attempting to accomplish is essentially what Irvin Scott calls an Education Ecosystem Team, which he describes as "a multidisciplinary team of diverse individuals working together to move the Education Ecosystem in the same direction."[161] EIE is already an intriguing exploration of how a parent might initiate the coming together of a community to better provide for its public schools to become learning ecosystems designed for both students and teachers to flourish. Its aim at present to create a pilot program that includes a school or two wishing to explore possibilities for transforming schools into more comprehensive places of learning.

The efforts to date have established a core team of well qualified individuals and over seven hundred members. Its growing list of partners and sponsors include Walmart and Google. Support from the Marriott Shoals Hotel & Spa is providing a good example of how corporations can contribute to the transformation of education. It is helping with fundraising efforts to finance the EIE pilot program by donating for auction a two night stay in its Presidential Suite, as well as breakfast and dinner for two at an epic restaurant in town, and $200 in spa credit. It has also offered its conference center for Amber to pursue her connections with the local music community with the aim of hosting a fundraising "blowout concert with some big names".

Whether or not the EIE pilot project gets off the ground is still to be determined, but EIE is already a success. The task at hand for everyone seeking to transform education is to grow the conversation about a new social contract for education and EIE is doing that. Its pilot project is an attempt to fly. If it doesn't take off, it positions people to take what they have learned and apply it, as did people who took aviation from failure to success. "Never give up" is the motto transformers must live by.

Thomas Kuhn observed that new paradigms can include the best of old ones and this is a clue to looking after the culprits. Contrary to what many people think, self-directed learning doesn't eliminate the formal teaching of subjects. At the Sudbury Valley School, a group of a dozen girls and boys ages nine to twelve asked for a course in arithmetic. Their request was granted on condition that everyone attended class on time, didn't skip classes and did their homework. The group agreed and it was decided that they'd meet for half an hour two days a week until the course was completed. According to Daniel Greenberg who taught the course, it took only twenty hours of class time for the students to learn all the math that's taught from grade one to the end of grade six in regular schools, and he said that by the end they "knew the material cold".[162] This example shows that democratic school systems have a place for subject specialists who would have the pleasure of sharing their knowledge with willing learners as opposed to force feeding the disengaged.

[159] Evolving In Education. https://evolvingineducation.org
[160] Evolving Education. https://evolvingeducation.org/en/home/
[161] ibid 10
[162] Ibid 17. (pp. 15-18).

What Is Seen

Many people believe that traditional schooling isn't working, but they don't really know why. The following is a sampling of persistent old problems, in no particular order, that public educators have been unable to solve, in large part because they're stuck in a model that creates them. The more aware that people become of the flaws in traditional schooling, the more likely they will be unable to unsee that things must change. Included with the sampling are additional suggestions for research that could prove to be invaluable to establishing new directions for education.

#1 - The Misuse of Time

The Sudbury Valley School math course brings into question all of the time public schools spend on math instruction up to the end of grade six. Willingness and readiness to learn the material would explain much of the time saving. Also the students would have acquired math skills through everyday activities. Math is everywhere. Fractions and decimals are learned while carving up pizzas and dealing with money. It supports Peter Gray's position on self-directed education that children will learn of their own volition all that they need to know to survive in their culture. In addition to some new content, the course would have formalized concepts already understood, and it would have been accomplished cohesively as opposed to confusing disengaged students with various parts presented by different teachers over years. Math shouldn't be a big deal. Universities have used it as a major criteria for admissions, but this is changing and as it does, young people could start enjoying it instead of stressing over it. Math anxiety is another symptom of something gone wrong.

Equally questionable is the time spent actually learning during a typical one hundred and ten hour high school course. A number of years ago, the Colonel By Secondary School in Ottawa began to offer the International Baccalaureate program (IB)[163]. To qualify, students had to be more advanced in math. Applicants had to cover two years of math in a single course during the year prior to entering the IB program. There was initial concern that it would be too much for students to absorb in that short a time, but anecdotal evidence indicated that the concern was unfounded. Much of the math taught through grades nine to twelve could be covered in a single course. A Lesson About Math[164] gives an inside look at the typical math class and presents the advantages to doing it differently.

Young people who have never gone to school are getting accepted into college and university programs that require them to demonstrate they have at least a twelfth grade knowledge of math. A study of how they acquired that knowledge and how long it took them to master it could be most informative. In their study of the graduates of the Sudbury Valley School, Gray and Chanoff asked participants who went on to college what they saw as advantages and disadvantages to their ability to pursue post-high-school education compared to students who had

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[163] The International Baccalaureate (IB). https://www.ibo.org

[164] Fransham, R. (2016, October, 12). A Lesson About Math, *Ottawa Public Education Remake Initiative*. http://operi.ca/?p=1734

a more traditional education. One of the graduates said, "A lot of the people there (in college) have had more experience in some of the substantive areas. But the attitudinal difference seems to allow me to catch up very quickly. The substantive things are trivial to acquire . . ."[165] Other graduates also referred to an attitudinal difference. A comparative study of these differences could be helpful in determining the route to a new age of learning.

#2 - Misuse of Teacher Expertise

In formally scheduled schools it's common to have a subject expert teaching one group of students a course while next door the same course is being taught by a teacher with no qualifications to teach that subject and no real interest in it. It's a problem that extends throughout K-12 public education. In the lower grades, one class of students may have a master teacher for the entire year, while another has a teacher who is considerably less effective. It exacerbates efforts to provide equality for all students and it further disadvantages less privileged students. Many savvy, influential parents do what they can to have their children placed with preferred teachers. The structure of teachers being shut away in their own classrooms means that weaker teachers have little opportunity for the self-improvement that results from observing master teachers in action. *School Circles* and *Suvemäe – Pioneer of Possibility* show that schools operating without formal scheduling don't have these problems. The teachers aren't isolated in their classrooms. They move freely in the learning community where they're accessible to all and they are visible role models for everyone.

Magnet schools[166] and the Specialty High Skills Major programs[167] in Ontario, Canada schools are designed to exposed the most deserving students to the top experts within a school system, but these programs are problematic. They amount to a brain drain from community schools, and they're elitist, but they suggest possibilities. If schools were free of formal scheduling, the problems could be overcome. These centres of concentrated expertise could become parts of a wide ecosystem of learners that offer mini-courses, travelling experts and other programs that help to share the expertise evenly throughout a school district.

#3 - Narrow Curriculum

Problems of equity existing in traditional schools are exacerbated by the narrow curriculum that touches on only a tiny fraction of what is going on in the world. It consequently favours those best positioned to benefit from that small slice. The high school curriculum is limited primarily to only the subjects that can be fit into the timetable, which constitutes injustice to even those students who appear to be success stories. After twelve years of schooling, students are graduating having had insufficient opportunities to pursue their interests and to discover themselves. Some evidence of this is that the U.S. National Center for Education Statistics estimates eighty percent of college students change their major at least once.[168] While this

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[165] Idid??? p. 199.
[166] Magnet schools. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magnet_school
[167] Specialty High Skills Major programs. https://www.ontario.ca/page/specialist-high-skills-major
[168] Ramos, Y. (2013, March 15), College students tend to change majors when they find the one they really love

number is debatable, colleges and universities are having to deal with the problem and they're finding that students who have substantial experience with self-directed learning are more apt to know what they want and are more ready to take advantage of what the institutes of higher learning offer.

A few years back, the Compass Liberated Learners centre in Ottawa[169] held an evening event to inform people about how to gain admission to colleges and universities with no school transcript or graduation diploma.[170] Jen Sugar, the Director of Admissions for the local medium-size Carleton University was the guest speaker and she talked about how candidates could get accepted to her university on the basis of only five prerequisite course credits. It's a trend, and it's a game changer. Students can get five credits in less than a year without going to school.

Jen had brought with her a journalism student who had been homeschooled. When this young lady was only fourteen she enrolled as a special student in a university course. She went on to enrol in more courses as a special student, which led to her gaining admission to Carleton at an unusually young age, with credits that she was able to apply towards her degree. Another student Jen had brought with her had never gone to school, but he was accepted into an engineering program. He had completed the required prerequisite credits online through the Ontario Virtual Learning Centre[171]. These two students knew what they wanted when they applied to Carleton and they felt responsible for getting it. In contrast, the engineering student said that he was disappointed with his university classmates who had attended traditional schools. He had expected to find a group of peers interested in pursuing the subject of interest to him and instead he found that his cohorts were primarily interested in partying. The answer he gave when asked if he found it difficult to make friends at university given his point of view was telling. He said it wasn't difficult at all, that the party-goers were always coming to him for last minute help with their assignments.

Jay Gosselin left a position with the CO-OP office of the University of Ottawa to fill a need. He had found what the Carleton engineering student alluded to - the majority of students coming out of high school weren't ready to be entering university. He founded Discover Year[172] to encourage students to take a gap year and to help them make the most of it. His TEDx Talk, *Gap Year: A Path to Purposeful Education,*[173] convincingly makes the case for high school graduates to be more grounded before continuing their formal studies.

The party behaviour of university students is normalized by adults who nostalgically look back on their own partying days as some of the best times of their lives, which could be true if it was the first real opportunity they had to find themselves. It speaks poorly of twelve years of schooling that fails to graduate young people who are responsibly independent and who have a good self-knowledge.

Borderzine. https://borderzine.com/2013/03/college-students-tend-to-change-majors-when-they-find-the-one-they-really-love/

[169] Compass Centre for Self-Directed Learning. https://www.facebook.com/CompassTeens/

[170] Carleton University Admissions talk at Compass. https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/my-drive

[171] The Ontario Virtual Learning Centre. https://virtuallearning.ca

[172] Discover Year. https://discoveryear.ca

[173] Gosselin, J. (2018). *Gap Year: A Path to Purposeful Education.* TEDx Talk.
https://www.ted.com/talks/jay_gosselin_gap_year_a_path_to_purposeful_education

"Know thyself" has been a message of truth-seekers throughout the ages. Murray Sinclair is a living legend who shares the advice. He was a former Canadian Senator who served as chairman of the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission[174] from 2009 to 2015. During a 2021 Bright Future interview at the time he was appointed Chancellor of Queen's University, he stressed the importance of young people knowing themselves. At about the 35 minute mark of episode 25 of the Bright Future podcast[175], host Michael Basset asks Murray, "What do you want to know about them?", referring to the students of Queen's University. He responded by saying, "What do I want to know about them, or what do I want them to know about themselves? I think that is an important distinction. The challenge for students who are entering and departing upon graduation from a university is to be sure you know who you are." A little later in the interview he had this to say about education: "I am most excited by the fact that we have an opportunity to change the world by changing the way we educate our children to talk to and about each other. We now have a generation of children who are challenging some of the very basic beliefs of their own parents, and that's good, that's always good. They have to learn to do it in a respectful way of course and in a way that helps them to determine things for themselves."

During her talk at the Compass gathering, Jen Sugar confirmed that the two students she brought with her were representative of university students who hadn't gone to school. Whereas colleges and universities once regarded homeschoolers as less suitable candidates for their programs, they're now being viewed as some of the most desirable.[176]

Research comparing the "Know thyself" levels, and the readiness for post-secondary studies of unschooled students to those who had a traditional education could be illuminating. The studies could go so far as to compare the development of the frontal lobes in each group, and maybe even those of their parents.

A recent development that looks promising is the founding of the Inner Development Goals (IDGs).[177] They can be interpreted as identifying what people need to know about themselves in order to better address pressing world problem. A fear is that conventional educators will seize on it and attempt to make courses out of it that will then be forced on students. Before that is allowed to happen, studies need to be conducted to determine if young people in democratic learning environments have been naturally acquiring the desired qualities. Caution needs to be exercised not to teach something that needs to be learned through living.

[174] Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission. https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1450124405592/1529106060525

[175] Episode 25 of Bright Future: *The Hon. Murray Sinclair on why we need truth for reconciliation,* https://podcasts.apple.com/ca/podcast/ep-25-the-hon-murray-sinclair-on-why-we-need-truth/id1514628454?i=1000526232180

[176] Schultz, C. (2014, Sept. 4). "Unschooled" Kids Do Just Fine in College. *Smithsonian Magazine.* https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/unschooled-kids-have-few-problems-once-they-hit-college-180952613/

[177] Inner Development Goals. Retrieved on December 31, 2024 from https://innerdevelopmentgoals.org

#4 - Large Impersonal Schools

Efforts to overcome the problem of school curriculum being too narrow has led to large high schools of two thousand students or more who are bused in from miles away. With formal scheduling, the larger the school enrolment, the greater the variety of courses a school can offer, but even in large schools, students are able to take only a fraction of the authorized courses[178], and large schools are problematic in other ways.

A number of around two hundred and fifty has been given as an optimum student enrolment for schools. It's thought that beyond that number anonymity begins to creep in and students fall through the cracks. Daniel Greenberg said the number might go as high as four hundred and fifty in democratic schools where students start at a young age and attrition is low.[179] With the resources available today and teachers trained as facilitators of learning, students free of the one-size-fits-all approach to learning could choose to undertake any ministry course at any given time.

The school down the street could again be the community hub with the prospect of creating a learning ecosystem that invites the whole village to raise the children. The idea of learning hubs being launchpads for reaching out into the bigger world and welcoming the big world in, has been around for some time. *Creating Learning Communities*[180], first published in 2000 and edited by Ron Miller, founder of the *Holistic Education Review*[181], contains the views of many thinkers on the topic. Today, Education Reimagined[182] is at the forefront of developing ecosystems of learners in K-12 schools. Its document, *Ecosystems For The Future Of Learning*[183]*,* produced with the History Co:Lab and commissioned by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching[184], gives some of the latest thinking and work being done to transform education.

Re-establishing neighbourhood learning centres as the norm has two tangible advantages. It supports the idea of active and safe routes to school[185], and it helps to address the climate change problem by dramatically reducing the need for school buses and all the other travel generated by students attending schools outside their neighbourhoods. Busing eats up huge amounts of educational funds that could instead be directly applied to learning.

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[178] For an example of the range of courses on the books for some students, see the Ontario Government document *Course Descriptions and Prerequisites*: https://www.dcp.edu.gov.on.ca/en/course-descriptions-and-prerequisites. Studies that compare the courses students can actually take even in large high schools would provide evidence of the narrow range of topics available to students.
[179] This number was mentioned in a private conversation with Daniel Greenberg.
[180] Miller, R. (2000). *Creating Learning Communities*. The Foundation For Educational Renewal, Brandon, Vermont. https://www.amazon.com/Creating-Learning-Communities-Foundations-Education/dp/1885580045
[181] Holistic Education Review. https://her.journals.publicknowledgeproject.org/index.php/her
[182] Education Reimagined. https://education-reimagined.org/
[183] Education Reimagined and History Co:Lab. (2023) *Ecosystems For The Future Of Learning*. https://thebigidea.education-reimagined.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Ecosystems-for-the-Future-of-Learning-FINAL-Report.pdf
[184] Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. https://www.carnegiefoundation.org
[185] Active & Safe Routes to School. http://activesaferoutes.ca

The very large scale shift underway from the Industrial Age to the Age of Autonomy is reversing the movement to cities back to the land and smaller communities. It's a shift that is resulting in the decline of city centres which will create all sorts of inescapable challenges. Solving the problems of undoing large schools in order for people to establish local communities of learners is one of these challenges. Needed are governments and school boards willing to pioneer how to return learning to local communities.

#5 - Out-Dated Curriculum and Resources

At the start of the second semester of the LBP program, one of the students enrolled in a grade twelve computer course complained that the Waterloo Structured Basic programming language schools were using was outdated and he asked if he could load the state-of-the-art Visual Basic program on a class computer to use for his course. His mother was working for a software development firm, which, anticipating growth, had purchased more licensed copies of Visual Basic than it needed at the time, and she told him that the firm would loan him one of the extra copies for his course. There was no good reason to deny his request, so he installed it and with a friend taking the same course energized the room with their excitement over what they were able to accomplish working through the main tutorial that came with the Visual Basic software.

With the explosion of information and the speed of change, we're far from the old days when people could learn all they needed to know for life in their first twenty years. Today it's said that books are out of date the day they're published. An example accentuating this problem in education is found with the Ontario Ministry of Education Computer Studies[186] document describing the five grades ten to twelve courses schools are authorized to offer. It was published in 2008. In 2023 the grade ten course information was updated, but the other four courses, two grade eleven and two grade twelve, are still described as published in 2008. As the Visual Basics boys indicated, students are living in the present and know what is relevant. Having them learn dated material is a recipe for disengagement. More studies are needed to shed light on the connection between perceived relevance of material and engagement in learning.

#6 - Putting the Brakes on Learning

Another grade twelve student was so inspired by the Visual Basics students that he spent his own money on a copy of a newly released version of the C programming language. He too installed it on a classroom computer and worked on it in class, although for him it led to no course credit. He had fallen behind in acquiring the credits he needed to graduate with his peer group and had been on the verge of dropping out of school when he enrolled in the program. The grade ten introductory computer course, a required prerequisite to higher level ones, was the one he was required to take in the program. Within a month he had more than accomplished the learning outcomes for it, and hoping to make up a credit he was missing to graduate with his friends, he asked if he could get credit for taking the next level computer course using his programming language. The answer came back from the school board that he couldn't get more than four

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[186] https://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/computer10to12_2008.pdf

credits per semester. That was the rule. A similar systemic rule also puts the brakes on learning in the lower grades. It stems from age-segregation. It's considered taboo for a teacher to teach what students are to be taught the following year. What are teachers to do if the students they receive already know what they are required to teach? These are problems that don't exist in democratic schools where there are no limits to what students can learn.

#7 - Beyond the Limits of Co-op

Co-op programs demonstrate the interest employers have in the education of young people, but what they can do is severely restricted by having to fit in with the school agenda as opposed to schools fitting in with their operations. Currently, students in public schools are placed with employers for a semester, a four month period. Not all employers can commit to providing students with a quality learning experience for that long a time. It consequently happens that employers don't get involved or have situations where students learn what they need to know during the first weeks and then finish out the semester as free labour. The work cycle of many companies is such that they have quiet times when it would be convenient to have staff working with students, and busy times when staff needs to be focused on meeting deadlines and fulfilling customer needs. If co-op placements weren't tied to formal scheduling, then students could be free to learn from employers for varying amounts of time ranging from a morning, to days, weeks and months. Schools free of formal scheduling are also able to welcome employers and others to visit at their convenience and share what they have to offer.

Co-op isn't the only way to connect students with the bigger world. Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR)[187] is another way to involve students in their communities, and as is the case with age-mixing, it addresses to some degree the complaint that traditional schooling offers too little opportunity for students to feel useful. A related activity initiated by a couple of grade eleven girls in the LBP program paints a broader picture. Of their own volition, on their own time, and unknown to the teachers, they'd been visiting a private daycare neighbouring the school. One day they came to class and asked if they could bring in a large cardboard box used to transport a refrigerator. They wanted to decorate it as a playhouse for the children in the daycare. The class agreed to having the box sit right in the middle of the classroom for as long as they needed. One day, in a show of being comfortable with herself and her community of learners, one of the girls stuck her head out of a window she had created in the box and loudly declared to the class, "Hey, look at me! I'm getting to play like a little kid." The end result of the project was that the girls personified the notion that if you want to feel better about yourself, do something for someone else. They had fun making the playhouse and playing in it with the daycare children; they served as an example to others in the class how a little initiative could make life interesting, and they acquired some credit towards their art course.

#8 - Lack of Job Satisfaction

There's much fear among public school teachers that movement towards democratic schools threatens their job security, but to the contrary, it would allow for the hiring of more teachers

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[187] For more on YPAR see Berkeley YPAR Hub, Berkeley University of California. https://yparhub.berkeley.edu/home

with no new spending. The growing recognition of the importance of intergenerational learning points to the need for students to be in contact with more, not fewer adults.

The movement to democratize school also promises to alleviate the mounting sick leave costs to school boards, the insufficient numbers of substitute teachers, and the overall teacher shortage. It will require changes to teacher education. How to effectively deliver subject content would remain, but emphasis would be placed on training teachers to be facilitators of human flourishing and cultivators of multifaceted ecosystems of learning. This shouldn't be seen by union leaders as a burden for teachers, but rather as their salvation. Those who adapt stand to feel that teaching is the most honourable of professions and wake up in the morning wanting to go to school, as will their students.

Studies are needed to determine the validity of anecdotal evidence that teachers in democratic learning environments are happier in their jobs and less likely to be off on sick leave than those working in public schools. Fostering Human Flourishing: Learning Ecosystems Roundtable[188] is the title of a session conducted at the 2024 Learning Planet Festival. It consisted of two panels, one hosted by Michael Stevenson, senior consultant for The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)[189], and the other by Vishal Talreja, co-founder of Dream a Dream[190]. The panelists from around the world were most impressive and well qualified to talk about education for human flourishing. Vishal's panel focused attention on education in the global south, which could become a leader in the development of a new social contract for education, the thought being that the dominant model of education, warned about in *Schooling the World*, isn't as entrenched there as it is in the global north. The difficult task of deschooling is likely not as big a barrier to change, and much can be learned from Indigenous cultures that have been less impacted by colonization. The recording of this session could be of much value to faculties of education seeking to adjust their teacher training programs to make teaching the enjoyable profession it has the potential to be.

#9 - Breeding Discrimination

Another story about the grade twelve Visual Basic boys of the LBP program gives insight into how traditional schools breed discrimination. They enrolled for the second year of the program and about six weeks in they proudly confessed to one of the teachers that they had only pretended that they'd help to build a learning community. "We just wanted to work by ourselves all day on the computer, and we didn't intend to have anything to do with the little grade ten kids," they said, then added, "We don't even notice the age difference anymore." They were feeling good about themselves as if they had transcended to a deeper sense of their humanity. Learning communities allow students to get to know others as human beings just like themselves, not as the kid who fails math, or who is the teacher's pet, etc.. The competitive atmosphere that's a source of discrimination naturally gives way to feelings of community in programs that allow for relationship building. This is perhaps the greatest argument for

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[188] Fostering Human Flourishing: Learning Ecosystems Roundtable. (2024). Learning Planet Festival. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AkKupBUrXtc
[189] The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). https://www.oecd.org/about/
[190] Dream a Dream. https://dreamadream.org

eliminating authoritarian control, formal scheduling and age-segregation. Comparing the health of democratic learning communities to those of traditional schools could be very revealing. Levels of bullying in each would be an easy place to start.

#10 - Separation of Subjects

Formal scheduling works against learning efficiency in that it causes a duplication of content, particularly with math and the sciences, and it disjoints knowledge by having students concentrate on parts at the expense of the bigger picture. Another downside is that it discourages flow[191], which is crucial to student engagement. If students happen to get into flow in one class, they will have to pop out of it when the bell rings. The subliminal message it ingrains is "why bother".

Self-directed learning environments allow for the integration of subjects to happen naturally, and provide for students to stay in flow as long as they wish. Grade eleven students in the LBP program demonstrated how it can work. They were required to study Shakespeare's Macbeth and they decided to integrate their subjects and have some fun putting on a Shakespearean play. Credit towards their art and computer courses would be gained by making backdrops, filming the production, editing the footage and producing a professional video of the play.[192] It was also an undertaking rich in opportunities to practice the 4 C's.

The play provides a window into how two schools under the same roof can complement each other. LBP at the time had a remarkable English teacher who had the ability to uninhibitedly stand before his class reading Shakespeare, stepping in and out of the different characters as he read. It didn't occur to those involved at the time, but he could have assumed a part in the play and dropped in on the program during his prep period to rehearse with the students. It offers a quality professional development opportunity where the teacher would experience being the equal of students and perhaps experience how working with students who are self-directed is more enjoyable than force feeding them. The students would benefit from having a true pro in their midst. It's a glimpse of how public education can shift to rights-affirming education in ways that those who are resistant to change will begin to see how life can be more satisfying for them. As more teachers conduct these kinds of programs, the more they'll discover ways to blend the old and the new to capture the best of both.

An Ending About Wellbeing
The story of a Vietnamese student who enrolled in the second year of the LBP program makes a good conclusion to this article. He was relatively new to Canada and was struggling to learn English. The year before, he had been in a grade nine science course taught by one of the teachers in the program. It was a difficult class, an unstreamed mix of over thirty students, and he was miserable, as he was reported to be in all his classes. He sat at the back of the room with a scowl on his face, and if asked a question would absolutely cringe under the glare of over thirty pairs of eyes bearing down on him.

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[191] For more on flow, see Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The Psychology of optimal experience*. HarperCollins, New York. https://www.amazon.ca/Flow-Psychology-Experience-Mihaly-Csikszentmihalyi/dp/0061339202
[192] Math might also have been included with students using geometry when constructing their backdrops.

School Circles and *Suvemäe – Pioneer of Possibility* document how quickly students regain their better selves when treated with dignity, and the Vietnamese boy made an incredible turnaround in the LBP program. He became friends with an English speaking Portuguese student during his first days of the program and transformed into a radiant, happy person animatedly jabbering with his new friend throughout the day. He wasn't only spiritually refreshed. There could have been no better way for him to improve his English. It was empowering for him. It's an example of the incidental learning that can more easily occur within a community of learners.

As the Christmas break approached, the student asked a teacher if he could organize the class holiday party celebration. The teacher liked the idea, but said that it would have to be a class decision. The boy went off with nothing more said and returned to the teacher within twenty minutes. He had gone to every other student with his request and they all agreed.

He made reservations for the class to have dinner at a Vietnamese restaurant and on the evening of the party the students met at their suburban school and took public transportation to the downtown restaurant, but he didn't travel with them. He said he would meet them at the restaurant and when they arrived they discovered that he was their Maître d'Hôtel. He welcomed the group most graciously, beaming with delight, and with a towel folder over his arm he led the group to their tables describing the non-alcoholic drinks the restaurant had made specially for them. So there he was, transformed from a young man so miserable as to be untouchable to a wonderful ambassador for his people and a social planner who provided a memorable cultural experience.

In closing, if the following prediction by Carol Black comes true, it could mean that miserable students will no longer exist and that public education has passed its high stakes test.

> *Generations from now, we'll look back and say,*
> *"How could we have done this kind of thing to people?"*[193]

It will be for those who cannot unsee the injustices being done to young people today to act - "keeping quiet, saying nothing, becomes as political an act as speaking out."

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[193] This quote is found at the top of the page where you can watch *Schooling the World* for free. https://carolblack.org/schooling-the-world.