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AUTUMN 2016 **The Journal of Personalised Education Now** Issue No. 24

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Welcome to Issue 24 of the Journal, an Alternative Educational Futures Conference 'Special'!

The conference was held at Birmingham City University on 17th June to celebrate the life and work of two radical educators and dear friends, Prof Roland Meighan (1937-2014) and Phillip Toogood (1935-2013). The event was a wonderful tribute to the lives of Roland and Philip, demonstrating the energy, richness, warmth and creativity of the many strands of the alternative education community which they supported and nurtured during their lives.

I would like to thank Peter Humphreys who had the vision for the conference matched by the energy to make it happen. It was fitting that Peter opened the conference, announcing the amazing line up of presenters. There were around 130 people in attendance and, at any one time throughout the day, there was a choice of three twenty minute workshops to attend. It was possible to attend eight workshops during the day plus an inspiring keynote from Dr. Bernard Trafford - Still Rearranging the Deckchairs. At Noon, for example, you could listen to Clive Harber asking whether authoritarian and violent schools can educate for peace and democracy, hear Mark Webster explore how Art and Creativity can promote positive social change or join LibED for reflections on the experience of critical pedagogy in the classroom!

The warmth and energy of reunions, introductions and conversations could be felt throughout the conference venue, by the bookstalls, in the corridors, during lunch and, of course, before and after the workshops.

Following the event I invited some of the presenters to the conference to write something for the Journal related to their presentation so that this issue would offer a feel and flavour of the conference and the range of areas covered. I feel that all the articles convey the freshness and aliveness of the original presentations. I hope you enjoy reading them.

Josh Gifford, Editor

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Home and (Sometimes School) are Where the Heart and Head Are by Nigel Rayment

The headline in the TES read, “Wilshaw calls for more mavericks to shake up an ‘ordinary education system’” (26 May 2016). Well it’s a shame the outgoing head of Ofsted didn’t make the national Alternative Educational Futures conference at Birmingham City University on Friday of last week. Had he done so he might have woken up to the fact that, despite the deadening hand of his own organisation and that of the DfE, the spirit of far from ordinary education is alive and well across the land.

The conference brought together an impressive and suitably heterodox array of theorists and practitioners, including peace educators, specialists in global learning, democratic education, libertarian education, and proponents of digital, self-determined learning (heutagogy). But what made the conference really buzz was that so many of the delegates and practitioners were active home educators, a group which according to figures on Home Education UK, provides education to 0.6% of compulsory education aged children - that’s around 80,000 young people. Although “provides” is not a term home educators would use in this context, since, as they are keen to stress, to enter the realm of home education is to embark on a process of deliberate and highly effective co-learning.

The conference was dedicated to two stalwarts of “maverick” education, Roland Meighan and Philip Toogood, each of whom devoted their lives to promoting learning that understands the child in the round. Neither had truck with the kind of schooling that privileges the head at the expense of the heart, the sort that, in the view of last year’s NUT report *Exam Factories?* is producing children with, “increasingly high levels of school-related anxiety and stress, disaffection and mental health problems.”

While suspicious of formal education in general, both Meighan and Toogood believed in the power of a flexi-schooling, an approach which blends home education with part-time attendance at school, enabling young people to benefit from the best of both settings. And it’s not just the children who can benefit from this arrangement. Six years ago Hollinsclough Church of England Primary School, situated in a surprisingly remote north Staffordshire moorland hamlet, was the country’s smallest school, having only 5 children on roll. With no pub or other civic focus, the school’s closure might well have been the final nail in the coffin of a community

drifting towards becoming little more than a collection of holiday lets. Today the school has 48 pupils, 26 of them partly home educated. And the school’s principal Janette Mountford-Lees pins this remarkable turnaround in recruitment firmly to the decision to begin flexi-schooling in 2009. It’s an outcome which prompts Peter Humphreys of the Centre for Personalised Education and an academic with a longstanding interest in flexi-schooling, to observe, “it seems remarkable the Government isn’t pushing the flexi-schooling model as a way to stem falling pupil numbers in rural schools.”

But Hollinsclough’s resurgence is not simply because its numbers are swelled by children who are partly home educated. Integrating full-time and part-time attenders called for some thoughtful and creative timetabling, and this freed up time for all pupils, whatever their mode of attendance, to learn through personalised and highly engaging thematic projects founded on real and pressing world issues. Because of this pupils don’t experience school as a place merely to accumulate knowledge, but as a vibrant site of opinion and doubt, of concern and hope, of question and counter-question and, crucially, of exploration and fun. And while doing so, they develop skills and attitudes suited to the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world which is prominent on the leadership development agenda of, it seems, pretty much every profession other than mainstream British education. The positive impacts of learning in this way have obvious appeal to parents growing ever more alarmed by the damaging impacts of an impersonal, data-driven, results preoccupied education system. It’s hardly a mystery then that Hollinsclough should be full to capacity.

So it turns out the mavericks have been hard at work inspiring children throughout Wilshaw’s watch. Wouldn’t it be lovely to hope that his successor Amanda Spielman might find time away from the data to attend similar events to the Alternative Educational Futures conference and to visit schools such as Hollinsclough, where she could participate in some co-learning and engage her heart as well as her head? Perhaps Sir Michael will suggest it to her on his way out.

Nigel Rayment completed his PhD on the literature of natural history and ecology in 1988. He works as a coach, trainer, researcher and writer in the overlapping fields of education for sustainability, global learning, values education and active citizenship. He is a fellow of the Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors and a Huffington Post blogger.

A 'Painful Kind of Exclusion' by Clare Lawrence

Mary Warnock was a great advocate for inclusion in education. In her time – the 1970s – she was a radical voice challenging the status quo and asking all in education to rethink the concept of education for those with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND).

The title of this article, though, is taken from her remarks in the fascinating set of essays, *Included or Excluded*, edited by Ruth Cigman (Routledge, 2006). In these she expands on her 2004 remarks that her inclusion model may not be working. She agrees with the autism expert Lorna Wing that for many children there is no such thing as true inclusion in mainstream school. For them, full time mainstream school may be so challenging, exhausting, isolating and downright frightening that they experience no true inclusion at all.

The result is that many parents of children with SEND 'choose' to home educate. In 2010 Parsons and Lewis from the University of Southampton published the results of their online survey in the *International Journal of Inclusive Education* (14, (1), 67- 86). They decided not to use the term Elective Home Education in this report as 'elective' suggested a choice where in reality many parents had none. As one parent reported, 'We are not choosing home education as a lifestyle choice, but we have no other acceptable option.' Another parent explained why: 'We were frightened for [our daughter's] sanity and her life.' Nearly half of the children in the study had autism. Parsons and Lewis concluded that for many of these parents, 'The only way to help their children achieve their potential was to remove them from the state system altogether, often after serious concerns about their children's health and happiness.'

Yet, four years earlier, Arora had reported in the *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs* (6, (1), 55–66, 2006) that a potential solution to this dichotomy was that, 'Homes and schools work together to ensure that children's needs are met ... [through] a system of part-time attendance at school, in which parents and school take responsibility for delivering different parts of the curriculum.' This sounds very much like the Flexischooling model which is emerging through progressive schools such as Hollinsclough and Kimichi, yet remains qualitatively different. It does not depend on an 'alternative' model by the schools; it depends on any typical, mainstream school, primary or secondary, being open to an approach which puts the needs of the individual child first and to work flexibly with the parents for the good of that child.

There is provision in the 2015 Special Educational Needs Code of Practice to support this idea. In Paragraph 5.41 it states, 'Parents should be involved in planning support and, where appropriate, in ... contributing to progress at home.' This is very different from the 'This is how we do it' approach to SEND inclusion currently exhibited by many mainstream schools.

We shared the education of our son, Sam, between home and school throughout his school career. Neither his primary nor his secondary school was particularly progressive, and he was the only pupil in either school ever to have experienced this 'part-time attendance'. Nor was he the only pupil in either school with autism. We had to work hard to reassure the school that our choice to share his education was not a comment on their inability to meet these children's needs, but rather the belief that for our son, for our family and in this instance, it was an education which would work.

And it did work. We can never, of course, prove that it worked 'better'. There is no control group against whom to measure his progress. All we know is that he has been successful and, perhaps more importantly, been happy. Most important of all, he is entirely convinced that this contentment, self-confidence, self-awareness and self-acceptance are due to his shared education. He gained a great deal from school – access to teachers specialist in their subjects, the opportunity to learn alongside his peers, the shared cultural experience of mainstream state education in this country – yet never felt overwhelmed or defeated by the many elements he found difficult. He is old enough and articulate enough now to express this clearly, and that too is an issue.

In my research into shared education for children with autism, this 'voice' of the child fascinates me. Children in general have little say in their lives; children with autism – who have a diagnosed communicative difficulty – may have even less opportunity to be heard. Yet the children in my research have spoken out, not so much through words as through actions. For some, full time school has made them physically ill; for some, their mental state has become so precarious that adults have had to intervene; for some the solution has been to behave in such a way that the school has refused to have them any more. In each case, the child's wishes have been made clear and, like those in Parsons and Lewis' research, their parents have been left with few options.

Yet in each case these parents have negotiated an alternative to simply removing their child from school. Each has found a way for their child to access school on a part-time basis, in a way that does not interfere in any way with the provision made for the other pupils at that school. Each has found a way that allows the remainder of their child's educational time to be spent at home,

working with them or developing independent study skills. Each has found a way – tentative, shifting and vulnerable though it might be – to balance the educational, physical, psychological and emotional needs of their vulnerable child.

This balancing act should not be such an unusual approach. Back in 2010 Parsons and Lewis suggested that, ‘Provision [needs] to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate children's changing needs over time, for example, through offering a mix of school and home-based provision.’ Six years on, this is still seldom offered to parents of children with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities as something to be considered. I suggest that this needs to change.

Clare Lawrence is researching autism and flexischooling approaches for her PhD and currently works as a senior lecturer in education at Bishop Grosseteste University. She has two children, one of whom has autism, and works part-time for the National Autistic Society.

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Self Managed Learning Made Difficult by Dr. Ian Cunningham

I appreciate that the title may seem a little strange. So many self-help texts are about things ‘made easy’. What I want to cover here is the fact that it is quite difficult to get people to understand why we are doing Self Managed Learning. The prevailing paradigm is one where assumptions are that young people go to school to learn. The dominant model is one that I want to challenge here and I want to do that through presenting real evidence.

I’m a scientist by background and therefore I tend to be interested in evidence rather than prejudiced opinion. The way in which schools dismiss evidence and continue to practise in ways that are counter to the best available research is at the very least disappointing and at its worse potentially immoral.

I appreciate that the title may seem a little strange. So many self-help texts are about things ‘made easy’. What I want to cover here is the fact that it is quite difficult to get people to understand why we are doing Self Managed Learning. The prevailing paradigm is one where assumptions are that young people go to school to learn. The dominant model is one that I want to challenge here and I want to do that through presenting real evidence.

So first I have to say a little bit about Self Managed Learning; (however for full information there are books and articles and videos available for people who are interested). After doing this I will give a few examples of evidence that seems to me to be incontrovertible and where if teachers and other adults working with children claim to be professionals they should act on the basis of this evidence.

An Outline of Self Managed Learning

A simple distinction between what we are doing and what schools do could be captured in the following two sentences.

*Schools **teach children subjects** in order for them to **pass tests**.*

Whereas

*In Self Managed Learning we **assist young people to learn** in order for them to **lead a good life**.*

Whilst I am the chair of governors of Self Managed Learning College I also do work in the college with young people. My business card says ‘Ian Cunningham, learning assistant’. Our job as adults is to assist young people to learn in ways that are appropriate to them and meet their needs. We are also not interested in testing and assessment except where young people choose it.

My own view is that it’s wrong to assess another human being unless they have chosen it. So our students may take public exams if they choose and they do so in the context of their interests in pursuing a particular career they themselves have freely chosen, with our assistance as adults.

In assisting students with their learning we have no classrooms, no imposed curriculum, no imposed lessons, no imposed teaching. Students are able to learn in ways which suit them and which fit with the kind of direction they want to take in their lives.

We start off with a whole week where we find out about the person, their interests, what they like and don’t like and any directions they want to take in their life. After that we can start to work with them to help them to think through the kind of programme of learning that they want to undertake. So students do have timetables - but ones that they write themselves in relation to their overall needs.

In order to work through their plans for learning students are in what we call learning groups. These consist of six students and one adult to support the group. Students are free to raise whatever they like within the group in order to help them with their learning. The group is the

basis on which students think through their weekly timetables.

In addition to belonging to a learning group each student is also part of a learning community. This is the whole group of students with adults who are there to assist them. At the moment in the college we have 24 students (aged from 9 to 16) and typically between three and five adults on each morning (we operate from 0900 to 1300 each weekday). We start the morning with a community meeting which is chaired in rotation; it could be a nine-year-old chairing the meeting or one of the adults.

The role of the community meeting is to work out collective needs such as agreeing rules for working through to organising trips or agreeing on bringing in visitors. Indeed anything can be raised by students that is relevant to the running of the whole community.

Some examples of evidence about learning

In creating the Self Managed Learning approach we have drawn on an array of well documented evidence about the nature of learning. Below are just a few examples taken from that evidence.

Teaching versus learning

There is a strange assumption that what is taught equals what is learned. If teaching worked perfectly then presumably every child would get A* in every exam that they took. Classroom teaching seems often to be aimed at a mythical average child. This average child doesn't exist. Every child is different and there is no such thing as an average child.

We know for instance that there are huge differences in the way people prefer to learn. The classroom seems to be based on an assumption of a particular way of transmitting knowledge and skills through particular media that are again aimed at some mythical average child. Personally I never found the classroom an environment that I liked. I rather agreed with Oscar Wilde: 'I love to learn - I just can't bear to be taught'.

In our research on learning with young people we found that there are at least 55 ways in which young people can learn of which the classroom is only one. In our college, given that students get free choice, no one has ever asked us to recreate a classroom. Some love to learn using a computer whereas others prefer to read books and others like to get more help from adults. The question is why we should be concerned about the way in which a person wants to learn so long as they learn what they choose.

My favourite teacher at school was the geography teacher because he never taught us anything. He just gave us the material on a Monday and said, 'I will test

you on it on Friday.' I loved this freedom as an independent learner. Others might choose a different approach.

The most important test that we have in our society is the driving test. Yet as a society we have no interest whatsoever in how a person learns to drive. Individuals could have had 1000 hours of lessons with a driving school or they might have merely spent a few hours driving with help from their parents in order to learn. As long as the person can actually go on a real road and show that they can drive safely they can pass the test. Why do schools assume that children must be locked into classrooms when it isn't an appropriate way of learning for many children?

The subjective curriculum

The curriculum chosen by examining bodies and by the state is one that is a subjective choice. There is no objective basis to the choice of the curriculum. Indeed there have been many challenges to the current academically biased curriculum in England from a huge range of educationalists. And yet schools are now avidly buying into the English baccalaureate where there is a complete neglect of creative subjects in the arts and other areas outside a very narrow range of academic subjects.

Our approach to curriculum is to try to understand the kind of life that an individual wants to live and what might be appropriate within that. Clearly if students are choosing, for instance, to go to university then they do have to deal with the fact that there may be an academic requirement that they might want to meet. However despite what schools and universities say you can go to university without any qualifications. The Open University is a good example but also universities have access courses for those without GCSEs and A-levels.

Summer-born children.

The government's own research a few years ago showed that at least 10,000 children every year get worse results at GCSE just because they're born in the summer. These children are also less likely to go to university and what is particularly worrying is that both teachers and parents tend to underestimate the abilities of children born in the summer. This level of discrimination is quite appalling and yet nobody seems to want to do anything about it and schools continue to provide discriminatory environments making, for instance, children in year 11 all take their GCSEs in that year. We have found that our students might choose to take a GCSE a year or two earlier; others might want to take another year beyond year 11 if they feel that that's going to be advantageous to them. Why not?

Employers' views.

Every credible survey of the views of employers over the last 10 years comes to similar conclusions. Generally employers say that schools are failing the world of work because they are neglecting important aspects of learning such as creativity, ability to get on with other people, ability to be self-disciplined and self-managing, etc. This evidence is generally ignored by schools despite the rhetoric of wanting, for instance, young people to learn to be able to be more employable. The continuing pressure to pass exams and assume that that's going to get you into university and therefore have a good career is a monstrous lie. It is continuing to create misery for many young people.

An example of this was a meeting some months ago about education where a number of recent graduates complained that they could not get satisfying work. Some were unemployed; others were doing menial tasks for low pay. A week later I went to a meeting of companies in the digital and creative sectors in our city of Brighton. Most of the employers there were saying they couldn't find people to fill the jobs that they had. They want people who are both creative and digitally aware and who can work in this fast-moving sector of the economy. It is also the major growth area of the economy in our city and in many parts of the UK. Schools and universities are failing young people when they are peddling faulty information about the world of work.

The Government's own figures show that the major expansion of jobs in the UK over the last 5 to 10 years has been in the creative sector or creative jobs within traditional organisations. The Government's narrow emphasis on science, technology, engineering and maths is a delusion. Of course there is work in those sectors but the neglect of the creative sector is misguided.

Conclusion

The above are just a few examples of an evidence base that we see as supporting alternatives to the current schooling model. Another example is the weird requirement for people to be able to handwrite. This article was created without me writing a word on a piece of paper. I had a serious cycle accident recently and so I'm unable to handwrite or use a computer. This whole piece has been created on a voice to text piece of software. I accept that some enjoy handwriting, but I don't ever feel the need to put pen to paper.

Dr. Ian Cunningham has published six books and over 120 articles and papers in areas such as education, learning, leadership and organisational change.

He chairs the Governing Body of Self Managed Learning College in Brighton. His most recent

academic post has been as Visiting Professor in Organisational Learning at Kodolányi János University of Applied Science, Székesfehérvár, Hungary. Other previous academic posts include visiting professor positions in education at the University of Utah, Middlesex University and the Technical Teacher Training Institute, Bhopal. He was Chief Executive of Roffey Park Management Institute from 1987 to 1993.

He chairs Strategic Developments International Ltd. In the latter capacity he has acted as a learning consultant to most of the world's largest international companies as well as to the National Health Service, Government departments and local authorities. His current clients include Tottenham Hotspur Football Club (developing senior coaches) and St George's, University of London (developing senior leaders). He is also running a Self Managed Learning programme for school heads.

He is a dancer with the Three Score Dance Company in Brighton. His last educational qualification (2011) was to qualify as an oxy-acetylene welder.

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Steiner Waldorf Education: A New Paradigm for Education by Josie Alwyn and Richard House

Richard House writes...

Steiner Waldorf Education for the Evolution of Human Consciousness

There is always some danger in sounding overly grandiose when speaking of Steiner Waldorf (SW) education in the ambitious terms of my title. And yet this was the quite explicit level at which Rudolf Steiner offered his insights into child pedagogy, teaching and learning. As he famously said, 'It is of great importance to find an answer to the needs of our times through an education which is based on a real understanding of humankind's evolution.' I hope this all-too-brief article will help to allay any scepticism about the veracity of Steiner's claim for an education that is faithful to the evolution of human consciousness.

Education systems in the Western world's era of 'Late Modernity' are demonstrably in abject crisis, even teetering on the brink of meltdown, with pupils manically

over-tested, teachers over-loaded, the number of violent attacks by children upon teachers ever-increasing... – I could go on. In the modern literature, I've yet to find anyone who expresses Steiner's concerns about these dark trends more succinctly than Robert Sardello, who has written: 'Materialistic learning... dominates education... Education has become an institution whose purpose... is not to make culture, not to serve the living cosmos, but to harness humankind to the dead forces of materialism. Education, as we know it, from pre-school through graduate school, *damages the soul.*' Elsewhere, I have termed this 'Modernity's assault on the very *being* of the child', and Steiner himself would have heartily endorsed Sardello's contemporary *cri de coeur*. We therefore urgently need to consider what needs to be done – or what paradigms transcended – so that the education of our children can serve and take forward the mature evolution of human consciousness, rather than being yet another materialistic fetter upon it; and in our view, SW education has a key role to play in this urgent evolutionary task.

Freedom, age-appropriateness and the cultivation of the imagination through creative artistic activity are just some of the principles that reside at the core of SW education. Steiner was a great philosopher of freedom, of course (see his seminal book *The Philosophy of Freedom*), and in relation to education, Steiner was actually talking about the lifelong impact on children's physical and mental health of a wrong kind of education. He wrote that 'If, in education, we coerce the impulses of human nature, if we do not know how to leave this nature free, but wish to interfere on our own part, then we injure the organism of the child for the whole of its earthly life.' One recurrent feature of Steiner's work is how he offered repeated insights into reality a century ago which subsequent empirical research has amply confirmed; and when the results of the extraordinary Longevity Project from the USA were published (e.g. see Howard Friedmann and Leslie Martin's *The Longevity Project*, Hay House, 2011), it became clear that an early, age-inappropriate start to formal schooling and intellectual learning is associated with life-long negative health effects, and even premature death. Steiner himself predicted these findings, and strongly advocated that children only begin formal learning around the age of 6 or 7.

In terms of the cultivation of the imagination (which crucially includes free play), Steiner would have strongly concurred with Albert Einstein's view that 'Imagination is more important than knowledge'. In our technocratic age, according to educationalist Alan Block, 'the definition of the child is made so precise that the imaginative freedom of the individual child is denied, [and] the child's freedom to play and explore is severely curtailed'. Certainly, the relentless incursion of imposed cognitive-intellectual learning at ever earlier ages is just one example of these

pernicious trends – and this in the face of mounting international evidence that the 'too much too soon' ideology is likely doing untold developmental harm to a generation of children. Mainstream schooling, then, seems to have lost touch with a deep understanding of the developmental needs of children, and is, rather, preoccupied with foisting an adult-centric agenda on to children which is both developmentally inappropriate and educationally unnecessary.

Several wonderful quotations from Steiner illustrate both the depth and wisdom of his pedagogy, and also the extraordinary contemporary relevance of someone who had these insights a full century ago – for example:

The State will tell us how to teach and what results to aim for, and what the State prescribes will be bad. Its targets are the worst ones imaginable, yet it expects to get the best possible results. Today's politics work in the direction of regimentation, and it will go even further than this in its attempts to make people conform. Human beings will be treated like puppets on strings, and this will be treated as progress in the extreme. Institutions like schools will be organised in the most arrogant and unsuitable manner. (From an address given on 20/8/1919)

If... mechanical thinking is carried into education,... there is no longer any natural gift for approaching the child himself. We experiment with the child because we can no longer approach his heart and soul.

It is inappropriate to work towards standardising human souls through future educational methods or school organisation.

Receive the children with reverence;
Educate them with love;
Relinquish them in freedom.

The educational critique and alternative given by Rudolf Steiner at the beginning of the last century is therefore a profoundly *human* vision, which is arguably even more relevant to our current troubled times than it was a century ago. Having set out starkly here some of the problems to which Steiner was responding, my colleague Josie Alwyn will offer a more positive insight into the nature of this visionary educational approach.

Josie Alwyn writes...

The Paradigm of Steiner Waldorf Education

As alternative educators, we probably share similar ideas about the educational outcomes we aim for in our work: that young people emerge from their educational journey

as free, responsible, well-balanced and creative individuals, who are resilient and able to make positive contributions to the life of their community towards a harmonious future for all. Also, we probably share a real interest in the various alternative ways of getting there.

My interest in the way Steiner Waldorf (SW) education 'gets there' began in 1985 when the arrival of my own children was challenging my literary-academic way of life with much more pressing and practical life questions. The individual journey I set out on with SW education is not unusual. It often starts with a real-life, often apparently by-chance experience of some aspect of SW education that feels 'good' – in the moral and social, as well as personal, sense. This experience of 'goodness' typically raises interesting questions of value in oneself about education and children, which can lead into more detailed research and exploration.

For me, there followed years of committed research and work in both National Curriculum and SW schools, leading to an ultimate understanding that these are polar opposite educational paradigms. The National Curriculum experience, for teacher and pupils, seems a contorting of the self to fit a prescribed mould imposed from the outside. SW education, for teacher and pupils, I experienced as a coherent, emergent, transformative process: an integrated and embodied experience of education from the inside out.

For these reasons, I made the potentially risky choice of SW education for my children and for my vocational path: 'risky' because of the independent, pioneering nature of SW education which offers none of the usual certainties, which asks one to think completely outside the box, and which also attracts some negative 'press'. However, the comparative journey I made towards that choice had already strengthened my objective thinking and self-confidence, enabling me to continue freely taking on the challenges of Rudolf Steiner's ideas, testing them on the pulse of my own experience, sharing them with colleagues and translating them into my own terms. It is this journey (of independent thinking, praxis and collegial working together through decades) that leads me to outline, briefly here below, two really big ideas - one concerns the human being in space, and the other in time – that SW education has, and which I think are of inestimable value to offer the wider educational community.

1. Rudolf Steiner's understanding of the human being – as not only body (and not only body and soul), but body, soul and spirit – places the individual 'self' in a macrocosmic context and offers a greatly enlarged space in which to develop our own independent thinking about not only what is unique to each individual, but also what about us belongs to our immediate circumstances of time

and place, what is universally human, and what belongs to the spiritual dimension of our lives. Steiner's understanding of human being is a coherent paradigm that is internally consistent and highly differentiated. It is radically challenging of intellectual materialism in all its expressions, and offers us all the opportunity to integrate our thinking, dissolving dualism and developing articulate, holistic praxis.

2. From this paradigm of human being arises the second big idea: child development, within a macrocosmic context of evolving human consciousness. Steiner's understanding of human development enables one to open up a space in one's own thinking and to explore how transformative processes arise and unfold through time and through each lifetime. For the educator who works deeply and practically with this model, education becomes an art, and the independent understanding of transformative learning processes that can be achieved enables the facilitation of the learner's own self-activity at each stage of development, as well as appropriate differentiation to meet each individual learner's specific educational needs at each stage of the journey.

Thus, the SW education paradigm offers, not so much to theorise as, first, to characterise and to model experiential and embodied transformative learning processes which engage imagination, thinking and understanding as further stages in the learning process. Thus, for teachers and learners, it is a wonderfully rich journey of discovery for body, soul and spirit, evolving through time.

Select Further Reading

- Rudolf Steiner, *The Child's Changing Consciousness and Waldorf Education*, Rudolf Steiner Press, London, 1988
- Kevin Avison and Martyn Rawson (eds), *The Tasks and Content of the Steiner-Waldorf Curriculum*, Floris Books, Edinburgh, 2nd edn, 2014
- Christopher Clouder and Martyn Rawson, *Waldorf Education*, Floris Books, Edinburgh, 1998
- Brien Masters, *Steiner Education and Social Issues: How Waldorf Schooling Addresses the Problems of Society*, Rudolf Steiner Press, London, 2007
- Lynne Oldfield, *Free to Learn: Steiner Waldorf Early Care and Education*, 2nd edn, Hawthorn Books, Stroud, 2012
- Jack Petrash, *Understanding Waldorf Education: Teaching from the Inside Out*, Floris Books, Edinburgh, 2003

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Harriet Pattison *Rethinking Learning to Read*, Educational Heretics Press (2016), 212 pp., £11.99

Book Review by Hazel Clawley

This important book was launched at the recent Alternative Education Futures conference organised by CPE-PEN. It is a 'major study of how children learn to read outside an institutional setting' (Dr Alan Thomas, in the book's Foreword). Most of us have, for the past 150 years, been taught to read in school by whatever method was currently fashionable amongst educational pundits. For me, learning to read in the mid-1940s, it was a 'phonics' approach – though, as I recall, without the rigidity of current practice. My infant school in Cleethorpes presented me with a book full of glossy coloured pictures (pre-war, obviously), with a green, wiggly snake for the sound of the letter 's', and a boy in pyjamas stretching his arms above his head in a yawn for the sound 'y'. The book was arranged alphabetically, and I can recall the later pictures most clearly, because I couldn't wait for the class's slow progress through the early pages, and dashed to the end to crack as much of the code as possible in school time (books could not be taken home) so I could read for myself Alice in

Wonderland, which my mother and I were sharing as a bedtime story. Being given a 'phonics' toolkit, and then being free to use it in my own way, was a small miracle for me. But it certainly didn't work as well for all my classmates – and therein lies one of the main themes recurring throughout this well-researched study: all children are different, and what works brilliantly for one may not work at all for another, and may even be counterproductive or damaging.

The study is based on a website questionnaire inviting home-educating parents to respond to questions about how their children had learned to read: 311 questionnaires were completed, representing 400 children. The researcher is aware of the danger of small-sample studies being rejected by decision-making government bodies (as with the Badman Review of 2009). While accepting that the sample does not necessarily represent the whole, she offers the work as 'a qualitative and exploratory account through which to challenge assumptions and offer new insights' (p.26).

The book looks firstly at different understandings of learning, comparing in particular two metaphors, that of acquisition and that of participation. Both metaphors were used by home educators in responses: 'He acquired the skills...'; 'Everyone else was doing it, they wanted to do it too...'. Pattison notes that the acquisition metaphor is dominant in our society, but suggests that the participation metaphor 'can be profitably drawn on in rethinking reading' (p.39).

So what is reading anyway? This is the question at the head of chapter three. (I used to think the answer to this was obvious, until faced with the case of the blind John Milton and his daughter. She would 'read' aloud to him from Latin texts that she didn't understand, but he did. So who was doing the reading?) Pattison explores the question through her respondents' replies: some treated reading as a phonetic system ('...we must learn the phonetic code...'); some as whole-word recognition ('Reading books the child enjoyed to them, and then first letting the child read the words they could to start and later on reading more and bigger words until they could read the whole story themselves'); and some as a relationship with print ('Living life in a world where words are everywhere'). She touches on methods that don't work ('...many of the methods for teaching kids to read may take the fun out of reading and then kids give up'); on families who eschew any kind of method; on children devising their own method; on memorising; and on silent reading – and the emphasis in school on reading aloud which causes stress to some children.

How do home-educated children learn to read without teachers? Very well, it seems! Of course, some home-educating parents are qualified teachers, but even those who are teachers don't always teach their children to read. Of the 311 parents responding, 91 claimed that they had taught their child to read, 133 said that they had not (though most of their children had learned to read nevertheless), and 87 took issue with the question itself. Many of the responses to the question about direct teaching led the researcher to speak of 'reading as cultural participation' (p.73): 'The whole family facilitated her to teach herself'; 'She watches us read'; 'I always remember my daughter picking up very quickly on the big bright lights of the supermarket names!'; 'I feel there is no need to teach it, only to perhaps encourage a love of reading'. As Pattison says: 'The challenges to "teaching", both the word itself and the theory behind it, permeate the questionnaire responses and push deeply and widely into a core concept of education' (p.94) – in particular questioning transmission models of learning.

What do families do to enable their children to become readers? This is one of the most fascinating sections of the book. Some answers in brief: sharing books through reading aloud (or not!); talking; answering children's questions; conversation; games, toys, computers; children's play and other interests; television (or, indeed, the absence of television!). What comes over above all is that there is no one magic formula to produce children who enjoy reading, no 'essential core that that all children must have'; rather, 'there are multiple possibilities and combinations as opposed to narrow necessities' (p. 116).

Learning to read doesn't always follow a linear, upward curve. Sometimes it progresses by fits and starts, according to home-educators' evidence. And sometimes it traces a downward curve. Readers can move from 'hard' words and phrases to 'easy' ones, if 'easy' means short words that follow the rules of phonics (like 'red') and 'hard' means longer words that buck those rules (like 'conscious'). Everything depends on the child's interests, and which words are meaningful to them. (I'm reminded of Sylvia Ashton-Warner's 1963 classic *Teacher*, in which her Maori beginner-readers chose their own special words (of love or fear) to write large on cards and carry with them. Many chose 'skellington' [sic], their own 'bogey-man' word, and soon learned to read and write such powerful symbols.)

Parents within the sample reported that their children learned to read anywhere between the ages of 18 months and 16 years. Many parents were unsure exactly when their child had started reading. Most claimed that once their child had decided to read, at

whatever age, they learned very quickly: 'As he was 6 years old, one Sunday morning, he called "Mama, I am at page 61!"'; 'At 10 I saw her holding a book and I asked what it was. She said it was the book she'd read over the weekend. And that was that. She could read.' 'Late reading', considered such a problem within the formal education system, is not a problem for these children. 'At home a child who is not reading at 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 or older may become a proficient reader on a par with age expected norms within months' (p.138).

All children are different. As I have already mentioned, this is one of the main themes of this book. Yet 'children in school do not have a choice about reading instruction. Nor for that matter do schools or teachers' (p.145). At home things are different: 'Learning to read is a very personal adventure and each person comes to it differently at different times and for different reasons and in different ways'; 'Back off and let the child lead'; 'Emotional readiness to read is more important than his or her intellectual readiness'. This personalised approach to learning was all the more important to those parents whose children had been removed from an unhappy school situation, especially those who had been unjustifiably labelled as having special educational needs, or who felt their special needs were not being catered for by the school system: 'I have found that the creative/spatial/technical child (often a boy) learns to read at a later age. In school he/she may be labelled "dyslexic"' (Mother of three children who learned to read aged between 10 and 12). Children's own motivation was key to learning to read, whether it was a 'desire to join in the cultural world of those round them' (p.175), or the need to read a specific text for a particular purpose: 'We started playing World of Warcraft and he found his reason' (p.178).

The overriding impression left by this book is of how many ways there are to learn to read, how quickly it can happen once a child needs and wants to learn and how the age at which a child learns is of little or no consequence. Contrast the school approach, where only one highly prescriptive method is on offer, where the process is deemed to take a number of years, and where precise reading 'targets' are specified for each age.

Unlike most academic research studies, this book does not end with neat conclusions. Instead, Pattison suggests a possible new way to understand how children learn to read, through applying the insights of complexity theory. (This is an offshoot of chaos theory, which I first came across in the late 1980s when as a home-educating parent I was introduced by my son to the Mandelbrot Set which he was investigating via our primitive home computer.) This contrasts with the cause-

and-effect logic which has dominated the sciences and social sciences since their inception, and which lies behind much of the 'cognitive skills' approach to reading, where each prescribed sub-skill must be acquired in a set order for the 'result' of reading to follow. The application of complexity theory to reading research is a new idea (for details of the argument, see pp. 187-92); yet, as Pattison says: 'some similar strands of thinking are discernible in some of the things which parents said'. For example: 'It was only after the younger child was reading fluently that I realized that I'd neglected to first teach her the alphabet song ... she did eventually learn the alphabet song (although not very well) ... "knowing the alphabet" is clearly not an essential "pre-reading skill"!'

There is much in this book to encourage and support home-educating families. More importantly, the findings need to be taken seriously by government and by their curriculum advisers. Will this happen? At the same conference that saw the launch of this book, I attended a session by Dr Ian Cunningham, in which, as a scientist, he bemoaned the lack of evidence-based practice in our education system as a whole. So it may take some time.

Hazel Clawley is a Trustee/Director of CPE-PEN. She home-educated her two children between 1979 and 1991, and has since worked for 12 years as an adult education tutor in the NHS, supporting stroke and traumatic brain injury patients to recover literacy ability.

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- Acceptance of Einstein's view that **imagination is more important than knowledge** in our modern and constantly changing world.
- A belief in **subsidiarity**... learning, acting and taking responsibility to the level of which you are capable.
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What is meant by 'Personalised Education'

Personalised education as promoted by Personalised Education Now is derived from the philosophy of autonomous education. This centres on learner-managed learning, invitational learning institutions, the catalogue/natural versions of curriculum, invited rather than uninvited teaching, and assessment at the learner's request. Its slogan is, "I did it my way – though often in co-operation with others" and it operates within a general democratically-based learning landscape that has the slogan, "alternatives for everybody, all the time".

Within the context of the UK "schooled society" there are already some key institutions that work to the autonomous philosophy within a democratic value system. A prime example is the public library. Others are nursery centres, some schools and colleges, museums, community arts projects, and home-based education

networks. They work to the principle of, “anybody, any age; any time, any place; any pathway, any pace”.

Such institutions are learner-friendly, non-ageist, convivial not coercive, and capable of operating as community learning centres which can provide courses, classes, workshops and experiences as requested by local learners. These are part of a rich and successful, but undervalued personalised learning heritage, from which we draw strength, and which we celebrate.

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

The Centre for Personalised Education Trust (CPE)

Personalised Education Now is the trading name for **The Centre for Personalised Education Trust (CPE)**, a charitable company, limited by guarantee (Charity Number: 1057442). It emerged from Education Now in 1996 as **The Centre for Personalised Education Trust (CPE)**. In 2004, after 17 years’ pioneering work, Education Now transferred its resources and membership to PEN.

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