

TO THE UNESCO INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE FUTURES OF EDUCATION

Dear Commissioners,

This is a covering letter for our attached response to your reports 'Education in a Post-Covid World' of June 2020 and 'Progress Update' of March 2021. (Please reply to gabrielgroiss@googlemail.com)

We are an international group which includes the director of a major national educational innovation programme, vice-chair of a European wide democratic education organisation, a school inspector, teachers who have created innovations in their schools in Canada, Israel, Spain and the UK, and a human rights expert who is also a parent.

We fully support your view that things must be done differently. That while preserving the legacy of free public education for all, as clearly stated and required in the UN Agenda for Sustainability 2030 Sustainable Development Goal Four (SDG4), there is a compelling need for a different kind of education; a different kind of school; and indeed, a new kind of institution such as community learning hubs connected to wider ecosystems which will provide the lifelong learning facility for all ages as alluded to in SDG4 and your reports. We share your anxiety about the potential of technologies to threaten the future of democracy and therefore attach especial importance to the references to Global Citizenship set out in Target 7 of SDG4. This explains our belief that Human Rights fundamentally guarantee the Agency and Inclusivity that should underpin all Futures of Education.

We are encouraged that several member states are already exploring the kinds of system-wide approaches that we believe are required: in particular the Escuela Nueva movement in Colombia; the Education Cities programme in Israel; and the "101 democratic schools" network in Indonesia. Also encouraging are individual state schools such as the XP School and School 21 in England, the Agora schools in the Netherlands, the Suvermai school within a school in Estonia, and Charter Schools such as the High-Tech-High-Schools or the High School for the Recording Arts in the USA. We also applaud developments such as the Hope Programme of the Ottawa Catholic School Board in Canada which is reaching out post-Covid to families in Ontario that are looking for flexible individualised public school provision for their children.

We fully endorse your proposals for collective community governance, supported by governments, to ensure that education is not captured by powerful interests or diverted to the benefit of only some. With this in mind we recommend research into the pedagogies and outcomes of well-established alternative settings, sometimes described as "pioneers of possibility", in order that their experience can become accessible to all. With the attached document we have attempted to be as concise as possible in sharing our responses to your reports and would welcome any opportunity to discuss the issues with you further. We believe that the survival of our democracies and indeed the survival of our species is at stake, and that the work of your commission is of the utmost urgency and importance.

Yours faithfully and respectfully,

Richard Fransham – Director, Uniting for Children and Youth, (UCY), founder of CHIP programme, CANADA

Gabriel Groiss – Educator, Pedagogical director of a free-democratic School in Nature, Vice-Chair of EUDEC (European Democratic Education Community), GERMANY and SPAIN

Derry Hannam – High School Vice Principal and School Inspector (ret'd.), adviser to UK Govt. and Council of Europe in Education for Democratic Citizenship/Human Rights Education (ret'd.), UNITED KINGDOM,

Yaacov Hecht – Director of 'Education Cities' and founder of state funded Democratic Schools, ISRAEL

Katy Zago – Parent and Human Rights *expert* member of ALLI asbl, LUXEMBOURG

Response to UNESCO's International Commission on Futures of Education [Progress Update](#)

Dear Members of the Commission,

As you have a look at our submission, we would like you to have in mind the following statement from what is one of the most significant reports on education ever produced. It comes from the committee established in 1965 by the Government of Ontario to do a study on the aims and objectives of education in its Province. The authors begin a chapter titled “The Search for Truth in a Democratic Society” 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.

Democracy implies the freedom to think, to dissent, and to bring about change in a lawful manner in the interest of all. It is a flexible, responsive form of government, difficult to describe in fixed terms. Democracy does not arise as a result of imposed or structured political practices, but as a dynamic, liberating force, nurtured by the people themselves. It can thrive and flourish only when its citizens are free to search continually for new ideas, models, and theories to replace outmoded knowledge in an effort to serve an ever-increasing populace tomorrow.

A true democracy is a free and responsible society, and one aspect cannot exist or have meaning without the other.”

We value very much, many fundamental aspects pointed out in your Progress Update. Nevertheless we feel some specific and valuable experiences have been ignored or misunderstood. So to be part of the public debate you intend to spark, we have to express reservations on specific items and assumptions made in this report. Indeed they could seriously jeopardize the UN agenda 2030 to lead to a regenerative education by 2050 for more just and sustainable futures.

As representatives of a mixed international group of professionals or individuals we have extensive experience over years with pedagogical approaches centred on self organisation and self directed learning of infants and young people. Most of us are also able to compare it widely to conventional, directed pre-established curricular school settings, in wealthy contexts. Such contexts are often held as role models for quality education, but it is time to seriously reconsider this belief.

Our comments are articulated in 4 parts summarized below completed by a detailed argumentation and a [non-exhaustive resource list](#).

1. Education as a human right: The Central Axis
2. Education as a human right: Realities
3. Education as a human right: Valid Alternatives
4. Education as a human right: Governance?

Summary

1. Education as a human right : The Central Axis

Human rights offer a stable and solid ethical basis to enable change by overthrowing old paradigms. They represent a valuable framework to build on a new order. Yet it is also legitimate to struggle against them if they convey cultural destruction or dehumanization. By promoting peace and freedom they should enable a diversity of beliefs and cultures to coexist, without disrupting natural processes. There is no need to impose a trivial homogeneity: it is more about proposing than imposing.

In this chapter we rehearse the main principles of the ideology of human rights related to education. Power and forces need to be balanced between all involved actors and subjects. We should not forget that above the law we have the human being, preserving our humanity and our environment is paramount, to do so we need to protect our mental health through self-determination and social justice.

“Westerners,” observed Marcos Sandoval of the Triqui people of Oaxaca, “represent justice with a blindfolded woman. We want her with her eyes well open, to fully appreciate what is happening. Instead of neutrality or impartiality, we want compassion. The person committing a crime needs to be understood, rather than submitted to a trial” (Excerpt of Escaping Education by Madhu Suri Prakash and Gustavo Esteva <http://arvindguptatoys.com/arvindgupta/escapingeducation.pdf>.)

2. Education as a human right : Realities

We should not seek homogeneity at the expense of diversity sacrificing the potential of individual singularities. Young people should grow up in an educating landscape where their voice does count and where they do not learn to be subordinate. They should be able to develop sufficiently emotional resilience to preserve their integrity and become strong.

For this they need recognition, security and belonging. The reality we observe is however a growing tendency to submit to norms and conventions, and at the same time to devalue those who do not belong to this order. This leads to broad institutionalized abuse, under pedagogical pretext, with very harmful consequences for infants and young people's healthy development. This leads to inequalities rather than equity.

Let's free the words to dismantle violence and decolonize “childhood”: infants and young people are not objects but subjects fully entitled to human rights.

3. Education as a human right : Valid Alternatives

It is a delusion to think that we can control education by imposing intentionality, planning, and systematization (probably all the more in a digital world). Learning is as impenetrable or unpredictable as it is paradoxical, occurring beyond what you might offer or despite it.

We'd better be the change we want to see as Gandhi says. Being biologically designed to learn naturally, if Mother Nature's pedagogy is deviated from it can lead to serious physical and psychological disorders. Thus based on our own experience and empirical evidence we agree with Dr Peter Gray that [Self-Directed Education, not progressive education is the wave of the future](#). Seeing education as an individual right to autonomy and self-determination does not prevent the achievement of collective goals, so do we really need subordination? To achieve common goals there is no need to sacrifice personal liberties: the communitarian includes the personal.

Shouldn't we be allowed to consent to which cultural model we want to be subordinated to? We all appreciate the facts that support our beliefs, but we must experiment with new ways and take risks. Fear always feeds regression. If we bet on positive values, we can give hope. But the State prevents the creation of a collective desire when the individual is not an actor.

4. Education as a human right : Governance?

In a collectivist approach to education, governance can only be arbitrary (i.e. not truth-seeking) and therefore discriminatory. State barriers that prevent the innovation and pluralism necessary for the realization of the right to education must be dismantled and thus pave the way for new models where actors will define their own standards. Governments should be made accountable for fully respecting human rights in educational matters.

Interestingly the benefits of valid alternative approaches can easily be integrated in conventional schools and thus be accessible to most people. We provide examples of such educational ecosystems in this chapter.

As a result the obstacles to a paradigm shift are not as big as we may think. Let us co(r)-rupt the corruption preventing it by asserting our integrity and acting accordingly.

1. EDUCATION AS A HUMAN RIGHT : THE CENTRAL AXIS

Human rights are a bulwark against fear and ignorance.

Hannah Arendt

A reading of the interpretations and history of the founding texts on the right to education clearly shows their purpose to fight against any form of domination and abuse of power that is not necessary in order to preserve peace and to achieve more and more the other fundamental freedoms.

Human rights = NO OPPRESSION

The right to education is nothing other than a right to discernment and autonomy for all individuals, whatever their age, without prescribing any educational path. It is a right to dignity consisting in finding what is right for oneself, without harming others, in order to make society.

Human rights = CONSENT vs FREEDOM TO QUIT & CRITICAL THINKING

The right to education is about providing safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all. States have a responsibility to enable the development of equitable public education systems that respect human rights and lead to sustainable individual and collective well-being.

Human rights = ACCOUNTABILITY

Yet personalized, participatory and cooperative learning methods are also not sufficiently integrated into the mores to be easily implemented in the public school system. Indeed, "our culture, since its origins, has thought of political power in terms of hierarchical and authoritarian command-obedience relationships" and this verticality is found in the school system. However, if "we can think of politics without violence, we cannot think of the social without politics [...]" (Clastres). Social ties and learning are possible without coercion.

Human rights = SANE AUTHORITY

Educational rights aim at promoting peace and tolerance. They should take us a step closer to the heart of our humanity, by stimulating the heart as much as preserving a healthy mind. A major Canadian mental health association identified that the core values of mental health are social justice and self-determination.

All these values and aims have been established in European law since 1952. Unfortunately in the last decades we could observe in many countries the tendency to impose standards arbitrarily thus seriously jeopardizing the ethical fundamentals of human rights and our future.

As the philosopher José Ortega y Gasset puts it : « It is curious that all historical crises occur at the beginning of a period of uniformity, in which everything is a little bit everything and nothing is resolutely but roughly determined. ». Let us keep this in mind.

2. EDUCATION AS A HUMAN RIGHT : REALITIES

Inequality is on the rise, and the few who make global decisions bear no social responsibility.

Herbert Renz-Polster

When the State takes on the obligation of education in an egalitarian manner, it does so through an organization that functions by seeking homogeneity at the expense of diversity. However, the desire to impose the same educational model on everyone, made up of compromises, « confines an entire society to triviality ». The author and academic Alain Déneault also notes that: « Mediocracy is the order according to which professions give way to functions, practices to techniques, competence to execution. School programs, practised without open debate, do not invite, or do not invite enough, to question ideological foundations and develop critical thinking, and thus discernment, thus producing a mass of *secondary illiterates* ».

Authoritarianism is the tendency to submit to norms and conventions, and at the same time to devalue those who do not belong to this order. Those who get to know an order in which they do not have their say or in which they experience constant shame and mortification as they grow up will feel weak, powerless - and will be sent on a lifelong journey to fill this vacuum. (Renz-Polster)

This puts us right in the middle of childhood issues: recognition, security and belonging are essential to become an autonomous and responsible adult. Infants and young people who do not find these securities in their families should receive them in institutions such as crèches, kindergartens and schools with the message: *We stand by you! You can trust us! We have reliable relationships!* But instead young people grow up in an educating landscape where their voice does not count and where they learn to be subordinate. (Renz-Polster)

This is the reality of millions of infants and young people in our rich and modern countries. In most conventional schools, infants and young people are not respected within their fundamental physiological and psychological needs and rights, which become therefore a broad institutionalized abuse, under pedagogical pretext, with very harmful consequences for infants and young people's healthy development.

*We cannot free ourselves from an evil
without naming and judging it as evil.*

Alice Miller

Here we are just going to mention shortly a few aspects of common practice:

- Infants are often separated far too early (even before 1½ years age) and far too abruptly (without a gentle adaptation period) and far too long (up to 6 to 8 hours a day, 5 days a week), from their mother or other bonding persons, into nurseries where the reality mostly consists largely in insufficient attention conditions (often very high infants/adult ratios, making a pedagogical quality attention practically impossible), this then (including also possible harmful educational behaviour of the parents happening many times already before entering nursery) causes early deep psycho-emotional harm like fear, frustration, disorientation, anxiety, distress, mistrust, lack of self-confidence, etc. that can mark negatively personal perception and attitudes towards life fundamentally: as there is no choice, infants soon get used to these stressful conditions becoming dull (for example the brain reacting by secretion of cortisol to numb itself), arranging with their painful reality, assuming it as normal way their life is supposed to be, losing widely the sensitive and cognitive capacity to question that status quo, also, as the lack of choice continues, in their future school-life (described in the following points), and -at the end- in their "free" adult labor-life.
- Infants and young people are often not allowed to freely follow their basic biological and ethological needs, such as free movement, play, talk, drink, eat, rest, go to the toilet, etc.. This profoundly harms the healthy development of basic personal competences like self perception and connection to one's own being.
- Infants and young people are systematically approached by adults with an expectation of what they are supposed to be, develop or learn, transmitting to them continuously the message that the way they are, they are insufficient. This seriously harms the development of a healthy self-esteem. This is particularly damaging to neurodiverse individuals, whose learning paths are more diverse and who have more difficulty adapting to external expectations. These groups suffer considerably as a consequence of traditional schooling and are disproportionately represented in prisons, mental health and unemployment figures as a result of their different skills and talents not being appreciated or given the opportunity to develop productively.
- Infants and young people are continuously under external direction, where reward and punishment systems are the central tool to gain their obedience, and where external motivation is fostered as a central motor for any action, which creates a deep psycho-emotional dependence on external approval. That harms very profoundly the healthy development of personal autonomy.

- Infants and young people are forced many thousands of hours (approx. 13 000 hours in an average school career) to study things they are absolutely not interested in. This creates the so called "bulimic learning", where information is taken in under pressure to "spit" it out soon again for an exam, but there is only very little of that content kept on a long term, to be used by the student. This has been well understood for many years, but it continues to be the standard procedure in most educational settings, in order to establish an evaluation of "learning" processes.
- Infants and young people are continuously exposed to external evaluation, which first: mainly only is focused on very reduced fields of human capacities of the cognitive and intellectual areas, ignoring many others; and secondly: using superficial standardised tests, which hardly can capture the real inner learning processes of understanding or interpretation, but put their value as persons into simple scales of numbers. This testing is not only superficial, but also creates a very relevant, harmful psychological pressure for most students, and functions at the end mainly as a tool for social selection, where the political aim of equal opportunities and chances is not found in reality, and social injustice is systematically maintained and perpetuated.
- Infants and young people are artificially separated by ages, sometimes even by gender, which in most cases creates a social hierarchy among them, where, instead of empathy and solidarity, cultures of disrespect and misvalue towards the younger and "weaker" are often established.

This just summarizes some central critical aspects, that could be developed further, eg. young people not knowing their own interests and talents, massive school failure, lack of civil and political conscience expressed in the ongoing un-responsible consumer behaviour or the rise of political populism, etc..

But where is the contemporaneous scientific evidence legitimating mainstream practice?! Which empirical facts support the way we are treating young people in our society?

The equation for our collective well-being will remain unsolvable until we revise the constants. Education needs role models. We teach (show) what we are.

3. EDUCATION AS A HUMAN RIGHT : VALID ALTERNATIVES

In order to stop that vast institutionalized abuse on millions of infants and young people (we insist: even in wealthy modern countries), and stop the reproduction by poor countries looking for progress by imitation of harmful models, it has to be criticized very clearly when sending out such an important paper about the futures of education, that forcing infants and young people's will is not the way, and we urge you to integrate that important clarification into your report.

Besides the following statements in your Progress Update particularly drew our attention and we will comment on them :

"The Commission WARNS AGAINST a view that is becoming increasingly popular [...]: THAT EDUCATION HAPPENS "NATURALLY" AT ALL TIMES AND IN ALL SPACES."

"While learning may occur widely, THERE IS NOTHING SPONTANEOUS ABOUT EDUCATION."

"Recognizing the relevance of the rich diversity of educational processes and practices that take place in a variety of environments, it needs to be stressed that as open and uncertain as it necessarily is, education nonetheless requires intentionality, planning, and systematization BECAUSE IT DOES NOT HAPPEN NATURALLY OR SPONTANEOUSLY."

We may understand such a stance in the context of the effects of Covid lockdowns on conventionally schooled pupils. Yet as these individuals have been growing up mostly in coercive environments with imposed tuition, how could we possibly expect them to suddenly be able to *educate* themselves autonomously as wished by third parties?

But beyond the particular current situation we strongly recommend you to read the following article of Peter Gray to further reflect on Self-Directed Education:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/freedom-learn/201706/differences-between-self-directed-and-progressive-education>

What is certain however is that through intrinsic motivation or not, learning just occurs spontaneously, nobody knows how and probably it occurs all the more when natural learning processes have not been disrupted.

Maria Montessori says that every young individual has its own construction plan which it wants to develop in the course of its life. If it is disturbed in this process, e.g. by the intervention or instruction of adults, the child moves further and further away from it. She calls it deviation and this can result in physical or psychological causes of illness, when it happens too often.

Learning is as impenetrable or unpredictable as it is paradoxical, occurring beyond what you might offer or despite it.

*The main thing is not to make people understand
but to ensure that the obstacles to understanding are removed.*

Jean-Pierre Winter

Spontaneous learning is an adaptive function of the brain: new neural networks are being formed when a person gets in contact with new information. There is a great similarity with the adaptive immune system of our body.

Learning is a natural function of the brain. It can't be stopped, it can only be directed. Although the school systems up to now have been trying to motivate pupils in learning a certain collection of information, each infant and young person respond differently to that.

Such response is not related to the intellectual school work content, but to the social and emotional situations they have been through during school. We have all seen very bright young people behaving badly or getting mediocre grades. During interviews, they mostly say that they are forced to learn what other people impose on them, with no regard to their own interests. But left alone to acquire information and experience following their own interests, these young people (like most people) have ups and downs, trials and errors. This process is also the scientific research method and leads to great discoveries and observations. Learning this way is more alive and relevant for growing up.

Think of how you best learn, so do you really believe education can not be spontaneous or natural? The question we thus asked ourselves is whether you really consider education as a liberation or as an imposition?

There is a huge difference between education in the sense of guiding an individual out of his true self and education as proposing access to information and knowledge so that an individual can become what is right to himself. This would be emancipatory education.

As a matter of fact a right to education represents an option. If there is an obligation as a counterpart it consists mostly in not preventing learning and the capacity to make enlightened choices and so become an autonomous and responsible individual.

A right to education is a right to autonomy.

Beyond that let us also remind ourselves that self-determination as a right of the individual to be involved in all choices that affect them is one of the core value of the Canadian Mental Health Association (<https://ottawa.cmha.ca/about-cmha/vision-mission-and-core-values/>).

*Every hour that an individual loses by not being himself
he cuts it out of his life, he strips it of its reality.*

José Ortega y Gasset

The next question would then be whether individual emancipatory education enables to achieve collective goals?

In that respect we first would like to share our good experiences resulting from pedagogical approaches that are based on self-management processes and self-directed development or learning. This represents a paradigm shift from a pedagogical work based on extrinsic motivation (nowadays still hidden many times behind modern so called "student centered" learning), to a pedagogical work based on true intrinsic motivation.

To document our stance we refer herewith to a [list of scientific research](#) articles or books, supporting our criticism of conventional schools practice, but also validating pedagogical approaches based on Self-Directed Education.

In a nutshell, we see crucial pedagogical aspects for a quality education as :

- Self-education of the adults

The continuous willingness to reflect and evolve, which means the self-education, first of the adults themselves (towards cultural development and coherence) which also represents the best reference that we can give to the infants and young people (of "life-long-learning"). Adults thus act as role models.

- Trustful relationships

Trustful relationship work is key, but also working with small groups and in pedagogical teams, accepting and respecting the infants and young people in their current state of development (without approaching them with a general projection and expectation of what they should learn, transmitting to them that the way they are, they are insufficient and depend on the approval of an external authority).

- Intrinsic motivation

Seek to preserve and cultivate intrinsic motivation, and consequently the processes of self-organisation and self-formation ("self-determined or self-directed learning"), as a central motor of development and learning.

- Personal development in democratic environments

Pedagogical approaches that focus on the development of basic personal and socio-emotional skills ("life skills" and "soft skills") in free and democratic structures, which form citizens accustomed to responsible, cooperative and supportive democratic participation (...and which do not focus solely on academic content, which in the end mainly have the effect of social selection....!)

- Free play

To recognise free play, not only for its great educational value, but also as an ethological need and therefore as a fundamental right of the young person.

- Contact with the real world

To be in continuous contact with the natural, socio-cultural and socio-economic environment, which offers so much stimulation, interaction and learning.

- Situational and process orientated

A pedagogical work that acts on situational and spontaneous concepts (and not pre-established and rigid) and oriented towards the process (and not mainly towards the products), in which skills and knowledge are mainly built through countless "micro-learning" situations.

- No segregation

Living together in inclusive, open and mixed, specially mixed-aged groups, which provide indispensable empathetic social learning (and which avoids education in an unsupportive hierarchy of "classes").

So do we really need subordination to achieve common goals?

The sociologist Danièle Linhart declares that subordination prevents collective thinking. She refers to the working environment but the same investigation should be raised in relation to education. This was actually done by the researcher Jean-François Nordmann in this extract: " The Common Core would reaffirm with conviction that the heart of the project of the republican school consists in producing subjects in active self-submission in relation to laws and figures recognised as transcendent and constitutive. But the whole problem, in our opinion, is to know whether it is not precisely this configuration and this general educational regime, inherited from long ago and retaining a considerable collective hold, which would have been profoundly challenged - and this for several decades already - and with which it would be necessary to break decisively to make way for a completely different educational regime, leading to the advent of a subject much more "autonomous", active, creative, democratic and profound than the (self-) submissive, moral and republican subject." ([https://journals.openedition.org/edso/1648 - ftn1](https://journals.openedition.org/edso/1648-ftn1)) Or shall we develop autonomy and make room for initiative without calling into question the relationship of subordination, by getting rid of its archaic and humanly unacceptable dimension as proposed by Human Resources specialist Denis Pennel?

We all appreciate the facts that support our beliefs, but we must experiment with new ways and take risks. Fear always feeds regression, if we bet on positive values, we can give hope. But the State prevents the creation of a collective desire when the individual is not an actor.

4. EDUCATION AS A HUMAN RIGHT : GOVERNANCE?

Access to education could be governed as a common good, human resources as a natural resource, in an unconditional participatory governance as per the principles of the political scientist Elinor Ostrom, Nobel Prize in Economics. A state monopoly in the education system is artificial. While states have an important role to play in providing equal opportunities, effective participation in decision-making by all stakeholders, regardless of age, is essential.

The education system is like a computer. It makes no sense to try to build an efficient tool on an obsolete architecture. State barriers that prevent the innovation and pluralism necessary for the realization of the right to education must be dismantled and thus pave the way for new models where actors will define their own standards.

You interestingly write in your report :

Imagining new educational ecosystems implies reinventing architecture, curriculum and pedagogy. School buildings should be designed or remodeled with the same boldness and creativity with which they were first invented in the 19th century. New educational ecosystems must allow students to have experiences that they would otherwise not be presented with. It is for this that schools exist. It is this that distinguishes schools from home learning or learning in digital spaces.

Mankind could blossom long before schools were invented. Could you imagine a life without a school like in the film [CaRabA](#) or have we all been so impregnated since early age from the school ideology that we are not able anymore to think of education without a school? The educational ecosystems that allow students to have experiences they would not be presented with otherwise already exist and have been practised among others by *unschoolers* – so out of schools ! - already for decades or even ages. You would be surprised how diversified a life without school can be.

The question though is not whether there should be schools or not but it all depends on what is right for a person at a specific time and what options this person has in terms of learning opportunities.

As stated by [Richard Fransham](#) in a recent [AERO](#) newsletter, it requires providing opportunities in community schools for people to choose which paradigm they wish to experience. Initially the choice of a child-centered learning environment would be in the form of pilot programs based on [Derry Hannam's 20% idea](#), the free learner concept defined by [Unschooling School](#), the school-within-a-community-school such as The CHIP Program promoted by [OPERI](#), or the intriguing new [HOPE Program](#) being implemented by the Ottawa Catholic School Board. These programs are all scalable on the basis of change by choice where they are as equally visible and accessible to learners as are traditional programs. Some will say that operating competing paradigms under the same roof will never work, but this is a myth built on the presumption that teachers are not professional.

Maybe the radical change we need is first to deschool ourselves to enable a variety of offers to thrive allowing each individual to opt in or out and find what fits their learning needs.

Alienation deprives the conscience of alienation.

Pierre Bourdieu

Opting fully out of school temporarily or not should thus also be one of the many possible options. Such choice enable families to experience, learn and adapt, to invent and create but if they do not fit the norm they are treated somehow far too often like criminals or dangerous separatists and also discouraged to take this path.

Besides despite many administrative and financial hardships, personalised, participatory and cooperative learning methods are also already applied in too rare free democratic schools. Their positive contribution to the construction of a democratic and open society should be beyond doubt. Nevertheless in practice they are also heavily discouraged by some governments (eg. France).

But are such discouragements compliant with human rights as a way to promote peace and democracy? How can we ensure proper ethical governance if fundamental rights are not taken seriously by sanctioning efficiently their non-respect?

We see educational freedom as essential to provide answers to contemporary challenges. Science is closer to poetry than to reality. It is a world of fantasy and imagination. How can we possibly reinvent our future without freedom to learn?

In a collectivist approach to education, governance can only be arbitrary (i.e. non truth-seeking) and therefore discriminatory. As a result it is often felt like an injustice and disrespectful of the inherent dignity of individual human beings. This is for instance obvious in the standardized assessment of specific disorders or needs of learners, which some even call collective normopathy. When there is no space left for nuance for purely administrative reasons, effects on the well-being of young people can really be tremendous.

By the way did you know that in Self-Directed Education DYSlexia is not an issue? (eg. [4/10 DYS & SDE – FHREE](#))? How could we collect empirical evidence without decades of freedom to escape mainstream practice? And what if we spent money promoting culture and art rather than remediating what we damaged?

So what if individualism was in fact essential for collective thinking and well-being ?

*Man, in order to live, must think;
if he thinks badly without intimate veracity, he lives badly.*

Jose Ortega y Gasset

If human rights are a bulwark against fear and ignorance, we should not ignore the latest research and decades of valuable empirical data in Self-Directed Education and free democratic learning environments.

Something that must be realized is that it is not possible to respond to your request for feedback on your draft document Futures of Education with the brevity and clarity needed to establish the mindset that would constitute a fresh look. We consequently urge you with great sincerity to view the response we provide here as an invitation to consult with us, as a request to give us the opportunity needed for us to fully consider with you the possibility that some letting go of long established beliefs is required if you are to accomplish your goal.

The survival and refining of our democracies, and perhaps even the survival of human beings is at stake. If nothing more, please strongly urge the authorities who will act on your final document to at a minimum run fully supported pilot projects that will help people to imagine a different vision for public education that has the potential to cultivate a free and responsible society.

Thank you very much for your attention. (Please reply to gabrielgroiss@googlemail.com)

This report was established with the contribution of many actors of change worldwide and is supported by many many more.

Resource list <https://suitable-education.uk/evidence-base-for-self-directed-education/>
and more on <https://www.progressiveeducation.org/post-category/research/>