



## Rebooting Public Education – Part 1

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by Richard Fransham

### Introduction

This essay is for people who steadfastly believe that healthy democracies are dependent upon public education being everybody’s first choice. It is written for those who strive for the open-mindedness John Dewey<sup>1</sup> describes as follows:

“Openminded is the active desire to listen to more sides than one; to give heed to the facts from whatever source they come; to give full attention to alternative possibilities; and to recognize the possibility of error even in the beliefs that are dearest to us.”<sup>2</sup>

People immersed in traditional education often have difficulty imagining how things can be different. My intent with this essay is to cause pause for thought. We have become accustomed to getting our information through snippets and sound bites to the point that a serious read for many of us seems like too much work, but there is no simple way to dig ourselves out of the mess we have created. We have to do the work.

In the early 1970s, I was a disenchanted teacher full of self-doubt until I read *Education and Ecstasy* by George Leonard.<sup>3</sup> His scathing attack on schools as we know them defined so vividly the sad state of public education that I thought the education revolution was about to happen. I confidently gave a copy of the book to my father who was a superintendent with a large Montreal area school board at the time. In my mind, he was about to become a champion of change, but instead he delivered me a rude awakening. He couldn’t get past page ten of the “nonsense”.

The back cover of the book contains a quote from the Boston Globe that reads, “This remarkable book will delight many, disturb others and challenge all.” It delighted me, a struggling teacher, and it deeply disturbed my father, a successful disciple of traditional education. In the fifty plus

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<sup>1</sup> John Dewey (1859-1952) is an often referred to philosopher and educational reformer. His views on experiential learning have challenges conventional thinking almost from the beginning of education as we know it. For more information about what he had to offer, visit: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Dewey](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Dewey).

<sup>2</sup> Watkinson, A. (1999). *Education, Student Rights and the Charter*. UBC Press, p. 12  
<https://www.ubcpress.ca/education-student-rights-and-the-charter>.

<sup>3</sup> Leonard, G. (1968). *Education and Ecstasy*. Dell Publishing, New York, N.Y.

years since I read the book, my father's mindset has continued to dominate public education and this essay is likely to be dismissed by many who share his mindset. On the outside, however, out of the sight of most, much has happened as I work to reveal here. Private schools and homeschoolers are growing in number to the point that those who are observing the play between the two mindsets fear a growing disparity between the haves and have-nots. Those with means will increasingly seek to leave public education, and those without will be left with second rate schools. It is my hope that people will work through this essay, check out the references and let their imaginations take them to where things get interesting and generate hope.

The essay is presented in three parts. Part 1 follows. Parts 2 and 3 will be provided later. The first part gives an overview of where we stand in education today. When civilization transformed from the Agrarian to the Industrial Age, education was transformed in the process. Today's typical school is a social construct that started to become popular in the 1830s. It seems like it has been around forever, but public education as we know it is less than a couple of hundred years old. During its time it has proven to be a poor choice for humanity and it is proving to be utterly inadequate for the Digital Age. The remake of education is underway, but as indicted above, it is hampered by people who don't yet realize that the industrial model, designed to produce the workers and consumers for capitalism, has had its day.

Part 2 is about a history lesson that public school authorities have yet to apply. It draws on the work of Thomas Kuhn who coined the term "paradigm shift". He describes how paradigms compete, how dominant ones keep contenders at bay, and how a failing paradigm eventually gets replaced. There are two, and only two, distinct education paradigms competing, the prevalent autocratic one and the emerging democratic one. The position taken in this essay is that the turmoil we see in education results from the dominant paradigm fighting to remain dominant. The word "alternative" gives some legitimacy to the autocratic paradigm by casting a wrong impression on what is happening. The democratic paradigm is not an alternative as such. It is the emerging replacement for the failing autocratic paradigm. This does not mean that all traces of the old paradigm will be gone. New paradigms can incorporate certain aspects of old paradigms, but the battle will end, and the period of relative calm that Kuhn observed follows a paradigm shift will be enjoyed. This essay is an effort to make that transformation happen sooner rather than later.

Part 3 presents how to apply Kuhn's lesson to make the transformation of public education as easy as possible. There is no great mystery involved. It only requires putting the two paradigms on an equal footing. This is done by applying the concept of schools-within-schools. The options of a democratic and an autocratic education are provided in neighbourhood schools with people free to choose what works best for them. The choices are equally visible and accessible. Currently those who want the democratic approach to learning are forced to take either the private school or homeschooling route, which needs to be seen as a serious violation of their human rights. They are denied the education they need while being forced to pay taxes to support an institution that is failing to serve them. It also fragments communities with neighbourhood children spending their days in other places and it discourages the "pioneers of possibilities" whom we need for the remake of public education from pursuing what they know is inevitable.

Every paradigm comes with its own set of problems. By putting the democratic and autocratic learning paradigms on equal footings, the problem-solving processes, which Kuhn calls the “normal science” of a paradigm, can begin in earnest. In the battle of paradigms, a ploy of a dominant one is to discredit its competitor at the first sign of it facing a problem. Part 3 of the essay points out that the research and development processes that take a theory, such as Copernicus’s view of the universe, or the Wright Brothers’ ideas about flight, to what they are today are being suppressed in education at the expense of us all and the planet. We cannot afford to let prevail the mentality so aptly expressed by Alan King in his Early Russia cartoon shown in Figure 1.<sup>4</sup>

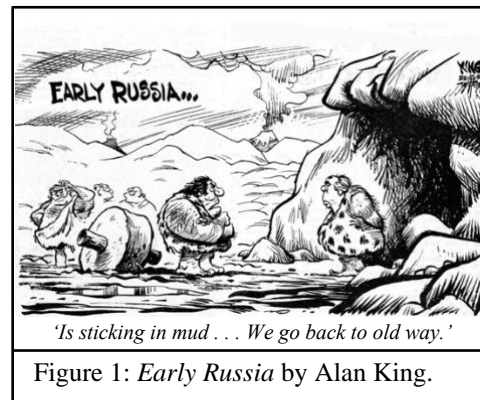


Figure 1: *Early Russia* by Alan King.

In Ottawa, roughly only forty percent of people turn out to vote in school board elections and there is good evidence to suggest that many of them are ill-informed. These are symptoms of an unhealthy democracy and school systems that do not have students living as democratic citizens. The assaults on democracies that are occurring around the world serve warning that we cannot be complacent about protecting our form of governance. The times call for a renewed commitment to democracy. Change happens at the local level with neighbours talking to neighbours and making their views known to the authorities. School board elections are taking place in Ottawa in October 2022, and this essay is part of a local effort to overcome voter apathy and engage people in conversations about the power of public education to create the culture we need in order to have the world we want. The problems with education discussed here are not specific to Ottawa. They are found wherever the colonial system of education is entrenched. This essay may therefore be of some value to people around the world wishing to shore up their democracies with appropriate public education.

## Part 1: The State of Public Education

### In the Pursuit of Truth

The dream pursued here is of a sustainable democratic society based on social and environmental justice. Its focus on education is pragmatic. A paternalistic sympathy for children and youth is not the underlying driver. Education will determine if we continue our drift towards civilization collapse or save ourselves from global catastrophe.<sup>5</sup> The importance of education to our survival cannot be overstated. Carol Black<sup>6</sup> in her documentary film *Schooling the World*<sup>7</sup> expresses this well with her message that if you want to change a culture, you have to change the way it educates its children.

<sup>4</sup> Reprinted with permission of Alan King.

<sup>5</sup> Stein, Z. (2019). *Education in a Time Between Worlds: Essays on the Future of Schools, Technology, and Society*. Bright Alliance. San Francisco, California. <http://www.zakstein.org>. This video is of Zak Stein speaking at the 2021 Ecoversties Conference: <https://youtu.be/wqh5w6lkP2c>.

<sup>6</sup> Carol Black gave this talk titled “Alternative to School” at the Economics of Happiness conference, held in Portland, Oregon, in February 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UyoBBROgUsQ>.

<sup>7</sup> Black, C. (Director). (2010). *Schooling the World*. <http://carolblack.org/schooling-the-world>.

It is semantics to some degree, but a fundamental distinction needs to be made at this point. The approach to education being advocated here is not about how a society educates its children. It is about how a society provides for its children to educate themselves. The learning environment is crucial, and to get it right, the aims of education need to be fully understood.

A report published over five decades ago still stands as a significant guide to the aims and objectives of public education in a democratic society. Titled *Living and Learning*<sup>8</sup>, best known as the Hall-Dennis Report, named after its principal authors, it puts the role of education squarely on creating a culture in which individual differences are appreciated and all can thrive. It is more about striving for a good life in a caring society than it is about learning for a good job. This is not to suggest that the report has all the answers. It has its own set of problems, and like the recently released UNESCO report on the future of education,<sup>9</sup> and the Deep Learning theories promoted by Michel Fullan,<sup>10</sup> it is progressive in nature rather than self-directed as described by Peter Gray in his Psychology Today blog post *Differences Between Self-Directed and Progressive Education*.<sup>11</sup> If, however, the report had been properly implemented, if the conditions had been created for pioneering educators to work at addressing its problems, we would not still be caught in the public education dilemma that created the need for the report decades ago.

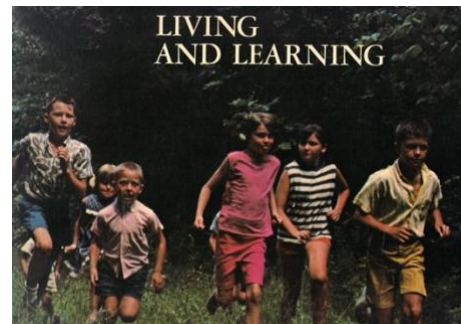


Figure 2: *Living and Learning* report on the aims and objectives of education.

A major strength of the report is its big picture thinking reflected in its opening words under the heading, *The Truth Shall Make You Free*.

“The underlying aim of education is to further man's unending search for truth. Once he possesses the means to truth, all else is within his grasp. Wisdom and understanding, sensitivity, compassion, and responsibility, as well as intellectual honesty and personal integrity, will be his guides in adolescence and his companions in maturity.”<sup>12</sup>

It brings to mind the age-old advice, “Know thyself”, which was recently reinforced by Canadian human rights activist, Murray Sinclair.<sup>13</sup> Not long ago he agreed to be the Chancellor of Queen’s

<sup>8</sup> Ontario Department of Education (1968). *Living and Learning*, Toronto, Canada.

<https://www.connexions.org/CxLibrary/Docs/CX5636-HallDennis.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> International Commission on the Futures of Education (2021). *Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379707>.

<sup>10</sup> Fullan, M., Quinn, J., McEachen, J. (2018). *Deep Learning: Engage the World Change the World*, Corwin Press and Ontario Principals’ Council, Thousand Oaks, California, <https://michaelfullan.ca/books/deep-learning-engage-the-world-change-the-world/>.

<sup>11</sup> Gray, P. (2017). “Differences Between Self-Directed and Progressive Education”, Psychology Today Blog. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/freedom-learn/201706/differences-between-self-directed-and-progressive-education>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid at 7, p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> Murray Sinclair was the first Indigenous judge in the Province of Manitoba. He served as a member of the Senate of Canada before becoming the chancellor of Queens University. He rose to prominence as chairman of the [Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#) from 2009 to 2015.

University and in a *Bright Future* podcast produced by the Conference Board of Canada,<sup>14</sup> he was asked, “What kinds of questions are you going to be asking this generation of students; what do you want to know about them?” This is how he responded:

“What do I want to know about them, or what do I want them to know about themselves. I think that’s an important distinction. . . . Be sure you know yourself. Be sure you keep your focus in front of you. Be sure you know your history. Be sure you know where you come from. Try to figure out why you’re here. Understand that knowing who you are is a constant question. The answer to it is constantly changing. Who you are today will not necessarily be the same as who you are tomorrow.”

When asked what he was most excited about, he echoed Carol Black. “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 is good. That’s always good.” Some of the young people to whom he refers are found in the short video by Wondering School<sup>15</sup> titled: *Youth Perspectives on Sociocracy*.<sup>16</sup> These youth recognize their power to influence the course of the world saying, “We are the generation we have been waiting for.”

Older generations need to feel ashamed that youth think their elders are abdicating their responsibility to clean up the mess they have created. Youth cannot be left to shoulder the lion’s share of that burden. The state of the world requires us all, young and old, to become the generation we have been waiting for with the young included as equal partners in decisions that affect them. The demand of the disabled, “Nothing about us without us”<sup>17</sup> applies for everyone, and if we respect this with children and youth, then in time we will have created a culture where no one needs to demand it. Older generations cannot presume to know more than younger generations about creating a sustainable future where democratic values prevail. Children and youth serve as the conscience of a society and their input is essential for constant societal renewal, particularly in times of great change. Leaving them disconnected results in a society that is ungrounded, a society in jeopardy. For adults uninitiated in how to be equal with young people, these comments might seem unworkable. The bottom line is, however, that only by acquiring the mindset of equality with young people do we have a chance of securing a strong, sustainable, democratic society where all people feel they belong.

Difficult to accept, but essential to addressing the public education problem, is that autocratic school systems are major violators of human rights. Well-meaning adults who have been raised

<sup>14</sup> Bassett, M. (Host). (2021, June 21). The Hon. Murray Sinclair on why we need truth for reconciliation (No. 25) [Audio podcast episode]. In *Bright Future*, The Conference Board of Canada. <https://podcasts.apple.com/ca/podcast/bright-future/id1514628454?i=1000526232180>.

<sup>15</sup> Wondering School is a documentary film producer challenging the traditional model of education and democracy: <https://www.wonderingschool.org>. It is most noted for its film *School Circles*: <https://schoolcirclesfilm.com>.

<sup>16</sup> Shread, C., Osorio, M. (Directors). (2021). *Youth Perspectives on Sociocracy* (Film; online video). Wondering School. <https://youtu.be/H3EXpBWaZk0>. This film was an outcome of the Child Friendly Community Conference: <https://www.ucyottawa.com/the-child-friendly-community-conference/>.

<sup>17</sup> “Nothing About Us Without Us” is the title of a book by James Charlton (1998) that deals with the rights of the disabled. See <https://www.ucpress.edu/book.php?isbn=9780520224810>. Wikipedia provides an introduction to the origins of the slogan: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nothing\\_About\\_Us\\_Without\\_Us](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nothing_About_Us_Without_Us).

through authoritarian practices righteously assume positions of superiority. They regard children and youth as too inexperienced and irresponsible to be taken seriously. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy much like women faced in their fight for emancipation. People, including many women, once believed that women lacked what it takes to operate in the boardrooms of big business. If never given the opportunity to learn what it takes, women plunked into that environment are going to look incompetent. We see that when women have experience and are given responsibility, they function well in what was once thought to be a man's world. The same can be said of young people. As we see with the youth in *Youth Perspectives on Sociocracy*, we

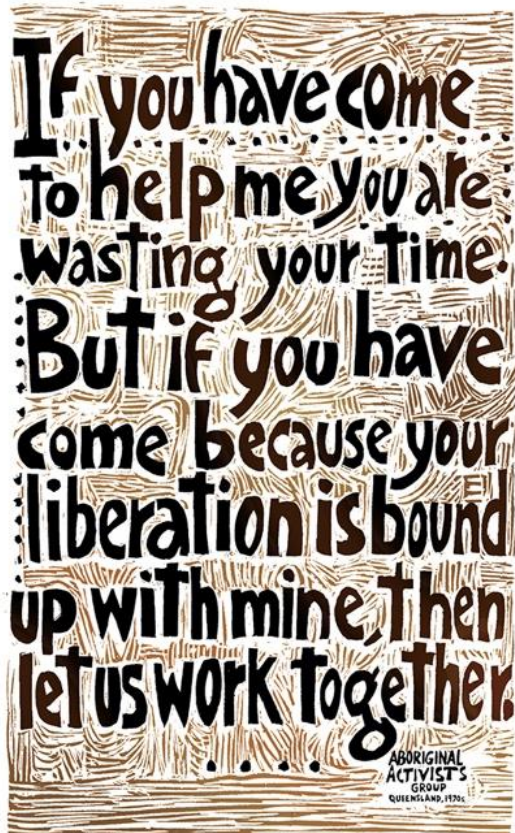


Figure 3: Queensland Aboriginal Activists, 1970

see also with others who have spoken at AERO events in 2021.<sup>18</sup> They have substantial contributions to make and they are perfectly capable of holding their own at the tables adult decision makers have claimed as their exclusive domain. We see that when young people feel respected and that their voices matter, they demonstrate thoughtfulness and the qualities of good citizenship as much as do good adult role models. Learning environments that do not permit the young and old to genuinely practice democracy together are the enemy of human rights and the democratic way of life.

*Dark Horse* is a book about attaining success in unconventional ways. It requires changing one's mindset about things that have been taken for granted. The authors, Todd Rose and Ogi Ogas, emphasize that the hardest part of adopting a new mindset is letting go of the old one.<sup>19</sup> The challenge for people who are accustomed to hierarchical relationships is to let go of behaviours that use power over others, or that subordinate oneself to the wishes of others. A statement that well describes the essence of relationships built on equality was crafted by Queensland Aboriginal activists in the 1970s. It reads as shown in Figure 3:

<sup>18</sup> A Youth Rights Day panel presentation at the 2021 annual AERO conference provoked this response from a long-time member: "This is the deepest most powerful AERO session I've ever experienced." Jerry Mintz, AERO founder, described it as, "One of the best ever" (in its more than 30 year history). The session was titled, "The Generation We Have Been Waiting For". This link is to the recording of the session:

[https://youtu.be/AyE\\_n0Z5k6A](https://youtu.be/AyE_n0Z5k6A). The panel moderator was Zineb Mouhyi, co-founder of YouthxYouth (<https://www.youthxyouth.com>). Her talk at the 2021 February AEROx gives a vision of what public education needs to become and the challenges to orchestrating the transformation: <https://youtu.be/irHE6DvQKsk>. As a sign of youth finding their voices, the first Youth AEROx was held in November 2021. It was a youth-led event driven by activist Addie Lentzner who co-founded the Vermont Student Anti-Racism Network: <http://vsarn.weebly.com/> and Mahi Thakur, member of Ecoversities: <https://ecoversities.org>.

<sup>19</sup> Rose, T., Ogas, O. (2018). *Dark Horse: Achieving Success Through the Pursuit of Fulfillment*. HarperCollins Publishers, New York, New York. <http://www.toddrose.com/darkhorse>.

“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.”<sup>20</sup>

Roger Hart’s essay titled *Children’s Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship* published by UNICEF<sup>21</sup> helps to define intergenerational relationships built on equality. It contains the Ladder of Participation (Figure 4), a useful visualization of the various ways adults interact with young people.

Derry Hannam is a retired inspector of British schools and a continuing advocate for democratic learning environments. In chapter 6 of his recently published book titled “Another Way is Possible – Becoming a Democratic Teacher in a State School”,<sup>22</sup> he describes how he managed his 11-year-old students. Despite the constraints of age-segregation and mandated curriculum, he was able to establish the kinds of relationships that exist with the upper rungs of Hart’s Ladder. It’s a heart-warming story of respect for students that we need faculties of education sharing and applying in their programs. In a short video titled “Responsible Subversives”,<sup>23</sup> Derry describes the kind of teacher students need

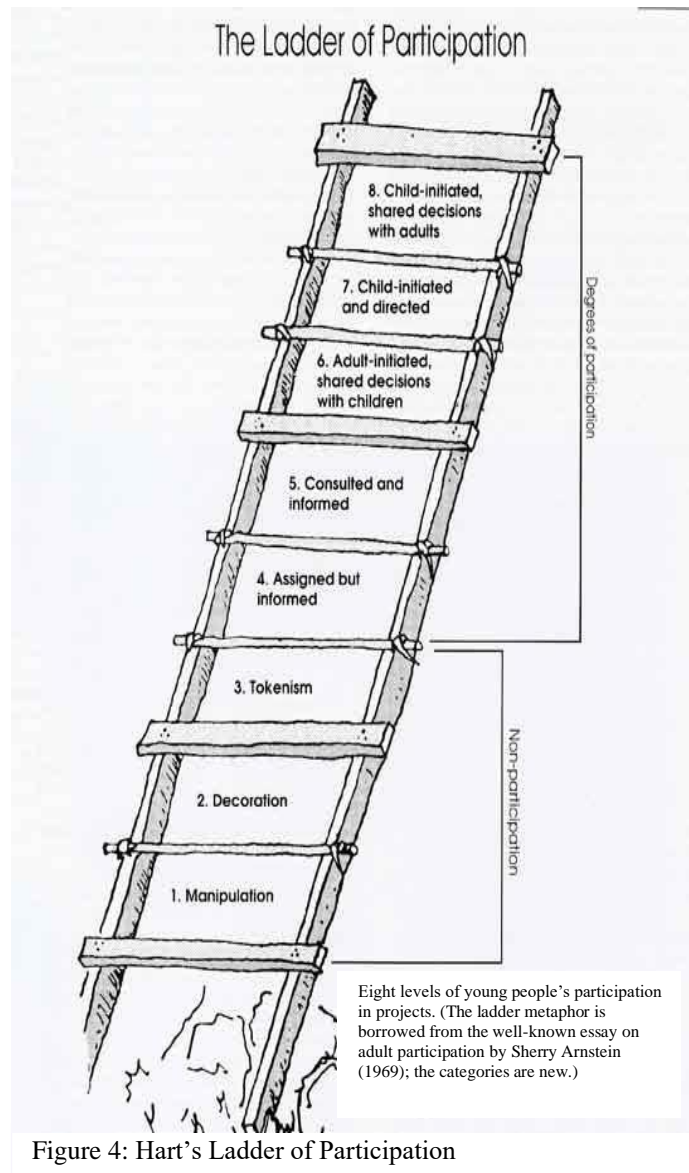


Figure 4: Hart’s Ladder of Participation

<sup>20</sup> Lilla Watson is often credited with this quote, but she regards it as a product of collaboration and prefers that it be referenced as “Aboriginal activists group Queensland, 1970s.” See: <https://uniting.church/lilla-watson-let-us-work-together/>. The poster image was obtained from: <https://www.rlmartstudio.com/product/liberation/>.

<sup>21</sup> Hart, R. (1992). “Children’s participation: from tokenism to citizenship “. UNICEF International Child Development Centre. Florence, Italy. ([https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/childrens\\_participation.pdf](https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/childrens_participation.pdf)). Hart’s ladder is a modification of the one presented by Arnstein, S.R. (1969) A Ladder Of Citizen Participation, Journal of the American Institute of Planners, 35:4, 216-224.

<sup>22</sup> Hannam, D. (2021). *Another Way is Possible - Becoming a Democratic Teacher in a State School*. <https://www.amazon.com/Another-Way-Possible-Democratic-Self-Directed/dp/B0942MSF5M>. Derry is a retired inspector of school in England where he is known for his report on democratic education titled: “The Hannam Report” or “Investigating the Impact of Student Participation on Education”: <https://www.progressiveeducation.org/impact-of-student-participation-by-derry-hannam/>.

<sup>23</sup> As a result of COVID, a group of AERO members who advocate for public education formed a group called Unschooling School (<https://www.unschoolingschool.com/index.html>). Heather MacTaggart, co-author of *Overschooled but Undereducated: How the crisis in education is jeopardizing our adolescents*

to encounter if they are to become caring and confident democratic citizens.

During a webinar titled, “The Effects of Behavior-Based Models on Neurodevelopment and Learning”, panelist Alfie Kohn told a story about his infant son. The baby would wake up and start screaming when Alfie would immediately try to change his diaper. By applying “perspective taking”, which is consciously trying to look at the world through another person’s eyes, Alfie realized his son just wanted to wake up a little more before his diaper was changed. Alfie described it as, “Doing him the courtesy of trying to understand what he was trying to tell me”.<sup>24</sup>

This is essentially what Derry describes as a responsible subversive, and in “The 20% Project for Schools – A Modest Proposal”,<sup>25</sup> he provides a vision of how schools can proactively cultivate this mindset.

The 20% Project is transitional. It is a starting point to be scaled up as people see the benefits to giving students a good measure of autonomy and as people gain experience in managing this type of learning environment. Visions of what is needed go far beyond what it proposes. “Child Rearing is Mean” by K.R.Ä.T.Z.Ä. (KinderÄchTsZÄnker),<sup>26</sup> for example, rejects the whole notion of education saying, “There are essentially two means of education available to the educator: Seduction on the one hand (distraction, trickery, bribery, etc.) and extortion on the



Figure 5: Go To Bed Now poster

(<https://www.changelearning.ca/books-overschooled-undereducated-how-crisis-education-jeopardizing.html>), was the inspiration behind the group. In her book she used the term “responsible subversives”. Derry is one of the original members of Unschooling School and the video presents comments he made about the term at one of the group’s meetings. The video is found here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ze\\_MrATumjI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ze_MrATumjI).

<sup>24</sup> Kohn, A., Torres, E. (2022). The Effects of Behavior-Based Models on Neurodevelopment and Learning. NJ Autism Center of Excellence. (Recording; online video). Youtube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7MJbqkzDTdg> (Comment said around the 59 minute mark).

<sup>25</sup> Hannam, D. (2021, May 28). The 20% Project for Schools – A Modest Proposal. *Progressive Education*.

<https://www.progressiveeducation.org/the-20-project-for-schools-a-modest-proposal-by-derry-hannam/>.

<sup>26</sup> K.R.Ä.T.Z.Ä.. Child Rearing Is Mean. <http://www.ucyottawa.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/ChildrearingIsMean.pdf>. K.R.Ä.T.Z.Ä. came to a de facto end after it hosted the IDEC 2005 (<http://idec2005.org/>). A 30 minute documentary film titled *Democratic Schools* was produced during the conference: <http://democratic-schools.com>. The K.R.Ä.T.Z.Ä. website has been preserved for the record: <http://en.kraetzae.de>.



other, i.e. intimidation by threatening and inflicting disadvantages.” Mike Weimann<sup>27</sup> who was on the ground floor of K.R.Ä.T.Z.Ä. shares the red poster<sup>28</sup> in Figure 5 that encapsulates how much attitudes towards young people are the antithesis of perspective taking.

K.R.Ä.T.Z.Ä. was a group of German child activists who formed in 1992 after the Berlin Wall came down. One of its main fields of interest was voting rights without age limits. It’s a view gaining momentum today among human rights activists. On November 30, 2021, a group of Canadian youth launched a court challenge to lower the federal voting age<sup>29</sup> claiming that current policies violate sections of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.<sup>30</sup> Another development is the founding of the Children’s Voting Colloquium in 2019.<sup>31</sup> It is collaborating with a number of organizations worldwide to unite people in an effort to have minimum voting ages abolished globally. This action will at first seem outrageous to most people, but the arguments in favour of it are compelling. One of the founders of the Colloquium is John Wall,<sup>32</sup> Professor of Philosophy, Religion, and Childhood Studies, as well as the Director of the Childism Institute,<sup>33</sup> at Rutgers University. He has just published, “Give Children the Vote: On Democratizing Democracy”,<sup>34</sup> which presents the arguments pro and con the abolition of minimum voting ages while concluding that the best interests of democracies are served by their removal.

### The New Age

The remake of public education requires putting it into context with the social conditions of today. In the 1830s, when the idea of publicly funded education for all was catching on, the world was a very different place. People could learn most of what they needed to know for life in the first 20 years of life and a predominantly minimally educated and obedient workforce was needed for the factories of the Industrial Age.

Today, the speed of change and the decrease in manufacturing jobs in first world countries makes this approach to education inappropriate. We can no longer predict what kinds of skills people will need for employment. Futurologist Rohit Talwar of Fast Future says, “Pupils should be prepared for a world that could see them taking up 40 different jobs before reaching the age of 100.”<sup>35</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Mike Weimann is also a co-founder of Netzwerk-Schule, a democratic school established in Berlin in 2008 and he served as a staff member from 2008-2017. He gave this talk at the IDEC 2020: [http://www.ucyottawa.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/WebIDEC2020\\_MikeWeimann-TdS.pdf](http://www.ucyottawa.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/WebIDEC2020_MikeWeimann-TdS.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> The *Go To Bed Now* poster is available in various languages at <https://gotobednow.com/shop>.

<sup>29</sup> Maloney, R. (2021, December 1) *Young Canadians launch court challenge to lower federal voting age from 18*. CBC. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/young-canadians-voting-age-challenge-1.6268431>. See also <https://childrenfirstcanada.org/press-releases/young-canadians-file-court-challenge-to-lower-federal-voting-age-calling-it-unconstitutional/>.

<sup>30</sup> *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, s 7, Part 1 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, being Schedule B to the *Canada Act 1982 (UK)*, 1982, c 11. <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/const/page-12.html>.

<sup>31</sup> *Children’s Voting Colloquium*. <https://www.childrenvoting.org>.

<sup>32</sup> Wall, J. biographical notes. <https://johnwall.camden.rutgers.edu>.

<sup>33</sup> The Childism Institute. <https://www.childism.org>.

<sup>34</sup> Wall, J. (2022). *Give Children the Vote: On Democratizing Democracy*. Bloomsbury Publishing, New York, NY. <https://johnwall.camden.rutgers.edu/books/give-children-the-vote/>.

<sup>35</sup> BBC News. (2015, Oct. 7). *Prepare pupils for the world of the future, heads told*.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/education-34464133>. See also: <https://fastfuture.com/about-fast-future/>.

To thrive in this kind of society people require the skills to be independent, lifelong learners. Employers are saying that to be successful in today's workplace people need to be versed in the 4Cs: creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaboration. Recognizing that public education has to be about more than training people for jobs, character and citizenship have been added to create the 6Cs of education.<sup>36</sup> The nursing profession has also established its 6Cs: care, compassion, competence, communication, courage and commitment, which to a large extent are characteristics of character and citizenship.

Just one example of how conventional schools thwart learning the 6Cs of education is contained in this little anecdote. A ninth-grade math teacher talking to his colleagues in his school's staffroom at lunch said, "The students asked me again today, 'Sir, why do we have to learn this stuff?' I told them, 'You know, when I was your age, I asked the same question, but now I know the answer. I earn my living teaching it to you.'" Another day the answer may have been, "Because you need it to get into university." Teachers are discouraged from using these moments to develop critical thinking skills, which the students are applying when they seek answers to things that don't feel right to them. Perhaps it is because the teachers are feeling time crunched trying to get the curriculum covered, but there is a more likely reason they don't seriously entertain the question. The students are searching for truth, but the truth is that there is no justification for imposing math on them, and adults are afraid to admit it. They imagine a student revolt if the truth be known.

A study done to determine what happened to people who attended the non-coercive, democratic Sudbury Valley School<sup>37</sup> sheds light on what the educators' 6Cs involve. One of the questions asked of the subjects was what did they regard as advantages and disadvantages of the school. A person who had attended the school from age 9 and then went on to college 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 ...".<sup>38</sup> Upon close inspection of life at Sudbury Valley, one finds that the 6Cs of education are constantly being practiced. They develop naturally where young people are responsible for themselves in community with others.

The substantive things are easy to measure, which is convenient for autocratic school systems heavy on accountability. Attitudinal qualities are not easily assessed and the jury is still out as to whether or not it is even constructive to attempt to formally measure them during people's formative years. One way of looking at assessment is that the only valid form of evaluation is self-evaluation. We see it on the playground when younger children are intently observing what older ones are doing. They are assessing if they are capable of doing the same thing. Another perspective is contained in Albert Einstein's saying, "Everything that can be counted does not

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<sup>36</sup> MIRO Blog. *The 6 C's of education*. (2021, Feb. 9). <https://miro.com/blog/6-cs-of-education-classroom/>.

<sup>37</sup> The Sudbury Valley School was founded in 1968. <https://sudburyvalley.org>. Daniel Greenberg, co-founder and author of many books about the school died in late 2021. See: *The Man Who Trusted Children: Daniel Greenberg* by Peter Gray. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/freedom-learn/202112/the-man-who-trusted-children-daniel-greenberg?fbclid=IwAR0Qv6IHR3KXt0Y5-4wJqjt5ACsMr1t3N2QX11JvDO4hSc77ANcuFnURL08>.

<sup>38</sup> Gray, P. & Chanoff, D. (1986). Democratic Schooling: What Happens to Young People Who Have Charge of Their Own Education?. *American Journal of Education*, Vol. 94, No. 2, pp. 182-213. p. 199. [https://cdn2.psychologytoday.com/assets/attachments/1195/democratic-schooling-aje\\_0.pdf](https://cdn2.psychologytoday.com/assets/attachments/1195/democratic-schooling-aje_0.pdf).

necessarily count; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted.” Add to this the following quote from *Paradigm Shift* and the image of what is important systemically begins to emerge.

“If you want to control, you design organizations for accountability.  
If you want to accomplish, you design for commitment.”<sup>39</sup>

In *Education, Student Rights and the Charter*, Ailsa Watkinson refers to the work of David Purpel, an American professor of education who saw the public school as “the only major institution specifically charged with the responsibility for nourishing and sustaining democracy.”<sup>40</sup> “Purpel,” she writes, “has suggested that the need to control student behaviour reflects an obsession within the traditional authoritarian model of education. The need to control has placed a higher priority on productivity, efficiency, and uniformity than on flexibility, diversity, rights, and freedoms. Disciplinary rules are promulgated to reinforce control over students. School rules make it implicit or, if necessary, explicit that it is the school that decides, the school that allows, lets, gives permission, waives, makes exceptions. It is the students who petition, request, and plead.”<sup>41</sup>

Important to note is that accountability is expensive. It adds enormously to the price tag of the autocratic school systems. To those who understand the democratic learning model, the management hierarchy and all of the record keeping, scheduling and disciplinary actions typical of autocratic school systems, practices that have no direct bearing on learning, are seen as an enormous mismanagement of resources. Learning environments designed for commitment eliminate these expenses and the savings can be used to bring more teachers into the schools to create the kinds of ecosystems of community learners promoted by such people as Kelly Young of Education Reimagined.<sup>42</sup>

Around the time that Tapscott and Caston published *Paradigm Shift*, Algonquin College in Ottawa was requiring first year students to take an analytical reading course. It had found that students graduating from high school lacked this skill. Hearing of this an Ottawa high school math teacher decided to make the skills of lifelong, independent learning the primary curriculum for his students with analytical reading being a key component. The math was to be acquired as a by-product.

Analytical reading was defined for the students as the ability to read a manual, and the math textbook was their manual. Instead of spoon feeding the students lessons in math, the teacher challenged the students to use their textbooks to teach themselves and thereby accomplish two learning objectives with the one effort. If they got stumped and simply couldn't make sense of

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<sup>39</sup> Tapscott, D. & Caston, A. (1993). *Paradigm Shift*. McGraw-Hill, New York, N.Y., p. 36.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid at 2, p. 38.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid at 2, p. 39.

<sup>42</sup> The Education Reimagined website contains this map of learning environments in the United States: <https://education-reimagined.org/map/>. One of the many examples is Remake Learning: <https://education-reimagined.org/map/remake-learning/>.

what the textbook was presenting, they were to bring the book to the teacher to get a reading lesson.<sup>43</sup>

Much can be said about this approach. One benefit is that getting stumped produces the opportunity to practice critical thinking skills, the ability to identify all relevant information and the mental agility to see it from all angles. An unexpected result for the teacher was that it gave him an opportunity to diagnose learning problems. Students' poor performance in math often has nothing to do with their math ability, and everything to do with missing prerequisite knowledge. It's a problem that is inherent in a system that promotes students to the next level based on their age rather than their mastery of subject material. The value of analytical reading skill was acknowledged inadvertently by one of the students in the study of Sudbury Valley School graduates. When asked if it was difficult to adjust to the structure of college after the freedom of Sudbury Valley, the student responded, "Textbooks are so systematized, so easy. You know exactly what they want."<sup>44</sup>

While the importance of analytical reading skill was stressed by the math teacher, students were encouraged to take stock of all the resources available to them, both in and out of school, that they could use to learn math. They were to think of their class as a community of learners where everyone was a student and a teacher, and to expand that perspective to the larger community of family members and neighbours who might help them if they got stuck. From this one example people can imagine how schools could be doing so much more for students if teachers became guides on the side more than sages on stages.

In this example one sees the transfer of responsibility for learning back to the student from being in the hands of the teacher. It is an approach that helps to overcome the problem of people needing to be told what to do, which the following story of an employer's frustration reveals.

The employer needed an engineer to solve some problems related to the development of a prototype plant being designed to extract oil from waste and he hired a graduating engineer who was top of his class. The employer was himself an engineer working on some of the more challenging problems. On the new recruit's first day of work, the employer explained to him the nature of a problem he was to solve and then sent him away to solve it. Within half an hour the young engineer was back to ask the employer, "How would you like me to solve this?" The employer was taken aback and said, "If I had time to solve it, I wouldn't have hired you. Go and figure it out." The employer could be faulted for not handling the situation more constructively, but the point is that schools are creating people who need to be managed; they need to be told what to do and how to do it. Our traditional schools are breeding into students an infantile mentality in that they crave the direction of a strong, understanding authority. It's a process that schools creativity out of people while it schools in a fear of risk, a fear of making mistakes.

The documentary film *Class Dismissed*<sup>45</sup> portrays the difficult journey from life as an extrinsically motivated learner back to one who is intrinsically motivated. It is a process that has

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<sup>43</sup> OPERI Blog. (2016, Oct. 13). *Analytical Reading*. <http://operi.ca/?p=1744> and OPERI Blog. *A Lesson About Math*. (2016, Oct. 12). <http://operi.ca/?p=1734>.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid at 37, pp. 200-01.

<sup>45</sup> Stuart, J. (Director). (2015). *Class Dismissed* [Documentary film]. 3StoryFilms. <http://classdismissedmovie.com>.

become known as deschooling. Jordan Taylor is a young lady who, despite liking school and being a strong student, quit in tenth grade. She left because she felt she could learn more not being in school. Speaking at the 2020 Child Friendly Community Conference<sup>46</sup> three years after quitting, she explained how she was struggling with the decision of whether or not to go to college. “One of the reasons I’m not fully on board with going to college,” she said, “is that I don’t want to get sucked back into a system. I’ve figured out how to be intrinsically motivated, which took the better part of two years and I don’t want to go back to extrinsic motivation.” She brings to mind the saying, “I was such a good learner, and then I went to school.” She also helps to dispel the view that the autocratic system is serving well the higher achieving students. It is a view held by people who have never considered how much better off these students might be in an environment that promotes the skills of independent learning and that is more emotionally nourishing.

In addition to the window *Class Dismissed* gives us into what motivates us, it also provides insights into how intrinsically motivated people are naturally drawn to creating intergenerational ecosystems of community learners. “Village Home”,<sup>47</sup> a learning community featured in the film, and the democratic schools featured in the documentary “School Circles”<sup>48</sup> offer visions of learning environments that preserve intrinsic motivation. A feature of these learning environments is the absence of formal scheduling, the segregating of students by age and the dividing up of the school day into fixed chunks of time to study packaged courses. It’s a practice Larry Rosenstock, co-founder of the High Tech High network of charter schools,<sup>49</sup> says is the single greatest impediment to educational innovation.<sup>50</sup> Marching students to the bell, and assembly line learning are ways that it has been described. Streaming, the grouping of students by perceived ability, was added to formal scheduling in the effort to make classes as homogeneous as possible. The idea was that the more homogeneous a class, the more effectively the teacher could dispense the curriculum. It’s a system that promotes uniformity and conformity, and then we wonder why people don’t celebrate diversity and why people who are different get bullied.

Daniel Greenberg described age-mixing as Sudbury Valley’s secret weapon.<sup>51</sup> It constitutes the greatest learning resource available to us and traditional schools squander it. Teachers deliver and students receive, and behind it is a major injustice. Students are robbed of endless opportunities to feel good about themselves by doing for others and they are left to think that they have nothing of value to offer. They are in effect the recipients of charity which is demeaning and it doesn’t exist in democratic schools where everybody is a learner and a teacher. Traditional teachers fear this kind of learning environment thinking it threatens their job security, but this is a red herring promoted by those who can’t imagine doing things differently. We need

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<sup>46</sup> Jordan Taylor in conversation with Jim Flannery. (2020, Nov. 21). *A Sense of Wellbeing*. Child Friendly Community Conference (Comment begins at the 42:25). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYPW0cTTr-4>.

<sup>47</sup> Village Home: <https://www.villagehome.org>.

<sup>48</sup> Shread, C. & Osorio, M. (2020). *School Circles: Every Voice Matters* [Documentary film]. Wondering School. <https://schoolcirclesfilm.com>.

<sup>49</sup> High Tech High network of charter schools: <https://www.hightechhigh.org>.

<sup>50</sup> Abeles, V. & Rubenstein, G. (2015). *Beyond Measure*. Simon & Shuster, New York, N.Y.. See also the documentary film *Beyond Measure* directed by Abeles. <https://beyondtheracetowhere.org/beyond-measure/>.

<sup>51</sup> Greenberg, D. (1987). *Free At Last: The Sudbury Valley School*. Sudbury Valley School Press. Framingham, MA. p. 75.

more adults interacting with young people, not fewer, and there are good indicators that job satisfaction for teachers is higher in learning environments where they have more control and can interact naturally with students as opposed to acting as their managers. The fact that there is a lack of studies confirming this needs to be seen as a condemnation of the teaching profession and their unions.

Student mental health is a growing concern. Some like to blame it on COVID, but it was a problem long before the pandemic. *The Provision of Care* document produced by Faiz Jan and Kirsten Kelly states that 48% of Ontario high school students had moderate to severe psychological distress in 2015.<sup>52</sup> The Ottawa branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association has at the top of its list of core values “social justice” and “self-determination”.<sup>53</sup> From this we can derive the formula:

$$\text{mental health} = \text{social justice} + \text{self-determination}$$

This is the essence of democratic schools. They foster an atmosphere of equality, and through self-direction students can establish equity. The measure of a mentally healthy school is students walking into them feeling inferior or superior to no one while being in control of their learning to the extent that they are not infringing on the rights of others. This is far from how students walk into the competitive, test-driven schools that are still the norm today. If the aim of education is to produce strong, democratically minded, independent citizens, then schools need to be places where that is lived. To have them sitting as citizens-in-waiting until the age of eighteen is absurd and perhaps the strongest indicator of the misguided aims of public education today.

Democratic schools are not new and they are not standardized. They all tend to be a little different depending on the community they serve. In *Dark Horse*, Rose and Ogas discuss “The Standardization Covenant” simply stated as “Be the same as everyone else only better.” The flip side of it they say constitutes its fatal flaw: “our standardized institutions of opportunity were never designed for personal fulfillment,”<sup>54</sup> and this is the fatal flaw of public education as we know it today. Democratic schools are designed for personal fulfillment in community with others.

Yaacov Hecht first termed a school “democratic” and he has been instrumental in making Israel a bright spot in the emergence of publicly funded democratic schools.<sup>55</sup> His work has led to the establishment of roughly thirty such schools in Israel and he is now working on a vision for Tel

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<sup>52</sup> Jan, F., & Kelly, K. (2021, Nov. 29). *The Provision of Care*. Peace of Mind Coalition. Ottawa, Ontario. <https://www.pomontario.ca/uploads/1/2/0/2/120284677/updatedprovisionofcare.pdf>.

<sup>53</sup> Canadian Mental Health Association (Ottawa branch) 2022. “Core Values”. <https://ottawa.cmha.ca/about-cmha/vision-mission-and-core-values/>.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid at 18, p. 34.

<sup>55</sup> Hetch, Y. (2020, Nov. 21). *Democratic Education*. Child Friendly Community Conference. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnN-js2uvwc>.

Aviv of an ecosystem of community learners<sup>56</sup> that is fuelled by Canadian author Chris Montgomery's<sup>57</sup> book *Happy City*.<sup>58</sup>

In conclusion to this part of the essay, consider the following quote taken from the 1968 Hall-Dennis Report.

*“Today, on every side, however, there is heard a growing demand for a fresh look at education in Ontario. The Committee was told of inflexible programs, outdated curricula, unrealistic regulations, regimented organization, and mistaken aims of education. We heard from alienated students, frustrated teachers, irate parents, and concerned educators. Many public organizations and private individuals have told us of their growing discontent and lack of confidence in a school system which, in their opinion, has become outmoded and is failing those it exists to serve.”<sup>59</sup>*

Some people would argue that it is truer today than it was over a half century ago. A paradigm can be replaced when for an extended period of time its most talented and capable disciples fail to solve its pressing problems. It is time for the perpetrators of schools as we know them to make room for those working with a different mindset.

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<sup>56</sup> Hetch, Y. (2021, Sept. 30). *Visions of Learning Communities*. IDEC 2021 Summerhill Festival of Childhood. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1D9DuO2OE6UTNn6BZkZhMwWPQ8G67qfFk/view?usp=sharing>.

<sup>57</sup> Charles Montgomery: <https://www.charlesmontgomery.ca/bio/>.

<sup>58</sup> Montgomery, C. (2013). *Happy City: Transforming Our Lives Through Urban Design*. Doubleday Canada. <http://www.thehappycity.com/>

<sup>59</sup> Ibid at 7, p. 10.