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Je'anna: Welcome, everybody and welcome most of all to our panelists I'm going to just read them in the order that they are on my screen: Derry Hannam, Cassidy Youngmans Anika Pretha, Jerry Mintz, Sidney Morris. Welcome and thank you so much for being here to share a very important part of your lives with us in terms of the inspiration that I think we all need to be able to make the shift, in making that more beautiful educational world that our hearts know is possible. So, I'm going to suggest that we dive right in. I'm going to ask each of you to briefly introduce yourself and then after that we'll go into asking... I'll be asking you a few more leading questions. But if each of you could just start with who you are and where you are - just a couple of sentences to give everybody a little bit here on what you used to do before you made the shift and a little bit about what you did once you made the shift and I'll just call it again in the order that it is on my screen. Derry, would you mind starting?

Derry: Oh, hell.

Je'Anna: Sorry

Derry: I'm, very basically, from the public school system in the UK. I mean I started thinking about these issues when I was at school and I wondered why nobody was interested to know all the things I was interested in. They just didn't want to know and I built up a kind of resistance to what they wanted me to be interested in if they couldn't be interested in what I was interested in. So, I had a number of work experiences but one of them was to work in a group therapy in a psychiatric hospital- a group therapy unit for young people. And I remember talking with some so-called patients one day and saying that if you went to your health center for advice and you were put into a room with 30 other people with different problems, shouted at to sit down and be quiet, given a lot of information completely unrelated to your problem, and then given a test to decide whether you could have further treatment or not... and we sort of said, "Well, you'd never run a health system like this so, why the hell are schools run like that?" And that sort of kicked off a lot of stuff in me and, uh, I decided to train to be a teacher to try and do things in another way. Found the psychology course in the in the university was teaching me about Skinner and rats and Pavlov and salivating dogs. And I remember thinking, "I don't want to teach dogs or rats- I'd rather prefer to teach children." So, I discovered all the books in the library by A.S Neil, Homer, Lane, John Dewey, et cetera. Tolstoy. And realized there was another way to run a school. And, so, I in my first job I was with 36 kids who'd failed their examination at 11. What a thing to do with kids to fail an examination at 11! And they were sent to this sort of second class secondary modern school. I had 35 or 36 of them and we just ran into a kind of mini Summerhill, a democratic learning community, all the decisions were made, we sat in a circle and made our class rules. I was responsible for History, Geography, R.E., Social Studies and English. And, so, the kids said, "Well, that covers just about everything, doesn't it? Can we study everything?" So, I thought what a good idea and they launched off into their own projects. It worked very successfully. They recovered their confidence, looked forward to coming to school. The parents began to phone the head teacher and said, "What's this crazy guy doing? Suddenly my kid likes school again." And, so, I had the head teacher on my side but I thought I'd probably get fired after a year of this but I didn't. I got put in charge of all seven classes of kids this age- 12, 13, and we ran the whole thing with 220 kids as a sort of giant democratic learning experience and it worked brilliantly. And, far from getting fired, I ended up running a school myself, became a school inspector and then I worked in Europe trying to take the ideas from the democratic schools which exist all over the world several hundred of them. Nobody really knows how many there are because they come and go. And then to take these ideas and see how we can introduce them into public schools, into state school systems with a little bit of success in some countries and not much in others. But I've got a feeling that something's about to happen or something is happening. One of these Overton windows where an opportunity for introducing these ideas is beginning to happen worldwide, partly as a result of COVID. I guess I've gone on too long. Je'anna, you haven't told me to stop. I'll actually tell myself to stop- that'll be a first.

Je'anna: There you go. I think you've probably answered the next question I'll ask you on the next round. I know that you're going to have something more to say and it's beautiful. Derry, thank you,

you've gotten us to off to a beautiful start. My screen ordered itself in the meantime. I think I'm going to next-- do you mind if i call on you, Cassidy?

Cassidy: Sure. Hi everybody, thank you so much for being here. I recognize some names but then I know sometimes we change our Zoom names so if I know you, let me know, and if i don't know you- hi, I'm Cassidy and I'm so so grateful that I was invited to be a part of this conversation, especially with people like Anika, like Jerry, like Sid, like Derry who have been doing, have been doing the work. Definitely really pouring into communities and not only doing that but going out you know? That's something that I've seen like from Derry, from Jerry especially is like going out and visiting these different spaces and really bringing that back in to kids. So, that's so beautiful. I am from Dallas, Texas and I'm here right now. I was a public school teacher for five years. I taught seventh grade English and so it was double state tested. There was a writing and a reading portion. So, I really quickly saw how starkly intense the testing system had become even from the gap of when I was in school to becoming a teacher, along with a million other reasons why I wasn't going to be able to continue in public education- both for the kids and for my own health. Like that was not a healthy environment for me to be a part of. And I'm not hating on public school, if it works for people. But for me it was a very toxic environment most of my experience and as a kid. So, when I, when I started looking for alternatives, of course, like as a lot of people's story goes, searching alternative education, searching all these things. The AERO website came up right and the amazing Jerry holding that space for everybody to find their path. And, so, then I started looking down the list and I saw there was one community in Dallas, Texas that was open that was a democratic school. And, so, then you know, I picked up the phone, tried to make an appointment. A kid answered, right, a 12-year-old answered, and made the meeting for me and was like, "Okay, here's when your tour is going to be," and my mind is like blown right because I'm still teaching in public school and I'm just like, "oh my gosh what's happening?" And, so, you know long story short, eventually I ended up with them and getting involved in creating a yearly conference called Self-directed Path that was to spread the word of self-directed education in Dallas, Fortworth. And so then we had Blake Boles as a keynote speaker, we had Peter Gray as a keynote speaker, and then we had Joel Hammon. And those have been our three keynotes. And Blake came down and kind of helped me just really make the leap to self-directed education because I was like well I'm not you know valid to do anything besides teaching in public education. This is my degree. This is all I've ever done. Why would anybody in this movement want me and this other thing, right? And I don't have these skills because I'm still taught and conditioned that you have to you know go to school to be worthy of learning anything, you know. So, a long story short he helps me make that leap and then I took a year saving money and then I jumped and took a sabbatical year to visit all sorts of different spaces kind of like, you know, Derry and Jerry have done in different ways. And then came back and helped create a learning community here in Dallas and now I'm pivoting again to help create another one that's hoping to be fall 2022. Thank you for having me.

Je'anna: Yay! Thank you, Cassidy. Anika, are you up for next?

Anika: Yes. I'm so glad Cassie's in Dallas so that means I'll be able to see you hopefully in November. That's exciting. We've crossed paths quite a bit in this, in my journey and I'm glad that we are staying connected. My journey sounds so similar so far. I was a public school teacher for six years and I knew literally my first day on the job that this was not where I am supposed to be. I just didn't know where to go or what I was supposed to do. So, I did something very similar to Derry as I just did it the way I thought it would be until I would get caught and get the call to the principal's office and tell you know the whole conversation of what we have to stick with the objectives we have to do this and that But I'm a very stubborn person so I was like okay, okay and I would keep going back to my classroom and doing it the way I thought it should be done. I didn't want to get fired. A black woman getting fired from a predominantly white county would not have been a good educational move from my career. And I'm just being honest about that so I decided to quit before I got fired and while I still had a good relationship with those people I worked for. I'm thankful that I had some nice principals who recognized that I was thinking out the box and were willing to... They just kept having the principles meetings with me that were not very productive. So, I eventually left and I went into Christian education and found myself just as frustrated there. For a faith to talk about freedom so much I just didn't find much freedom in those schools and actually encountered a lot of racism in those schools. So, I also found that this is not a good place for me. And then my parents also started a school which

was a little bit better but still very structured and still, just again, I wrestled with just not giving students the space to figure out who they are, to create, to have a voice. And, so, with my parents though it was a little bit easier for me to just... I didn't have the principles meetings. I was able to just kind of do that in my niche but it's hard when you're only doing it in your class and it's not going throughout the school because some or even it's not even encouraged in the home so that whatever you pour into them is still a battle. So, long story short I got married, had kids. Again didn't realize there were actually schools that felt the way I did. I really felt that I was alone and then it came time for my son to start school. And he was five, finishing pre-k and he's a pistol. He was a pistol from the moment he was conceived, I mean that literally and I knew I was in trouble when I held him in my arms in the hospital. And he's wonderful like not in trouble in a bad way but he was just so full of life and he yearned for freedom from a very young age. And he had his own voice. It was so intense that he wouldn't eat just because I wanted him to like that's how much he wanted to make his own decisions. And I remember having to change, to go along with how he wanted to eat and but I still didn't understand what that was and I thought that we would just kind of muddle through the education world that way. And then when it came time for him to go to kindergarten, I began to look for schools for him. And I was so troubled by all the different public and private schools I was seeing. And I was very hopeless. I thought my free-spirited, strong-willed child, fire in his soul... What is going to happen to my baby? It will wither in a homeschool situation where I just have him all to myself. He needs to share that fire with the world and other children. And I literally was just sitting at my computer in a state of desperation and an ad for Sudbury school in Maryland Fairhaven Sudbury school just popped up on my Facebook page, which was odd because I wasn't looking. I hadn't been looking at schools like that so for it to just pop up on my page was strange. And their open house was the next day and I had an event. And I left the event early just to get to the open house before it ended. And it was a very short visit because they were almost finished but it only took me one minute of just seeing the space and I asked questions such as, "Well, when do they do reading?" "Well, we don't make them do reading." And for some people that would make them say, "Oh, that's awful." Like I said, "Oh, this is great. Tell me more." Because my son had already told me he was never going to read a book. So, I needed to find a place that was going to be okay with that kind of mentality and he was very strong-willed about that. It wasn't... that wasn't anything I could discipline out of him. He was very, "I'm gonna learn everything I need to know by watching documentaries." He was five but would watch adult documentaries on whatever topic that interests him and he knew how to find these things on YouTube but he had no interest in me teaching him how to read, teaching how to do anything, you know? And, so, all that to say is I just needed a few minutes at Fairhaven and I knew that this was the philosophy. I didn't know how it was going to work out, I didn't care how it was going to work out. I just knew my son was going to be able to be who he was, that he was going to have a positive educational experience, that no one was going to try to put the water on his fire, and that he would find himself. I just needed that for him. And, so, I could not afford Fairhaven. And, so, I came home and I said I gotta start a school because we can't afford the tuition. And I think there will probably be other families that feel the way I do about my child and let's try it. And my husband, who is really business-minded, said, "I have an idea." He said... but this time it was early 2015. So, he said, "Let's do this." He said, "Let's... we're going to have to pay somebody, we're going to pay a private school and we got to put the other two in preschool someplace. Let's invest what we can right now and to see if we can get this school going and if we can, we're not paying child care or private school. So that was his thinking. That's how I reeled him in. And, so, that's what we did and we thought we were going... we were trying to just get 12. It was gonna be like a one-room schoolhouse of 12 kids grades k or ages 5 to 18. And we were going to do this Sudbury thing together. And my husband though kept warning me. He said, "I don't think the black community is going to be too cool with you saying you're not going to teach their children how to read." He said, "You know how black people feel when you tell them that they can't read or do math he said that's a very real... you know, education was used as a weapon against black people. So, you're going to have to come differently than what you're feeling." And I was like, "Dang." He said, "So, what if you say..." He said, "I think you'll be able to get away with it if you say they will read and do math. You don't have to give any details about that but if you say it then you still have a lot more freedom in the day. And I think everyone will be happy." And, my goodness, he was so right. They weren't concerned about everything else and we did. We use a small fraction of our day to just barely touch those subjects so that we can show that that learning is happening and the rest of our time is in freedom. The rest of our week is in freedom. And that balance has worked and, in fact, there's been quite a few of us

who've come away from even wanting that and we're just pretty much just doing what we want. And, so, it's kind of like a mix of people who are fully Sudbury and a mix of people who are looking for that reading, you know, assignment or that math assignment. But I feel like we've reached a nice balance where we're giving freedom. We're going into our seventh year and we are now... The virus brought us online but somehow we've created an online free community which I can talk about later. So, we have people that meet in person here but we also are giving it out to people outside of Maryland and training family so the kids stay home with their parents. And we're just guiding families on how to give their children freedom at home. So, that is where we are right now and that I tried to be as short as possible.

Je'anna: That was beautiful. Thank you. Jerry, are you up to it. I'm sure you are

Jerry: Yeah, I don't understand it all.

Je'anna: So, just a little bit about how long were you... how long were you doing public school teaching and then what got you thinking about making a change to doing things differently. Just a little bit about that transition that you made.

Jerry: Nope. So, what I'm gonna say is I never made a shift and, actually, I... When I was 6/7-years-old my grandfather would sit down with me and say, "What do you want to learn?" So, that was my paradigm for learning. Yeah, and, so, he would, he was talking to me about causes of World War II, Humor theories- the ego, the id, and the super ego when I was six, seven, eight years old and, so, when I started dealing with school I said, "Well, what's... Something's wrong with this. It has nothing to do with the way you should be learning it." And when I was about 15 I organized all my friends so that we could, you know, explore what we wanted to talk about. They were, they were the elite of the school I never bothered to be. They went on to Ivy League schools. I went to Goddard, you know. But then I actually started... Well, I did go to public... Teach in public school but that was after I had already spent time at Lewis Wadham school which was a school based on Summerhill. So, my purpose of going to into the public schools was to see if I could change it from within. And, so, I for example was in a public school doing a supposedly remedial reading program or whatever. And I was... We were doing stuff in the back room, basically had our own little school going. And I wrote a diary about those experiences called "I was a spy in the public schools" which you can actually read. It's... Or I can send it to anybody who wants. It's an e-book. Short e-book but there are a lot of funny things that happened there. And, so, then really right after that I kind of got to the point where I realized the system was going to change me before I changed the system. So, I went ahead and started a school back when I was about 23 years old. Actually that came out of my Goddard college thesis which was called "On the starting of school." And that school's still going 55 years later or something like that. I don't... They don't know that I started them but I continued doing that. Started my own school in '68, ran after 17 years. And, you know, basic concept is: children are natural learners. If you understand that you can't do it the way the public schools do it. You just can't because it's all destroying that basic ability to learn. Home, grades, all that stuff is antithetical to that. Now kids can go six or seven years, they're pretty resilient, before beings... before extinguishing that basic ability to learn. And after that the paradigm that the public schools talk about of motivating kids and so on become self-fulfilling. So, that's the basic concept that I was operating on and then I started AERO. Actually worked for the NCACS which was an organization that was trying to make changes. And then started AERO in 1989, so 32 years. And, so, basically the website some of you have seen it is educationrevolution.org. And the fact is that the education revolution happened this year, inadvertently because of COVID. We think we had something to do with it but we never know how much because I started working with John Holt in the, well, 60s, 70s and brought him to Vermont where I was doing my school in the 80s and he had already shifted from trying to change public schools how children learn, how children fail, to teach your own. In other words, he basically started the the new homeschool movement. And, so, we've been promoting his idea of this ever since. And also the idea of doing homeschool resource centers and then for the last 15, 16 years we've been having a course for... to help people start new schools. In fact Je'anna was in the course before she started her school and we've helped start over a hundred different schools. And you can go to educationrevolution.org, go to find a school, you'll see our member schools, and scroll down a little bit you'll see the course with about a map of those hundred or so. So, yeah the education revolution happened in the sense that they grabbed it,

something, not knowing what to do when this all came down and that was homeschooling. And by then everybody sort of knew what it was and then when people weren't quite happy with that they set these up these pandemic pods which were really homeschool resource centers which we'd already planted the seeds for around the world. And now two billion people now know that they are not stuck with the local assigned school. We don't know and I'm very clear about this, I have no idea where this is going to go. It will go somewhere. The fact is that people in the system, administrators, think they still have a captive audience. They don't and they're about to find that out in September. Then we'll see where it goes but the fact is that they... I couldn't believe the arrogance of the people, for example in New York City, who declared that they were... that people could no longer do distance learning, that they must come back to their schools. And they actually think that parents are going to do that. Well, here's a little stat that's kind of interesting- you've been able to go in person to public schools in New York City this whole last school year from the very beginning. 60% of the parents didn't send their kids. So, what percentage of those people are going to not just jump back into the system? We don't know but it's going to be a big enough percentage that people in the system are going to panic because they are dependent on that state aid to pay their staff and when they were doing their own distance learning technically though the fundings need an estate. They don't give credit for distance learning part of this law, therefore, every kid in New York state was true because that's all they had. And, so, I'm assuming that some states realize that they do. California has done it. There are so many homeschoolers in California that every district in self-defense set up something called individual independent study and what that meant was people could homeschool through the local public schools and get credit for it and get resources of the system. And when this first came down regular homeschoolers were very concerned that they were going to co-opt those people all back into the system. It did not happen because they knew that homeschoolers could walk and would be very happy to just leave as soon as they got pressured to do anything. So, they've left them alone and that's kind of a template for the rest of the states if they want to follow it and recoup their money. But somehow they'll go crawling back saying, "Well, what can we do to get you back?" That could happen even before the school year starts. If they do a survey and find out how many parents don't plan to send their kids back. But I did consultations with parents who were homeschooling reluctantly and they had discovered their kids were natural learners and that their kids were entrepreneurial and so on. And that's the thing that people in the system forget they're dealing with real parents with real kids. So, education evolution has happened. We do not know where it's gonna go. There's going to be a lot of change.

Je'anna: From your ears into reality. So, yeah, we're listening. Thank you, Jerry. Thank you for filling our ears. That's beautiful. The education revolution is definitely underway. I am now going to call on Mr Morris.

Sidney: I have to say, I am so bowled over by the power of story coming from you incredible people that I have a hard time getting back up and putting my own story out there. I'll do my best. I think I had it all together at five years old. So, after 70 years I'm thinking my mission is to save five-year-olds. Unfortunately, I went into the schools at five years old or six years old and I didn't come out again, at least aware, until 15 years later when I dropped out of college in my senior year because I had spent a couple of months in Russia, wandering and realized, wait a minute, there's a lot to be learned out here in the world instead of being stuck in this room. So, I ended up driving a truck with some friends of mine from Sweden to Africa. I spent two years driving around Africa because I didn't know anything about Africa, so, I figured why not go there? And it was the kids in Africa who inspired me the most. Their incredible, unbridled curiosity for everything that they encountered... It just convinced me that kids were the answer. So, I came back to the US. I found a college that would let me design my own curriculum to become a teacher and accomplished that. But then I was like, well, I have this notion of directing my own learning but the public schools don't like that idea too much, so, what am I going to do? I did a whole bunch of jobs for about 10 years. And then some friends of mine were looking for a place for their kids that wasn't gonna coerce them to do things and to deny their values and all these beautiful things about kids. And, so, I started an independent school and I wasn't fully upfront with these parents, I have to admit, about my notion of letting kids direct their own learning. So, I sort of grabbed some vague curricula. I had a group of kids from ages six to twelve. It was a one-room school house but I really supported them to do things that they wanted to do. And then a couple years into that school I found Sudbury Valley and that was the end of that. I went there a couple of visits and I

said, "Oh my god, they're doing what I think we should do" and they've been doing it for... must have been 20 years by that time. So, I went back to my school and I said what do you think? Let's do a self-directed learning." They said, "Sorry, you're out of here." So, I got fired from the school that I started and my kids were in it. It only lasted about six months and then without the so-called, you know, founders energy it disappeared. So, I needed a job and I thought well maybe the public schools have wised up. And I got a job in the public schools teaching in a program that was funded by one of the teachers' unions. It was called Challenge to Change. And the idea was that I would be a project broker for fifth graders and I would take them into the community 20 hours a week and I would do projects based on their interests. And it was an incredible thing, absolutely incredible. It lasted two years and then money ran out. Guess what happened? Gone. Public school said, "So, that was nice but we're going back to what we used to do." So, just about that same time the charter school law in Massachusetts happened. So, I got together with some parents and we wrote a charter and this time I said, "Okay, I'm putting it down. Nobody can accuse me of not telling them what I want to do from the beginning." So, we had a charter that sells self-directed learning in a democratic environment. And when talked with secretary of education in Massachusetts she just said, "Cool." We were doing all kinds of different things so she stamped, it gave us our charter. And we started with 75 kids ages 9-14 and that first year the teachers taught what they wanted to teach, and the kids learned what they wanted to learn. It was an absolutely wonderful situation. Then the state said, "Oh, yeah, we forgot to tell you that we're going to have standards and assessment." So, we helped them actually come up with the standards. But we didn't really fully realize what was going to happen when they said, "Okay now you got to do these standards or we're going to test you." A little by little, just to start the school we started 25 years ago. Little by little, this school has become more and more traditional due to the pressure of the state requirements. Not for how to teach but just for testing. So, they scare people enough into thinking that they have to teach all of these standards in curricula sorts of ways so that they won't flunk the tests. That's the weird thing about the law- it doesn't tell you how to teach it just tells you, "If you don't teach effectively you're screwed." So, you know it's fear basically that motivates, I think, most public school situations. Anyway, we started the school and I taught there for 12 years and I was like a thorn in the side saying, "Come on we're not doing this anymore." And they kept saying, "Well, show me some examples." And, so, I found all these examples and they said, "Yeah, but this is that and this is that this is that." So, I decided to continue my quest to build institutions in the community which would support kids to do things they loved, like a maritime education program for kids to go out on the sea which we used to do from my island since the beginning of time. And I worked as a director on a farm, a teaching farm, for kids to go learn how to do sustainable agriculture. And then I got sick with lyme disease and so I had to stop that. But in the end I'm still on the case. And I'm creating a database of resources in the community, local educational resources, that any kid or anybody can use whether they're in school or out of school, unschooled, homeschooled, whatever; so that we can connect them with their interests and find people, situations, programs, whatever they need to help them learn about what they want to learn. And I'm hoping teachers will take advantage of this so the pressure is not on them to do individualized support of interests. And, because I didn't have a building anymore, I also started the Wanderbus which meets with kids in libraries and ask them what they want to do. They have a democratic process which figures out what answer to come up with and then we go do it. So, that's where I'm at trying to support kids to learn whatever, whenever, wherever, with whomever they want to learn.

Je'anna: Awesomeness.

Jerry: You can tell stories.

Je'anna: Okay, so I'm going to ask each of you now a little bit of a detailed focus in on can you remember any fears or worries that you had about doing it differently that might have in different circumstances stopped you from going on the journey? And what would your life have been like do you think if you hadn't actually embraced the shift? I'm just going to go in the same order, I think. So, that would be Derry.

Derry: Well, that's a tricky one. One of the thing, if i could just make a comment, it's lovely to hear the names Sudbury Valley and Summerhill coming up so often here. I mean, one of the most incredible fortnights of my life was spent with Mimsy and Danny and Hannah at Sudbury Valley. That was

amazing. And about the only good work I did in 10 years as a school inspector was to help defend Summerhill from the school inspectors and lo and behold summerhill is still here, even though most of the inspectors who tried to shut it down have retired, thank goodness. But, yeah, that's an interesting question. I've been talking with groups of student teachers a bit in the last year in different countries but I counted up, it's eight different countries. And their anxiety is the management of the school and how to get away with it with their teachers who aren't sympathetic. So, I think you really have to try and find a school that has some sympathy for what you're trying to do. And I did that in my first job and then I realized the best way to defend yourself from head teachers is to become a head teacher. And then you can employ all the crazy people like you and let them get on with it which is what I was able to do more or less in the end. But my problem wasn't so much getting on with head teachers. My problem was with other teachers. And in my first job I was supposed to teach history, geography, social studies, R.E., and English; and I had a head of department, all those departments, older teachers, sitting looking at me to check that I was doing it properly. And, of course, I didn't. I more or less through their instructions in the bin and had a little chat with the principal. "Is it okay if I go my own way?" And he said, "Yes, but don't make too much noise about it." And, so, I went my own way and built up a team. The second year there was a team of seven teachers who'd seen my class becoming a sort of democratic, self-managed learning class. And they thought, "We wanted a bit of that." Or at least three or four of them did and, so, we created a team who all wanted to work this way. And I think this is terribly important in the public school situation- you need to find a principal who's vaguely willing to support you doing things and then if he'll let you get, or she will let you get, started what I find is very quickly you develop a strong body of support from parents. Partly this was because the kids I started with had just failed a big high-stakes test at 11. What a dreadful thing to do to kids. And the parents became very, very supportive. And something I realized when I became a head teacher is that there's nothing matters more to help you sleep at night more than supportive phone calls and letters from parents. They're the the stuff that keep you going and winning over the parents was incredibly helpful. It was because they saw their kids becoming so enthusiastic for learning. If I was in a much more academic school where most of the parents were just obsessed with grades and getting into the best universities or colleges, it might be more difficult. But what we're beginning to find now is that universities are learning that kids who've learned in a self-managed way, they, I think they first got this message from dealing with homeschoolers. These kids know what they want to learn, they know how to learn, and they know what they want to do with their lives. And that makes them good students when they get to the next level if they want to go to the next level. I mean, not all kids want to go to college. That's another thing that's growing here- the realization that you don't have to go to college or university to lead a good life. Well, I won't get into that one but I find the colleges are beginning to see how valuable self-directed students are from the point of view of not dropping out, of knowing why they're there. And I find that creative employers, people like Google, are beginning to look for these qualities too and they're becoming more and more more important than examination or test results. Have I said the right thing, Je'anna? I feel I'm going on a bit.

Je'anna: Beautiful, Derry. Lots of, lots of wisdom there. My questions are just to to keep things flowing. I absolutely trust that, you know, the things that we all need to hear are what will be spoken. So, thank you. That was beautiful. And now I'm going to hand it over to Cassidy.

Cassidy: Yeah, so I kind of touched on one of the things that was already like blocking me mentally which was really that that I didn't feel qualified, right? So going into public education, I had gone to public school you know college for four years to learn this is how you teach. And, even though I knew, I didn't really use a lot of that in my public school classroom. There was still this idea of like I had to have this certificate or I had to have this approval that, "Yes, you are deemed worthy to do a different job than this specific job." So, was kind of giving myself permission and saying, "You know what? Like the difference is that you're going to do it and you're going to learn through doing it." And so because I thought about, oh well, I can go get a master's degree maybe and make my own degree kind of like Sid-- I know Blake made his own degree at Brookie, that maybe could be focused more on self-directed education and things like that. But then I was like, "You know what? I need to go live it. I need to go experience it. That's going to be so rich if people allow me to be in their space and I can supplement my income to do that, that's what I'm going to do." So, that I would say was a struggle I have so if you're like, "I don't know if I should go back to school to learn more." I'm just kind of-- think

about, like, can you actually leverage the network and this community to learn more by going and experiencing spaces. And I was kind of nervous to even ask, right? To like reach out and say, "Hey, can I come be in your space? Do you have internship opportunities?" So, don't be afraid to reach out because that was another block I feel like I had- was just nobody's going to want to hear from you. Who am I to reach out, right? But it's more like you learn about their work and then you say, "I see you're doing this, this, this." I really, you know, that love letter concept. I don't know if you guys have read Blake Bowles book but writing a love letter to someone that you really value and asking to pick their brain or learn from them. Another thing I'll say is, like, for me it wasn't specifically a challenge but I think for some people around me they were concerned about like my lifestyle had to change. So, for me to leave public education to go to this model like the way the money I had... I'm not you... I'm not going to Starbucks every day anymore, you know what I mean? Like the way that you live your life has to change. And I moved home at 26 for a year to save up money and that was a little bit of a, you know, it could have been an ego crush if I looked at it that way, right? Or it could have been like, "Oh, she's going back home" and "I thought she got a real job" and "This..." right? There's all that so really releasing all of those stories and knowing that this is your life path and that there's a reason that you're willing to make sacrifices, so, just knowing you're probably going to have to, if you haven't already. Were, you know, those were the big things with my fear of not being qualified. And then you know money and then just that... taking the leap and saying you know if not (again that quote, right?) if not now, when? If not me, who? And really, like, diving in deep and talking and learning all about all the things and just pushing forward. It's really a challenge but it's interesting because as I felt I didn't know exactly what the next step was going to be, you know? I didn't have my whole year off planned. So, when I didn't know what the next step was going to be, I kept putting myself out there and just like, you know, continuing to communicate and network and be involved in things like this and opportunities just continue to kind of like bubble up easily. So if you're seeking, you know, what you love and what you're passionate about, I really believe that things will come forward for you. So, like, believing in that is a really challenging thing too if you haven't seen it for yourself yet. But now that I feel like I have a couple of times, I can definitely say, like, if you're really putting yourself out there and believing in what you're doing, it's going to show up for you. Yeah.

Je'anna: Awesomeness. Thanks, Cassidy. And Sid?

Sid: So I think I went about things in the other direction. As opposed to transitioning from public schools to alternatives, I started out with alternatives. And, in between those alternatives, my kids were unschooled for four years so they really had the best of it before I said, "We're going back into school, guys." And the charter school was an attempt to really... to really transform public education into a situation where kids could follow their interests. And my wife said, "Are you crazy? I'm just getting used to unschooling and now you're taking them back into school?" So, I had to pay for that one and my daughter who was about, I don't know, she was 14 at the time, after one year said, "Hey, I don't want people telling me what to do." So she rose out of the school, got her GED and was off and running. My son, unfortunately, was dyslexic and was squashed totally by the school even though I had started it with all these wonderful aspirations. That kind of structure, which is based on coercive literacy learning, is not good for people who have neurodiversity just doesn't work. He's forgiven me and we're building a house together for him so he's... You know, my goal is for him to boss me around. Once that happens I will have succeeded. It's interesting to go in that other direction from the alternatives to the public school situation. And I think I firmly believe that in addition to all of the examples of learning outside the schools, which provide, you know, fodder for us to change the schools, I think, we also need to pay attention to the social justice aspect of it where 95% of the kids are in those schools. And if we don't transform them they will never get that opportunity to be who they are. I mean I was lucky because I got fired right in the beginning. So, nothing was holding me back, you know? It's like I was fired, I'm still alive, okay, let's just keep going. So, I still have one foot outside creating alternatives and the other foot firmly inside the public schools in whatever ways I can. Trying to persuade them that there is another way and it's a better way for all kids, not just some kids

Je'anna: Here, here. All kids. All kids. And Jerry.

Cassidy: Well, Anika too.

Je'anna: Oh, sorry.

Cassidy: Anika got skipped over.

[inaudible]

Je'anna: Sorry, Anika.

Anika: I had a lot of anxiety with my journey. I felt very, very lonely and I just want to be very honest about that. I had a lot of opposition. I had zero support in my community, my only support was my husband. My parents were supportive because they love me but my mom would keep saying, "So, when are they gonna do history now?" Like that was like every day I was answering the same questions. So, I knew she was struggling with supporting me and not quite feeling the freedom. And if they came to visit the school my dad would say, "Well, they sure are up a lot. I mean when do they sit down and do some, you know? But I'm here to support you so." I love them dearly but that's that was their support. None of my friends would send their kids to the school. My own sibling, brother, who we've always been very close and supportive of each other, refused to send his kids to the school. I spent many nights crying in my husband's arms because I could not find anyone, zero people, in my close community to support me and even had a lot of negative conversation happening about me. Why did I persist? Because I have a son who needed to thrive and you know a mother will do some crazy things for her children. And I knew what would happen to him in a traditional school so I really did not have a choice. This had to work and so we went from passing out flyers because my church was not supportive. Even in my church you know if you belong to a church community, typically, if someone is starting a business or a ministry the pastor will say, "Hey so-and-so is starting this ministry or so-and-so is starting this. Let's offer a word of prayer." They wouldn't even pray for the school like it was just no love. But they were willing to let me rent space so I don't know what that was all about but anyhow. But they came around. But my journey at the beginning was a lonely one so I'll say that I hope that you got that message. So I went from my husband and I on Saturdays passing out flyers to, you know, I didn't know much about social media at the time. And then I happened to come across a video- Oprah Winfrey Show. She interviewed a woman who wrote how to build your business using social media and I ate it up. So those of you all, if anyone knows me on social media, that's how I got sucked into that place is because I began to use every social media outlet to find strangers who would be interested in this type of school. And so what happened was that's when people started showing up to my open houses and these were mothers who were like me, who were like, "I can't find a place." That's very emotional. "I can't find a place for my child." And these weren't special needs kids. We do not take kids with severe disabilities. Maybe our autism, on the spectrum, maybe ADHD but definitely not severely disabled. And we did not take children who have behavioral problems necessarily. If we felt like it was something that would be dangerous to the community, we did not consider rebellion or disobedience of issue because we felt that usually that was a sign of "This structure is not working for me." So, we were open to those students, of course. We also got a lot of students who were bullied a lot from just being different. So, a lot of students who are highly into technology, a lot of artsy students, students who just wanna... are more into things that their peers are not into, were the ones who were drawn to our school. That was encouraging but I had very mixed feelings and I began to become very... So, my biggest obstacle was my own mind sometimes because when your family and those who are closest to you aren't supporting what you're doing, even if everyone else is coming to you, you begin to doubt what you're doing and it does grieve you when your close friends and family won't support the school. I would ask family members, "Would you like to donate to the school?" "I don't know about that." You know, it was just a really weird response that I was not prepared for because I come from a very loving community and family. I'm not sure what it is about freedom and education or this type of education that brings up a bitter response from people. I'm trying to understand that. I still haven't quite wrapped my mind around it especially when you see how happy children are and how healthy the experience is. I'm not... I don't understand. And I don't know if it's because adults have a desire to control and when you... And maybe they don't even realize how strong that desire is in themselves but when you're saying, "No, you don't have control." That the child is saying the path they want to take. That loss of control, I don't know if it rubs people the wrong way or is it fear? I'm trying to try to understand that. Then I also went through another phase where somehow the home school community was like... a buzz in

the homeschool community on social media about this crazy black woman that lets children run around and play all day and calls it a school. It was a really rough time for me but I just had to keep... I knew what was right. I had been studying Sudbury Valley's everything they wrote I was reading left and right. I was emailing Daniel Greenberg and Mimsy and they just kept encouraging me through the process and that was really ending for me. So finally what happened was the school just thrived. Like people I didn't know, everybody who started my school, were complete strangers. None of them were personal friends and there were few people that I grew up with but hadn't seen in like 30 years who heard about me starting the school because they had a child like my son, but that that was the closest person I knew who came to the school. And, so, I continued to do that. I was renting space in my church the one... one more... I would say obstacle was because the church had a struggle with the philosophy, there was a lot of unkindness with us in our use of the building which was also very discouraging. So, a lot of times if something broke there was the assumption "It's those kids." But then they'd investigate and realize it was somebody else who rented the church and I had to keep proving, "No, we didn't do..." And, so, we, my staff and I, got to the point we would take pictures of how the rooms looked when we left and just to kind of keep that. So, this is, you know, it was real. Finally, we just got into a groove though and the school began to be right. Before the virus we were up to 50 students and it was just like really growing very rapidly. And now church members were starting to send their kids to the school. My brother enrolled his kids in the school. And everyone was donating. We were getting texts from family members who did not believe in it at first because we started getting graduates. We had a graduate graduate and start her own beauty salon. And just another graduate went to college and they began to see some things that meant that, wait a minute, there must be something. And then before long all these people who were talking negatively would say, "I was telling my co-worker about your school," and they were like regurgitating my philosophy back to me. I was like, "Wait a minute. When did you learn... When did you start believing in what I was doing?" You know? So, that was a lot. I mean that was like the first three years of it you know? And so that's... that was the obstacle and I want to encourage you that if you're starting a school like this there's a good chance you're going to just face... The obstacle won't even be really physical you'll probably have your building, your faculty and everything but your mind... With hearing the negative talk, and the people not believing, and the rude questions people ask you. One final example of how this works- when I started the school, my in-laws did not... They thought I was completely... They thought their son and brother had married a crazy woman. And we went there for thanksgiving and my mother-in-law would ask questions about it. This was like the year before we started and she was very negative. The following year we went back and we were all playing like a win, lose or draw something like that and my kids who are very, very young and technically not really supposed to be literate were able to play this game with the adults, right? And, so, we overheard my mother-in-law talking on the phone to my brother-in-law, "Those kids are so smart and they can read and you see how they were playing that game?" You know? And then before, "How did you get them to do that?" I love what... I'm trying to remember who said it? Children are natural learners. They want to learn. And they may not learn how to read at four or three- I've heard some parents stress out about their children learning to read at three which is... I don't understand that. They may not learn by then but when they finally do, because it was their journey, they become very strong. And I also found that kids this way learn to comprehend stronger first before they read so they're able to engage in a meaningful conversation about different deep concepts that children their age can't do. So, there's a... there's this... they present themselves as being very articulate and very aware of the world around them. And, so, all of these things were seen in my own children. One of my in-laws said, "I noticed your children never cry." Now I'm not saying they never cried but it just seemed like they weren't frustrated a lot when we were out or with family. They just seemed very comfortable in their space because they knew mommy and daddy were going to protect their freedom, that we believed in them. There's a book that Sudbury has, I think the something about trusting the child or whatever, but is it some kingdom of childhood something i can't remember but it talks about trusting the child. And they felt that we trusted them so there comes this level of balance in their whole demeanor when they go out into the world in this confidence that began to be demonstrated in my own three children and my students. And people began to see that. And after a three or four year struggle it shifted from negativity-- Yes, Legacy of Trust, thank you. It's shifted from negativity to full-on support and even referrals. Even referrals from local public schools coming into my school. So keep hanging in there if you have any obstacles and even if you're feeling negative in your mind because of the negative talk of those closest dear to you. Prove them wrong.

Derry: Hey!

Je'anna: That was worth waiting for. Derry: Absolutely.

Viewer: It was wonderful Anika. If I may just ask a question. What type of evidence let's say of... or something that you think was most convincing to the local community that previously were against this?

Anika: There are a couple of things. Again, I'll go back to the gentleman... or was it Jerry or Derry? Somebody or Sydney... Somebody said, "Children are natural born learners, they want to learn." And so there's this... One of the common questions I get from parents is, "What if they don't want to do anything?" That's just not true and so I think what happened is they began to see that children wanted to learn but you just have to wait. So, when they begin to hear children's conversations... Because we were located in a church, sometimes church members would come into the school and, like Cassidy said, someone would come into the school and a student- the child could be six- "Hello, how can I help you? Welcome to the living water school. Who can I get for you?" Like there was this whole presentation that we didn't do a training on because they know this is our space. Can I show you around? So just this, the presentation of the students was one thing that really impressed people. And the other piece was if you stayed around and observed it long enough you could see the students were learning, reading and math just in their own time, in their own way because to reach your goals and to do the things you want to do you have to know how to read and do math. And, so, without us coercing that into them. And so my family began to see, "Your children are so smart," or, "These students are so smart," or, "I engaged in this conversation with a seven-year-old that was so deep." There also seems to be a high level of some type of... because of the law book and the Justice League or just- we call it the Justice League because we were so caught up in superheroes- but the Justice Committee, there seems to be a sense of right and wrong like what's fair. Because, typically, when they're not running Justice, they're just going along with what someone says you should do; but when they're running Justice and they're the ones and being witnesses and weighing out "Is this person wrong?", "Should there be a consequence?", "What should we have?" Then they're thinking about what's right and wrong in the world, what's fair in the world. And so they have these meaningful thoughts and conversations around that people began-- And then they begin to think for their own selves, "What's the best decision for me? So, those are some things that they began to notice about the students. And with us only offering just a couple of subjects, I try to implement, because of the pushback in the community of just fearing, "What if they don't learn how to read?" Really, I mean, it's like almost a paranoia around that. We offer those classes but it's not coercive, if that makes sense? I try to implement the spirit of the Sudbury Valley model. Even in doing that, I know that sounds weird, but I tried to be true to it in that sense, in that we provide the materials that you can use. We've had students say, "I don't like that but can you find me another one." "Sure, I'll buy you another one." Like giving them a say of what books, textbooks they like and there are no grades, we don't grade your assignments. If we'll tell you, "Oh, I think you did that wrong. This is how..." It's a conversation of this is how you do it right and they can work on it whenever they want and we just kind of keep track of their own progress. I know that sounds weird. That might take me a while to trying to explain that. But what happens is it's theirs. They know that, "If I learn math and I can count my own money..." because we also have a school store and they want to learn math so they can buy things and run the store and all that kind of stuff. So, I think parents seeing how the things they would learn in a traditional space is still happening in this free and open space and then seeing that students want it. They're hearing their students say, "Oh, mom, I forgot my math book. Can you go back to the school and get it?" As opposed to "Did you bring your homework today?" Like that's... They're seeing kids take ownership of their life- that's what I think I'm trying to say- and then doing the things they need to get there. Somebody asked, "Do parents worry about kids who are behind?" Well, I have this attitude that- and I'll say this to them- I said, I always say to them, "First of all I want to be a full Sudbury school but you all won't let me." Like I say that almost every day because I want to be true. "You know what the Sudbury school is because you won't let me, don't ask me if your child is behind. We've given them the supplies they need because you want them to do math so let them do math on their own time." And, so, they receive that and no one's been disappointed so far. and then, also, I'm really up front because I've said, "Listen... and if you all leave, you can leave but this is how I'm going to teach my kids." So, when a parent comes and tries to bring up standards and say stuff, I said, "You

know what? I have some great schools in the area that have everything you need. Would you like me to refer you? I'm friends with a lot of the principals." "Well, I don't want to leave. Why'd you say that?" "I said because you're asking me questions that are outside of our philosophy and I can't provide these things that you want. That's not who we are. I've given you the math books I've got. The child has the reading group that we do. That's what we give you. Now if you want something else I'll call them right now." And I'm not mean, I just want to always be true. This is who we are And I also found that when you are really strong like if a parent feels "Oh, if I just do this then she'll change the way she does things." Then that makes your school weak if you change every time somebody complains so staying true to the philosophy is so important because you develop an identity. This is that school. This is what they do there and your parents come to understand this is what they do there. And, if you keep coming to me about some state standards and some standardized tests, I'm gonna have to find you a new home for your baby because that's not what we do here. And so that understanding has also been helpful. So, I hope that was helpful to you.

Je'anna: That is so powerful. Oh, I got chills.

Anika: This doesn't have to be here and they need to feel that. Because sometimes parents have this power thing they do where they want to try to complain a lot to make you change the school into what they want it to be. Well, they need to go find a school that's what they want it to be. You know?

Je'anna: Yeah, beautiful. Thank you. Jerry, I want to throw you a specific question in terms of the idea of, you know, the system could change us before we manage to change the system, staying in a public system. What do you think might have happened if you had stayed inside the system trying to change it from within but without the necessary support to make those changes?

Jerry: Yeah, I think I know what would have happened. What would have happened is what happened to many people that I know who stayed in the system to try to make a change. It lasted as long as they were there. That's it. Because the system really wants to maintain its shape as something that coerces kids. Yeah, they'll put up with someone as a token for a while. I can give you lots of examples of this. I mean, I started my school in 1968 and a couple of years later my old high school started something called school within a school that ran democratically. And after a few years it got to be 40% of the school and I think at that point the other teachers, people in the system got panicky and basically did what they could to prevent kids from going into that program. And then it got beaten back down into a token. So, it still exists for about 50 or 60 kids out of about 600. And it's there and it's sort of a choice but you see if the system really believed in that then they would all be doing that. So, that's what would have happened, probably, is my guess.

Derry: Can I jump in , Je'anna?

Jerry: For a second but I have some things to say. Go ahead.

Derry: Sorry okay well...

Je'anna: Yes, sorry, go for it Derry. Jerry that's a beautiful start, I know Derry can say more.

Derry: Yeah, I think you're right that things regress quite quickly. That doesn't mean it's not worth doing that for the kids who experience it, it stays with them for the rest of their lives. And I also know this from my own work and from the work of other teachers. So, for me, if one kid, you know, benefits from what one teacher is able to do, it was worth doing. Though it's a hell of a struggle and you have to wait for the right moment to try and make a more sustainable, democratic and participative system. But I think we've got some right moments coming, Jerry, and we have to take full advantage of them.

Jerry: Well, Derry, I don't disagree with you in that sense but I've always looked at a bigger picture and, so, I'm always aware of all those millions of other kids that are being subjected to this cruelty. And, so, yes, I know if you affect one kid or a group of kids and those kids who experience it, that's fine. So, I'm not... I don't disagree with that but that's not been the approach I've taken. In a way it

has been though, in terms of actually trying to change the system because the only way that I knew how to do it was one step at a time, one school at a time. So, we started a whole lot of small schools that served as models in their community and, so, that is in a sense partly your response. Let me go. I have a few things to say because I've been taking some notes here. First of all, so, Anika's school is a member of AERO, and it is The Living Water School. And I have a couple things to say. One is in terms of, yes, I did say kids are natural learners but I also said that after five or six years that tends to be somewhat extinguished if you put them in a situation... I mean, think about it we're supposed to be training kids to take part in a democracy, preparing them, and then we put them in a situation with 12 years of authoritarian dictatorship, so, what did we train them for, you see? So, if you then put them into some kind of a democratic school there is going to be a period of decompression. You have to understand this, that it could last a long time. Years even to undo the damage that was done previously. So, that's something to understand if you start an alternative. Another thing I just wanted to throw out to you from something you said early on in terms of trying to do religious school teaching: I was told many years ago that Christians could not be unschoolers because of original sin. That that you couldn't give them real freedom or they would go in a sinful way. So, what's funny about that is over the years that got ignored and there are all kinds of Christian unschoolers but it's just a little point. It's very interesting. You remember that? did you know that about...? Yeah, yeah. So, another thing is... Oh, you still hear it. Yeah. Another thing, just in terms of Sydney's ideas, you know, it isn't necessarily true that the system will always stop you. There is one exception to that but it has to be a systemic one. The only systemic one that I know is Israel where there are over 30 public democratic schools and everybody in Israel knows what a democratic school is. This started with Yaacov Hecht's Democratic school of Hadera, back, I think, in the late 80s, and then he had friendly administrations that said, "Go ahead and start as many as you can." And he did. And it kind of hit the tipping point where in Israel democratic public schools are legitimate. I don't know of another country where this is the case. We have sort of public democratic schools in the United States like in Ithaca, New York, there's the alternative community school that was basically started by Dave Layman. And now is the Layman Public Alternative Community School but they're still kind of restricted. And charter schools everywhere are restricted. I know Joe Nathan still believes in them. He started the first ones in Minnesota. I met him when I was still running my school. But I think he's not really seeing the reality and I don't know if charters can be salvaged. Getting to Cassidy and Derry about the Summerhill: if you haven't seen the Summerhill drama you should look at it because it's something you can show your parents and they will get more what it's all about. And I was around Summerhill, Derry, when that was happening and, so, I remember very clearly. So, there are kids that I know, actually, that are in that drama because they shot it at Summerhill. Why was it effective? Because the guy who was producing it, his mother went to Summerhill so that's why it was, you know, fairly accurate. And what you did, Derry, during that period of time was absolutely crucial, I think, to Summerhill's being successful and the fact that it still continues to this day basically the way it was. Partly because, I guess, AS Neil's daughter is still directing it. How could that be when it was started in 1921? He had her when he was like 63 years old. Anyway, another thing. Let's see what... Oh yeah, Cassidy. Just the whole thing of agile learning centers. So, it's very cool the way agile learning centers are spreading around the world. So, where do they come from? You probably know but we started Brooklyn Free School, which is still going, back about 15 years ago. And then out of that we took the waiting list for Brooklyn Free School and we helped people start Manhattan Free School and help them kind of stagger through about five years of that. And then at one point they used to call me in whenever they had a crisis, and so they called me in because they were going to close Manhattan Free School. And, so, I went to this meeting with parents and students and teachers and a fair number there, and I said, "Look, you already have things going here as assets, that my school starters would give their eye teeth to have. You have your non-profit. You have a building. You ran out of money. Okay, you have no money, you're going to have to volunteer for a while to keep it going." Well, what happened is they listened to what I said. And they did get volunteers to keep it going and one of them was from the IT world. And he came up with the concept of agile learning from something that they had in IT. And what is so cool about that is that agile learning, it doesn't sound flaky. And, so, just the words... I can't tell you the difference between an agile learning center and any other democratic school, to me they're basically the same thing but the words are crucial. And this is why all over the world I hear about people starting agile learning centers. So, another thing that actually came from AERO but people probably don't know about it. It's interesting, agile learning centers give us no credit for being involved with it. It's funny.

Cassidy: Well, I would say to you agile learning--

Jerry: You won't even see a link to AERO on their website.

Cassidy: One of the reasons that they're doing so well is because their starter kit is open source. So, I will say like something that's really important in this movement is for things to be accessible which does mean free. And, so, I would say that they made a huge impact positively, Thomas and Nancy, on this movement by creating a starter kit and a facilitation guide that are free and accessible. So, I think they're incredible, incredible people and I'm so glad that they [inaudible].

Jerry: So, Nancy Tilton, was in the school starters course and when Nancy came into the school starters course, there were just one parent that had a couple of kids and that's why she was just gonna get some training to work with them. Then she started Mosaic and then another Mosaic, and merged them and they became big. And then she met the people from Manhattan. And then she married Thomas who was from the Manhattan, you know, agile learning center. They became an agile learning center and so on. She hasn't forgotten that. She knows what role we played in all that. And so we are promoting their trainings even though they don't give us much credit because Nancy's involved with it.

Anika: Can I say something to that, Jerry and Cassidy? I think... I want to choose my words carefully because I don't want to feel like I'm... I think in this journey of trying to make the shift that Je'anna is encouraging us to do with this is there... I think it we have to really be very supportive of each other. All of us are coming to this with different obstacles, different backgrounds.

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01:17:27,120 --> 01:17:31,840

And, as a community, what I'm hoping

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01:17:30,480 --> 01:17:35,760

all of us who are joining

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01:17:31,840 --> 01:17:38,320

this FHREE, F-H-R-E-E, movement with Je'anna

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01:17:35,760 --> 01:17:39,920

is we're saying that we want to support

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01:17:38,320 --> 01:17:42,320

each other, give each other,

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01:17:39,920 --> 01:17:44,400

acknowledge those who've come before us,

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01:17:42,320 --> 01:17:46,719

that we are inspired by, even if we're

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01:17:44,400 --> 01:17:48,800

not doing it exactly the same.

2239

01:17:46,719 --> 01:17:50,080
And I'm saying that because when I first

2240
01:17:48,800 --> 01:17:51,280
started--

2241
01:17:50,080 --> 01:17:53,679
And I didn't mention this because I just

2242
01:17:51,280 --> 01:17:55,199
didn't want to, I didn't want to, but

2243
01:17:53,679 --> 01:17:58,400
since Jerry mentioned it, I'm going to say

2244
01:17:55,199 --> 01:18:01,679
it, but in love, is that

2245
01:17:58,400 --> 01:18:03,760
there was a lot of criticism of me

2246
01:18:01,679 --> 01:18:06,000
in the unschool- not unschooling-

2247
01:18:03,760 --> 01:18:08,480
democratic Sudbury

2248
01:18:06,000 --> 01:18:10,239
community because I couldn't do it

2249
01:18:08,480 --> 01:18:13,120
fully.

2250
01:18:10,239 --> 01:18:15,120
What helped me, though, was when Sudbury

2251
01:18:13,120 --> 01:18:17,600
Valley reached out to me

2252
01:18:15,120 --> 01:18:18,880
and I was able to explain- ugh, why am I getting

2253
01:18:17,600 --> 01:18:21,440

emotional?-

2254

01:18:18,880 --> 01:18:22,719

what my obstacles were and I want to

2255

01:18:21,440 --> 01:18:25,600

feel like i'm part of a community

2256

01:18:22,719 --> 01:18:28,159

because I don't have one;

2257

01:18:25,600 --> 01:18:29,920

and there's a lot of opposition to what

2258

01:18:28,159 --> 01:18:32,159

I'm doing. And, so, if I'm being rejected

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01:18:29,920 --> 01:18:33,520

by my own community and then rejected by

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01:18:32,159 --> 01:18:35,760

the philosophy

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01:18:33,520 --> 01:18:38,000

that I'm trying to adhere to because i'm

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01:18:35,760 --> 01:18:41,120

not looking exactly the way they think i

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01:18:38,000 --> 01:18:43,199

should, then that doesn't help me either.

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01:18:41,120 --> 01:18:45,600

It was a very private email, I didn't

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01:18:43,199 --> 01:18:48,000

speak negatively about the community or

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01:18:45,600 --> 01:18:49,040

people, and there are a lot of people,

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01:18:48,000 --> 01:18:51,440

maybe there's a group of

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01:18:49,040 --> 01:18:53,679
not a lot, but there's a nice heavy

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01:18:51,440 --> 01:18:54,000
minority of us in the world that really

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01:18:53,679 --> 01:18:56,080
want

2271

01:18:54,000 --> 01:18:58,320
to do this freedom thing with our

2272

01:18:56,080 --> 01:19:00,480
students but we have different obstacles

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01:18:58,320 --> 01:19:01,920
that keep us from doing it.

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01:19:00,480 --> 01:19:04,719
And, so, maybe if we could maybe be a

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01:19:01,920 --> 01:19:08,080
community that's not so judgmental

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01:19:04,719 --> 01:19:11,280
sometimes and be supportive. And

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01:19:08,080 --> 01:19:13,520
say, "Hey, I was inspired by Mimsy," "I was

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01:19:11,280 --> 01:19:15,040
inspired by agile," "I was inspired by

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01:19:13,520 --> 01:19:16,960
Jerry and Derry

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01:19:15,040 --> 01:19:19,679
and Je'anna and all these people." To me

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01:19:16,960 --> 01:19:23,520
it's all love. I love all y'all: agile,

2282
01:19:19,679 --> 01:19:25,360
Mosaic, Sudbury Valley, democratic schools,

2283
01:19:23,520 --> 01:19:25,920
Summerhill, all of it inspires me. John

2284
01:19:25,360 --> 01:19:27,520
Holt,

2285
01:19:25,920 --> 01:19:30,560
Peter Gray, everybody. I'm reading

2286
01:19:27,520 --> 01:19:32,400
everybody because all of it helps me

2287
01:19:30,560 --> 01:19:34,000
do this. They've done the research,

2288
01:19:32,400 --> 01:19:35,520
they've done the legwork on it, they've

2289
01:19:34,000 --> 01:19:38,640
proven themselves.

2290
01:19:35,520 --> 01:19:39,440
So, I think if we can get out of that

2291
01:19:38,640 --> 01:19:40,560
because that's what

2292
01:19:39,440 --> 01:19:42,640
traditional schools do. They're

2293
01:19:40,560 --> 01:19:44,960
constantly competing with each other

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01:19:42,640 --> 01:19:46,400
but in this free space we're not

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01:19:44,960 --> 01:19:46,960
competing because we're all on this

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01:19:46,400 --> 01:19:49,679
mission

2297
01:19:46,960 --> 01:19:51,440
to free children. It's just that some of

2298
01:19:49,679 --> 01:19:52,560
us can only do it in different degrees.

2299
01:19:51,440 --> 01:19:55,040
So, Jerry, I'm glad you did mention that because that is a challenge in the community, and if we could somehow make a distinction between when we can really recognize somebody is not really true to the philosophy- we do need to be careful of that- or that they're trying to um say they're free but they're really not. I think, I wonder if we can find a balance between making sure of that but yet being open to when people are implementing it in ways that work for their community.

Jerry: Anika, yeah, I just want to say...

Je'anna: So--

Jerry: That you probably noticed that that is AERO's philosophy.

Je'anna: Yeah.

[inaudible].

Anika: Yeah, that's why I joined.

Jerry: [inaudible] tried all kinds of alternatives to not get people competing.

Anika: That's why I joined, yep.

Jerry: And so my ground is in democratic education but that's fine, it's more my area of expertise. But we have Montessori, we have Waldorf, basically the only commonality we talk about is that they're learner-centered, believe that kids are natural learners. How they want to do it, that's fine. And the same thing with our school starters: they do not have to do it in our certain way. They're, you know, for example Je'anna started a Sudbury school but other people people have started Montessori schools and so on. It's... So, that's fine. That's fine with us. I want to tell you kind of just a brief story that illustrates some of this. So, I love table tennis, as you know, and I teach it still- I'm going to teach this afternoon. And, so, I was in a boys and girls club, and I ran the table tennis club democratically. So, of course the boys and girls clubs are very authoritarian. And, so, we had a democratic table tennis club where the kids made all the decisions democratically about everything: where we're going to have a tournament, and, you know, everything that we do, how is our challenge rather going to work, everything was democratic. And at one point the kids noticed that it was a problem that the club had a rule that says you could only eat food in a certain place, because when the pizzas came they wanted to, you know. So, they said... They passed a rule in the table tennis club that they could eat their pizzas in the meeting. So, they were bringing their pizzas in there. One day one of the staff members looked in the meeting and the door flew open and he said, "You can't eat in here!" And one of the kids said, "We can too! We passed it." And he apologized and left. So, I was always wondering when that confrontation was going to take place. Democracy won. They felt so empowered and with such a right to make that decision that that prevailed. So, this is what's possible for kids to experience in any situation. If you have a classroom, you can still make it happen.

Je'anna: So, what I want to do now is, I want to take it forward from here. We've had a beautiful incredibly rich hour and a half. I want to just quickly amplify some of the things that have been said in the last few minutes because I think, you know, we've been through these many, many decades of self-directed education, alternative education, democratic education being very niche. And I agree. I think there is maybe this kind of Overton window, again as Derry is saying. With all of the disruption of the pandemic a lot of people have been waking up in new ways. A lot of us are saying we don't want to go back to the old normal. There's a lot of possibility now for some of these more niche experiments to come into the public view. And there's also a lot of teachers starting to contemplate career changes. And I'm a bit brokenhearted that so many of them are becoming estate agents and insurance sales people because most of them got into this in the first place because they wanted to work with children, and they wanted to be instrumental in making that kind of change and support for the kids that they love. So, this is where, you know, again if we're going to be supporting a transition for the whole of humanity, which I personally believe we are in the middle of, we need to be accepting and supporting of all of the stages and flavors of that transition because it's going to look different and be at all different stages, you know, all the way along. Every single one of us who've been through a transition of any kind, you know, there've been points when we didn't know what we were doing, when we knew a little bit about what we were doing, when we were trying it and making more mistakes and getting it right. And that's all part of the journey. So, we really want to be supporting and embracing the whole of that flow. One of the things that's come up here is also the need for building confidence, the need for community, the need for sharing. [inaudible] The need to be... Interning is a fantastic way to do it, if you have if you have the ability to go and intern somewhere that's already doing it. I didn't have the option of doing that which is where I started actually creating training courses. So, I want to very, very briefly tell you about the training course that we're on now and also the exciting role that is going to also be played by some of the, or all of the, panelists. So, very briefly I'm going to just quickly find myself here. I think this is the right place. Here we go. And, so, Transitioning to Self-directed Education is going to be for anybody who wants to make this shift. It's okay if you are also a parent wanting to do this at home. We're also looking very much at teachers at this point because it's just time, it's time. And, yeah, Sid is the one who made me realize it really is time. So, in month one we're going to be looking at what education is and what the role of the teacher or slash facilitator is. We're going to be looking at how we got our beliefs about education, children, childhood, work, success, happiness, teaching, and learning. How do we come to have these beliefs? Why do they need to change? How can we change them in ways that support our transition to SDE? In month two we're going to be looking at how SDE works and why, including the difference between different forms of education. Some of the theory behind it. Learning cycle, structure, consent, is, you know, this is consent-based education at its core, and motivation, and then practical issues. How do we support young people effectively rather than sabotaging them through thinking that we're helping when we're not? So, the difference between teaching, coaching, guidance. Pros, cons, boundaries of all of those. How to give feedback. Striving to ensure exposure to information and resources and informed choice. And how do you facilitate the three r's the SDE way? Because that's a question a lot of people really struggle to get their minds around. So we're going to go there directly. Then in month three we're going to be looking at implementation and this is where it's going to get very personal because, again, like we're saying each of you is going to be in a different space dealing with a different community, different kids, different possibilities. So, how are you going to build a culture of curiosity? How are you going to try and bring in these optimizing conditions for self-directed education as best you can wherever you are? And just a quick note here, you know, that note about you know maybe you're going to do things differently in your public school classroom up until the point where you hit the ceiling but by then you'll have grown and built the confidence that you might consider then actually being able to go off and start your own thing. So, you know, we don't have to have this thing of, "Oh, I have to leave before I begin, you know? Maybe being in the public classroom and doing as much as you can is going to actually help you find your feet and, you never know, maybe you will be one of the first places to help your whole school or your whole facility transition, because I do believe the time has come and we're going to start seeing that. And then comes month four. What? How do you have four months on a three-month course? So, here's the little smuggling secret. I'm trying to smuggle you on. I'm trying to give you the foundations so that you'll be ready to receive what you have then got the option to receive. Because often it's difficult when you need to take people right through the whole process, they don't necessarily understand what's being offered, or you're not quite ready to receive the full power of the richness. But, once I've

got you through those three months, then we're going to be inviting- and this isn't even everybody- but we're going to be inviting a number of ex-teachers and unschooling parents who are going to be offering completely individualized mentoring experiences. It'll be completely, yeah, individual as to how much they're offering, for how much, for what but that's where we're heading. So, having said all of that, very briefly, I can send you more details if you email me on "the shift will come" but those three months are going to have 12 calls. Nine of those are going to be big group calls, three of those are going to be smaller group calls. We're going to be grouping you by interest and affinity so we can dig more deeply into supporting your own particular application. There's also going to be notes, links, resources, journaling if you want to journal. Be giving you some prompts. Those are the costs. The times are going to be on Sundays at 6 pm in SAST, so that's 12 noon EST, 4 p.m Universal. And then the small group calls will be scheduled by Doodle poll by the participants. And then of course in month 4 it will be according to who your mentor is. So, you can email me. You can go to my webpage which is just my name so it's really easy. I've got a contact form there, and I think we are going to be doing this again. I think we are going to be carrying this on. I know Max is really up and willing. Max from Full Human Rights Experience Education who's very helpfully taken a hold of the tech side here and is going to be doing the recording and the editing. Making sure we get this video out so that you can all share it to the world, and we can get it to go viral please. And Max is also very very willing to do some podcast conversations and some more video conversations. And I'm hoping to spend some more time with some of the panelists and additional people over the next couple of months as well. And maybe also make some nice, free Q&A sessions that you can participate in. So, please do make sure that we know where to reach you. So with that I'm going to hand it back to our panel for a closing comment, word of advice, to anybody who's contemplating making the shift. And then we're going to wrap it up and say goodbye. So, I don't trust myself to get the order so I'm going to allow our panelists to let the spirit move them and speak when they are ready. So, over to you.

Anika: Well, just a quick question before I say mine because I don't want to miss her i think our messages are getting lost in the long trail. Am I saying this right? Is it Keon or Seon? C-I-A-N. I'm hoping I'm saying your name right. You said you felt very isolated. I saw a part. I just want to know exactly where you are?

Cian: Sorry, my mic was taking a long time to unmute. My computer's running slow. It's Cian.

Anika: Cian. Okay.

Cian: I'm in the Bahamas.

Anika: Okay, in the Bahamas. Okay. And it's important for us to know because we may know people, one person, you know who is interested in just connecting everybody.

Cian: Yeah, yeah.

Anika: But please email me. I'm putting my email in the chat. Please, you know, make sure you stay in touch with everyone because my heart went out to you because that that is isolating. That isolation can be a real obstacle.

Cian: Thank you. So, yeah, it's been tough. Thank you. I'm going to get your email but I'm going to be on the course tomorrow too, so I'll be here.

Anika: Okay, oh, good okay.

Cian: Thank you.

Anika: Okay. Yeah, thank you all. I just enjoyed our time together. It was just great to connect with community of like thinkers, and I just want to encourage everyone to not give up. And, I really feel like your schools will thrive because literally in every nook and cranny of the world are parents that need schools like this, that want schools like this. And if you stay true to it and don't try to morph it into what traditional people may want, that's the best way for those people to find you because there are

literally parents looking for an exact school. Our graduate... We had our graduation this year when we only graduated one little girl this year. And she totally... she was completely Sudbury. She was one of those families who wanted a fully Sudbury school and so she just tried her own path and figured out when she wanted to graduate, and how she was going to graduate, and did that. And her mom was saying last night how thankful she was because she was looking for a Sudbury school here and she just put in a search and somehow our school popped up. So, there are people who are really looking for this and if you're not very clear on what you are, they can't find you. And the more stable you are in what you are, they will find you. Even those who may not know educational philosophy, just hearing you talk, there's a parent somewhere that's saying, "That's it! That's what I'm looking for." So, I would encourage you to do the open houses, just in faith, just whether it be on zoom or in person. "Hey, I'm having an interest meeting at your local library or local coffee shop or bookstore or park. If you're interested in a unique way where your children are free to learn as they've been created or whatever, come on out and meet me." Even if you don't have one teacher. I did it. I didn't have one teacher. I started doing my open house before I had a building. [laughter] I was just like... I wanted to see, you know? And people were coming. And then it just kind of all fell into place. And I was constantly working on fixing these things but I wanted to see if there was an interest there, you know? So, start getting the word out there and just bring people together to talk. Invite people to... If you do it on Zoom, you can invite any one of us to share word at your open house. So just don't be discouraged and press on.

Sidney: I think the last thing that I want to say is it's all about relationship. Whatever situation you're in family, school, unschooling, anywhere, if we try to work on hearing the person we're with, the young learner, the parent, the teacher, whoever; and practicing kindness in that context, I think we're going a long way towards changing the world.

Derry: And, sorry, can I go?

Sidney: Go, Derry.

Derry: Well, my last comment, well, is don't write us off too quickly us people who are hanging in there in the public schools system, doing our best to change it from the inside. You know, sometimes in England you get a sort of snobbery of private schools looking down on state school teachers. And, sometimes you find a little bit of that in the democratic school movement but but not so much. So, don't write us off, give us a break. Some of us are doing our best to move things as fast as we can. And, just as a final thought, I'm really discovering some traction for what I call the 20% idea that we should try and get a foot in the door of the public schools; with the idea that 20% of the curriculum time should be allocated to the interests, passions, concerns, questions of the students themselves. And if you make a start doing this the mere act of negotiating how to organize the time involves a kind of collaborative decision-making in the school that hasn't happened before, and you can actually create (I'm hoping to see) passion departments created in some schools using this 20% idea. And what I find is people will say, "Okay, well, 20% yes, it's crazy but we can give it a try because there's still 80% left for the real stuff." But what you find is, once you've opened up the 20%, the kids start making better use of the 80% of time. So, in fact it's a win-win situation and obviously you want to see the 20% become 30%, 40%, 50% until it's 80/20 the other way, of course. That's what we're working for. And thanks so much for having me, Je'anna. I think I find it amazing as a kind of public school teacher to be in this uh amazing group of people.

Je'anna: Thank you, Derry. Thanks for coming.

Jerry: Okay, I think I'm the last one. So, I would say one of the things that we, and I, do all have to grapple with is the fact that most of us have been trained in the traditional system and have to fight against that. We have to kind of de-school ourselves. And I have been doing this for so long this has discovered that at many turns. And some people have heard the story about when I was asked to go to one of our schools in New Jersey that wanted to have a demonstration of democratic process. And I was driving over and then I thought, "Oh my god, the oldest kid there is five years old. I'm gonna have to give them the agenda and all that stuff. I don't know if they'll get all this." And I get over there and, you know, one of the kids is screaming, "Mommy" and I'm thinking "Oh, this is never gonna

work." And, so, then they put them around a table and I start saying to them, "Well, okay, so we're going to talk about democratic processes. A couple of things that you can bring up to talk about at democratic meetings: one is something you think is good for the school and something that you think is a problem in the school." Every hand went up and so we had our agenda immediately. One of the four-year-olds talked about how she heard that there was something in chocolate that, maybe like, you know, caffeine, and, therefore, she thought maybe kids shouldn't have candy afternoon, have chocolate. And that was discussed and passed. And another kid talked about how he noticed that the kids would go out when they were sick, outside, and thought maybe it wasn't a good idea. So, it was passed that if you have a cold you can't go out in the cold. So, I discovered that my prejudice was wrong: that kids are natural learners. And, so, it's the kind of thing that we do have to kind of fight in ourselves. And we have to be aware of that, that we have a tendency to slip over into that. And, so, that's part of... That's just the last thing I would leave you with.

Cassidy: Yes, Jerry, yes. I mean it's liberty, liberation work is work for ourselves as well, right? I know that seems like it's kind of selfish but in order to be there for young people and for anybody in relationship, kind of like what Sid was saying: relationship's so important, we have to be doing that work and unwinding a lot of the conditioning that we've been brought up in. And how school should be and how learning should be and how we should be. So, Jerry that's so beautiful. And I would just, one thing I want to say, is I've not been in a course that I've gained more from than I have from the Helping the Butterfly Hatch, which is a course that-- I'm gonna say your name wrong again... It's-- I want to say it right, so help me.

Je'anna: I love the ways that people say my name. Just say it the way it comes out.

Cassidy: I want to say it the way it's intended but it's okay. Well, Je'anna is what I remember, something like that. When that first class I was offered, I was a part of it, I think, for the first three or four months that it was happening. It was like maybe the third one though that she had run and life-changing, life-changing. Because I was in my interning, so, I was like, "Oh my gosh, this situation's happening. This kid is just like bringing snakes inside and all the girls are screaming. What the heck is going on?" And just the amount of unwinding that she was able to do with me and then the group of people that were a part of that. So, I can only imagine what she's going to create with this, and I'm just shamelessly huge plug for her and her work and her genius because she's still helping me unwind stuff. So, I don't really have anything else but do her course.

Je'anna: Oh, bless you, Cassidy. Thank you. I mean it's like I find that the people who come on my courses, it's exactly like the kids that are in the room at Riverstone Village. It's like I feel so pushed to be there because I feel like I'm the one doing most of the learning all the time with these amazing teachers. And I just love what you bring and I can't wait to see what this new group is going to bring. I think it's going to be very, very exciting. And I think that, you know, as Jerry you've been explaining like how these dominoes keep toppling and the ripples keep rippling and we don't even know how far these influences extend. I really do feel like we're at a turning point now and the shift is busy happening. So, thank you everybody who's come tonight, even if we didn't get to hear your beautiful voice, we felt your beautiful hearts helping make the resonance. And, yeah, let's all go forward from here and share this recording as soon as it comes out. And here we go. With that thank you and good afternoon, good evening, good morning, good night and bless you all.

Cassidy: Bye! Thank you, guys. It's like the Truman Show: in case I don't see you good afternoon, good evening, good night.

Je'anna: And with that public school isn't real. We can get to the real world on the outside let's go!

[Music]