

## CEPaLS 12: Are Free schools really about freedom?

Helen M Gunter

University of Manchester

This text was original posted on my Tumblr Blog on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2017. This Blog has now been deleted and so I am presenting it as a CEPaLS paper.

The Campaign for State Education (CASE) has reported a list of 21 'free' schools or 'studio' schools which have been given taxpayer funding but are now closed. I am going to list them here as this will make it real:

Black Country UTC Walsall. Walsall Closed University Technical College.  
Bradford Studio School Bradford. Bradford Closed Studio Schools.  
Central Bedfordshire UTC Central Bedfordshire. Houghton Regis Closed University Technical College.  
Create Studio East Riding of Yorkshire. Goole Closed Studio Schools.  
Dawes Lane Academy North Lincolnshire. Scunthorpe Closed Free Schools.  
Discovery New School West Sussex. Crawley Closed Free Schools.  
The Durham Free School Durham. Durham Closed Free Schools.  
Hackney University Technical College Hackney. London Closed University Technical College.  
Harpenden Free School Hertfordshire. Harpenden Closed Free Schools.  
Hartsbrook E-Act Free School. Haringey Closed Free Schools.  
Hull Studio School Kingston upon Hull. City of Hull Closed Studio Schools.  
Hyndburn Studio School Lancashire. Accrington Closed Studio Schools.  
Inspire Enterprise Academy Southampton. Southampton Closed Studio Schools.  
Kajans Hospitality & Catering Studio College - KHCS Birmingham. Birmingham Closed Studio Schools.  
The Midland Studio College Hinckley Leicestershire. Hinckley Closed Studio Schools.  
The Midland Studio College Nuneaton Warwickshire. Nuneaton Closed Studio Schools.  
New Campus Basildon Studio School Essex. Basildon Closed Studio Schools.  
Royal Greenwich Trust School Academy Greenwich. London Closed Free Schools.  
St Michael's Secondary School Cornwall. Camborne Closed Free Schools.  
Stockport Technical School Stockport. Stockport Closed Free Schools.  
The Studio School Luton. Luton Closed Studio Schools.

See:

[https://www.facebook.com/CampaignforStateEducation/?hc\\_ref=PAGES\\_TIMELINE&fref=nf](https://www.facebook.com/CampaignforStateEducation/?hc_ref=PAGES_TIMELINE&fref=nf)

It seems that people are 'free' to set up a 'free school' based on costly public investment that is 'free' because it is outside of local public democratic control, and so is located in the idea of the 'free' market. But we know that the 'free' market is based on the idea of competition, and that some products will not be bought or bought in sufficient numbers to secure break even or a profit. So businesses open and then they close. Is this any way to run an education system to serve all children? What happens to children and their education when a school closes? Or do we have to recognize that public education through a local school for all has been too successful and we have to get used to the idea that we have to compete for a school place, and we might not get one, or we might get one for a period of time? This is a new world for families and communities, and serious questions need to be asked about the impact of this on real people and their lives.

I am reminded of a different form of freedom to choose as outlined by Alan Bennett (2016) in talking about how in his childhood he could access a range of educational services:

“My parents set great store by education, which they had never had, both of them leaving school at twelve or thirteen and they were determined my bother and I should have the advantages that had been denied to them.

Leeds set great store by education, too and it was, of course, entirely free and thanks to the City they never had to pay a penny for our education from start to finish. So if I’m passionate about free education now and against loans and the other ways in which it now has to be financed it’s because I still believe that the way Leeds educated its children then was the best.

And it wasn’t simply education in the schools. Just down the road is George Carson’s School Board Building, the solidity and grandeur of which expresses the city’s faith in education. And beyond is the library building and at the top of the library, what was then the Reference Library, a superb piece of high Victorian architecture and a wonderful library where I regularly used to do my homework or work in the vacation along with many of my contemporaries.

Libraries don’t have honours boards but if they did that of Leeds Reference Library would have a distinguished list because of the boys and girls who worked there in my time along at least eight have become judges.

And new door to the library is, of course, the Art Gallery which was another part of my education, and across the road the Town Hall where every Saturday night throughout my adolescence I went to concerts and learned to love music” (p59-60).

This is an extract from Alan Bennett’s acceptance speech when he was given the freedom of the City of Leeds. He notes: “so you see that when I say I was given the freedom on the city many years ago, that is what I mean” (p60). In other words, freedom comes from a collective public service that all can access, not through competing for a place in a school that is free to close down.

If you wish to reference this paper:

Gunter, H.M. (2017) *CEPaLS 12: Are Free schools really about freedom?* Manchester: University of Manchester.

**References:**

Bennett, A. (2016) *Keeping On Keeping On*. London: Faber and Faber.