Book Reviews

**Learning at Not-School**
Julian Sefton-Green
The MIT Press (2013)
Review by David Mathew

While some people might disagree that ‘it is universally acknowledged across the social spectrum that schools in and of themselves are not the end-all and be-all of education’ (the word *universally* is particularly worrisome), it is nonetheless fair to accept that as time progresses, more and more alternatives to a traditional, classroom-based, face-to-face learning experience have become available. These alternatives are what the author terms ‘learning in Not-School’ experiences, where we learn in not-school environments such as after-school programmes, youth clubs, or on the Web.

This is an interesting idea for a short book of 92 pages, but I do wish that the editing and proofreading had been more robust. However interested one is in a subject, the tightrope of reader interest can be easily twanged by something like the following paragraph (from page 23), which I quote at length.

The ‘learner in not-school settings is theorized in two important ways: in respect of their *(sic)* interest, enthusiasm, and motivation, and along an a *(sic)* emotional axis in terms of their relationships with others, especially adults. The former focus in a sense posits the figure of the learner as possessing agency and individual choice that is frequently denied in other settings. Yet the latter focus is often preoccupied with deficits, with the absence of parenting figures in young people’s lives and the needs of the young for support and security.’

These sentences are, unfortunately, not alone: this is but one of the book’s paragraphs that obliges the reader to auto-correct errors as he goes along. On plenty of occasions I found myself re-reading a gobbet, mentally painting in the correct punctuation, or smoothing out an imbalanced phrase. And while I fully accept that a book should be the reader’s work as much as the writer’s, I cannot help feeling that for want of a sterner editorial eye *Learning at Not-School* would have constituted a more enriching reading experience. A pity.