Paper presented on Saturday 20th November 2010 3.20 – 3.50pm Nunn Hall at Institute of Education, jointly convened with Beijing Normal University, for Education and Citizenship in a Globalising World Conference.

How can children transform their schools as active citizens fighting for their rights?

For children to be active global citizens they should learn about school councils and children's voice through radical models of practice that create an alternative framework from orthodox, traditional schooling, allowing them to question the assumptions of the nature of childhood, learning and power. This will allow them to develop the underlying values of children's rights and social justice.

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Introduction

This paper is a thought-piece, with reflection on experiences of working with children and teachers as a project worker using models of radical schooling that will hopefully raise interest in a programme of further research. It is the preliminary argument for the development of teaching resources based on the examples used, to further the life of children as active global citizens. These resources are being developed and trialled with schools in East London and around the country.

Without a critical position to view their childhood, schooling and socialisation, a perspective based on real children's and adults' lives, can our children consciously consent to participate and define their citizenship in these communities, their local and global frameworks?

The fight for political, human and women's rights has been one of portraying this position, that of the outsider, through the power of song, poetry, short story and the novel. An exemplar is William Godwin, who helped pioneer the detective novel, at a time the novel form was not respected. His novel, (Godwin 1794) written just a year after his heralded essay 'Concerning Political Justice' (Godwin 1793), reflects its purpose through its title: Things as They Are; or The Adventures of Caleb Williams. It presents a chase story with the pursued wrongly accused of theft, and continuously imprisoned and denied his rights because of the power of the text, and the various characters unable to see outside their class position. Caleb significantly only creates and takes control of his own narrative in the courtroom.

This paper is a continuation of my work with Summerhill School, schools in East London, and further inspired by the work of Professor Michael Fielding.

Style

This is an argumentative paper, and though it is proposing quantitative research on the effects of children's use and exploration of models of schooling; researching the possible resulting changes in their perception of childhood, children's rights and the potential participation and autonomy of the child within a school, it reflects the narrative tradition of the educators it references (John Holt, A.S.Neill, Alexander Bloom). This is because the power of story allows the exploration of different perspectives, it allows us into the mind of

another, and to start constructing our own narratives, which is what these radical educationalists want our children to learn. This power is beautifully portrayed in Salman Rushdies 'Haroun and the Sea of Stories' (1999).

Neill was accused by R.S. Peters (1981) of avoiding the issue of evidence of the outcomes and success of Summerhill (see also Stewart 1972). Yet Neill (1968) consistently states that success is what the students define for themselves, it is not based on a cultural, social or educational judgement or measurement, or expectation based on patterns of normal distribution, to be imposed on the young person. The stories of the students, ex-pupils, their sense of who they are, why, and their relationship with their diverse communities, can help us to understand the nature of the school, their experiences and their construction of themselves.

This paper does not rely on the success of Summerhill in terms of outcomes, but its success in terms of its ongoing community life (Ofsted Reports 1949, 2007 and Stronach et al Report 2000; Cunningham et al Report 2000), showing that children can live and study with each other and adults in a community based on equality, decision making and children's rights. This example along with two others are powerful tools to allow children to see alternatives without the need to use hypotheticals, and avoiding the accompanying danger of building strawmen, defined within the ruling paradigm that opposes their values, processes and vocabulary, to be publicly burnt as a danger, reinforcing the power of the dominant view.

A recent example of this is the lesson material on Anarchy published in the magazine 'Creative Learning'. It is part of a series teaching different styles of government.

"The aim of this lesson is for students to understand what the word anarchy means and imagine what a country in anarchy might be like. Students will also consider the purpose of governments and appreciate that government and laws exist to help us. By the end, students will be able to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of living in anarchy."

The setting of anarchy is that of the breakdown of law, and the examples given include Somalia.

'Imagine… we are sitting here quietly getting on with our work, when we suddenly hear a loud noise burring overhead. You run to the windows and there are helicopters circling above this classroom! The helicopters are dropping bundles of leaflets and there is an announcement being blared from loudspeakers: "The government of Country X has been disposed. We have taken over the parliament buildings and members of parliament have fled the country in fear. Some are no more. The prime minister is in exile. I repeat, there is no government. Government is a thing of the past. Repeat, no government. No laws."

Sharron, Kerrie, 2010

The aspirations, the dreams of such people as William Godwin, of a country where government is not needed because the children learn to be moral animals, and do not need arbitrary authority to be told what is right and wrong. The idea of a political outlook that laws are not needed because human beings can be good if they learn how to choose. The idea that human beings are autonomous, thinking, creative, loving, empathising, decision-making animals as expressed in the values of human rights. These are all deleted from the dictionary of political thought for the children using this resource. A lesson that ironically appears to allow children to explore and make their own judgements about anarchy.

How would these children approach the values of Summerhill? How would they understand the poetry of Shelley, or the meaning and struggle for human rights? How authority based will their utopia's be? More importantly how will they see their own autonomy, their own development as individuals?

These lessons reinforce the need for law and order, they do not allow the children to think about being human, about the nature of the human, about social and cultural values, they fit into the values of the rules and power structures of the classroom and schools.

Present Context

Now, at a time of transition, after several years of apparent spaces in, and policy statements for, our schools that superficially have appeared progressive, emphasising citizenship, global, inclusive, emotional, participation, individual and enterprise, the question of the nature of our schools and what happens to our children in them has possibly reached a peak of the ever repetitive debate. Compare the words of T.H.Huxley, 1868, with those of debates over the past thirty years:

"The politicians tell us, 'You must educate the masses because they are going to be masters'. The clergy join in the cry for education, for they affirm that the people are drifting from the church and chapel into the broadest infidelity. The manufacturers and the capitalists swell the chorus lustily. They declare that ignorance makes bad workmen; that England will soon be unable to turn out cotton goods, or steam engines, cheaper than other people; and then, Ichabod! Ichabod! The glory will be departed from us. And a few voices are lifted in favour of the doctrine that the masses should be educated because they are men and women with unlimited capacities of being, doing, and suffering, and that it is as true now, as ever it was, that the people perish for lack of knowledge."

The sadness of this debate is that its discourses do not seem to be touched by the fields or practitioners of the philosophy and history of education. The most extreme examples of this are the Innovation Unit (website), that appeared to see history, if at all, as a source of rhetoric rather than ideas for change; the Crick Report (1998) that failed to recognise any history of citizenship and democratic practice; the review of the National Curriculum (Ed White, J 2003), comparing its content and skills with its aims and values statement by a team of Professors lead by the Institute of Education concluding that all but Geography failed to deliver.

The political debate, and that in the media, are based on a commonly shared framework that the outcomes of schooling, exam results or various measurements of literacy, numeracy and achievement are simple and uncontested numbers that reflect the success or failure of the system. The nature of the system, its processes, succeed or fail according to these outcomes. Philosophy and history are irrelevant, and psychology and child development are tools to help the effectiveness of producing 'educated' children, young people who thereby achieve within a meritocratic system, giving them the opportunities to liberate themselves from poverty and class.

This paper argues for the use of education establishments based on values and principals at odds with this paradigm of schooling as a black box of skills and knowledge for successful outcomes based on exams. Examples that have worked and that question the unexpressed or unexamined assumptions of the black box. This is why I call it a black box, though its inputs and outcomes are visible and valued, the processes, their nature and

values, for the benefit of utility are not consciously examined. A black box in ICT is a patented hardware and software system, for example robotic research by British Nuclear Fuels at their research centre near Manchester, which legally must not be opened or revealed but can be researched and mimicked through measuring and controlling its inputs and outputs in order to build a system that can replicate the original.

Need for Radical School Models of Practice

These radical schools are necessary for the development of our children as active global citizens. They allow them to recognise they are in a glass cage, by seeing what is outside it. They allow the children to start critically examining the processes of schooling that require obedience, acceptance of imposed power and knowledge structures, including those of the dominant culture, and the unexamined nature of a utilitarian use of learning. Mary Robinson, UN Human Rights Commissioner, when asked how schools based on children's rights could be created, said 'by the children' (Radio 3, 2000). This can only happen if the children can see that rights are about justice, and that arguments about responsibilities and practicalities can be answered through models of extreme practice. They need to disarm those adults who hang onto unaccountable power by replying to them that schools based on children's rights can work, have worked and will work.

The examples I will use are A.S.Neill's Summerhill, at which I have worked as a teacher and houseparent for some 10 years, Robert Owen's New Lanark School (1816), Alexander Bloom's St George-in-the-East (1945-55) and Janus Korczak's democratic Warsaw orphanages. All four have been used in schools In the UK through workshops with children and teachers. The experiences of this use, as well as the issues raised by these practices, inform this paper.

Neill and Summerhill

In 1915 the teacher, writer and educationalist A.S.Neill wrote about his experiences as a teacher, a dominie, in Gretna Green. He was the village school teacher, running the local state school. He sat on his desk, at the end of the day thinking about why he was teaching, and the present and future of his children. They were all children of farm labourers and would not go on to high school or university, and would never own their own homes, or even leave the village.

How often do teachers sit and think about the politics and philosophy of education? The figure, perched on the edge of his desk, defying authority through his very position. Throughout his log, in his style of writing, in his actions, he wants to break with expectation. Smoking his pipe and waiting to finish it before starting the school day, wanting to shock his children by kissing a non-existent wife in front of the class, wanting to confront the policeman about salting the ice on the road that the children use as a slide, seeing the children's activities in the playground as more important than his lessons…

The name of his first book, published in 1915, 'A Dominies Log', is a rebellion, the first paragraphs stating the rules he should abide by to write his official school logbook. The one in which you must not express opinions or emotions, the official record that has no space or reason for understanding humanity, children or a school community. His log will defy, question and challenge the humanity destroying system that he must work within.

His thoughts would lead him in 1921 to set-up the school he thought children should be able to attend. A school with no violence between the teachers and the children. A school where the children could play and choose what they learnt. A school in which the children could explore and create themselves, within a community in which everyone is accountable to each other.

Bloom and St George-in-the-East

This was a similar motive and awareness of the effects and values of schools on working class children expressed by Alexander Bloom, headteacher of St George-in-the-East (1945-55), a school much admired, and visited, by Neill.

"His fundamental starting point was our humanity, our being and development as persons. Our sense of who we are, our worth and capacity to feel and be significant go hand in hand with our capacity to contribute to the community within which our sense of significance and uniqueness grows and flourishes. In Bloom's experience, St George-in-the-East's children emerging from primary schools invariably felt 'inferior' and 'unwanted'. His response was to provide a school community that took an entirely different view of them; one which believed that 'What the child is was much more important than what the child could do' (Ibid); one that sought to replace the debilitating influence of fear as the prime incentive to 'progress'. 'Fear of authority (… imposed for disciplinary purposes), fear of failure, (… by means of marks, prizes and competition, for obtaining results); and the fear of punishment (for all these purposes)' must be replaced by 'friendship, security and the recognition of each child's worth' (Bloom 1952:135-136) '…" (Fielding, 2005)

Owen and Lanark

The values of these schools strongly reflect those of Robert Owen, the successful cotton industrialist who fought against child labour, and to create a society based on co-operation, and fair pay. He set-up a school in his cotton mill community at New Lanark in 1817 that employed staff who were deliberately not teachers but loved children. The school, like Neill's state village school, was for the children of workers, and orphans, brought to New Lanark as workers themselves.

The playground was a vital part of the school at New Lanark, and had the simple rule to be happy and help others to be happy. Owen wanted the learning to be lead by the children's questions; for them to see reading and writing instead of academic impositions as liberating doorways to help further learning. He wrote that children should learn to read and write as they want, and it could even wait til six years old. He criticised the Bell and Lancaster methods for training teachers, and methods of teaching, as they did not develop any understanding of what the children were learning and why. They were what they claimed to be, efficient and effective at mass training, the repetition of facts and ideas, and the testing of these.

Radically, and eventually threatening his good reputation and establishment support, he believed the school should teach geography so the children would realise through the discovery of other countries, cultures and religions that if they had been born elsewhere they would be different; that their beliefs were built through their experiences, without their awareness or consent. That in a different country they might be Muslims or Buddhists. This was part of his school helping to create a just local community, widening to be a just nation, and then wider still, a just world. A geography taught so that the children would see

themselves as ‘the other’. He thought people would eventually, through evidence and reason, build on his example and viewpoint and it would lead to the best parts of the world’s diverse religions acknowledging that they are shared and becoming a universal religion.

The children would teach each other by using a large world map on the wall, with only the outline of the countries and rivers. A child would stand at the front of the class pointing at different parts of the map, according to the questions from the audience. When they got it wrong they would change places with another child. The inspectors thought the children knew more than them. People came from all over the world to see this remarkable and happy school.

In his writings Owen seems to contradict himself, sometimes adamant that we cannot escape our environmental programming, and at other times that if we realise its nature we can start to reconstruct ourselves rationally. His work based on the former meant that his school and community ideas would simply condition people to be co-operators and act according to social justice, or if, on the latter, the children would have a moment of cognitive dissonance that would help them analyse their world at a meta level, perceiving different paradigms from above, leading them to choose co-operation through evidence and reason. Rather like the character in Flatland (Abbott, 1999) being lifted above the plain by a gust of wind to experience looking down at their 2-dimensional paradigm, seeing it from above and experiencing the third dimension of observing the nature of their world.

In fact I am projecting modern ideas onto Owen. His environmental determinism was consistent, but he did believe that his school would help create children who were ‘wise’ and would use ‘reason’ and ‘evidence’. He appears not to discriminate between this and other environmental determinist frameworks in which there is unthinking, unquestioning acceptance through power. I think his school would allow children to see they are constructs and begin to learn about how and why. They would start to create critical thinking minds, one of the foundations of active global citizenship, and according to Owen, co-operative citizens.

Owen read and respected the ideas of William Godwin, who wrote a nationally important book ‘On Political Justice’, that argues for the right of human beings to be free of imposed power, to be able to create and define themselves. An anarchist space defined by human rights, that would, with the right education system, allow people to choose to act morally, to act with social justice, because they have consented through their own experience, empathy and reason, rather than forced to through conformity and imposed law.

Challenging the Traditional School

The work, writings and schools of Robert Owen, A.S.Neill and Bloom, lead to a critique of education, schooling and pedagogy outside the framework of the values of state schooling and teacher training. Indeed outside the educational, community and personal values children unconsciously learn during their schooling. David Gribble (2006) compares traditional schools with radical progressive schools, sadly though the text is from the schools themselves, from documents, websites and policy statements, and more importantly from the children, it is difficult to gain a sense of the difference in values and philosophy. Despite the beginning statement, ‘In democratic schools these words would be accepted to, but they would not have the same meaning. “A shared set of values”, “a true learning community” , “all aspects of school life”, and “equal worth, value and respect”, for instance, would all be differently interpreted.’ But he then goes onto refer to the continuum

of the importance of different values, as if the values are the same but only differ in their importance, 'Conventional schools may lay more stress on exam results where the others think more of the personal growth of the child…'

The difference in the nature of the values of the two systems not further explored by Gribble, I think is expressed in his section of children's quotes on 'What is school for?':

'Traditional school student: "You have to work hard at school if you are going to get a decent job, because your exam results make all the difference. The point of going to school is to get qualified. It has nothing to do with your private life."

Democratic school student: "You have to get a few qualifications for most decent jobs, but you don't need grade A's, and you can do some jobs without passing any exams. School isn't about getting good jobs, it's about finding out who you really are." '

These radical examples are ignored or safely put into history of education or philosophy units, which, if taught, are normally options for trainee teachers. Even though Summerhill is recommended in the training of citizenship teachers, where it might create some heated debate, these examples are generally seen as eccentricities, mere historical inspirations for many teachers in the past.

"Early in the course and prior to the 'Designing the Curriculum' activity, trainees explore issues relating to the purposes of schooling. They investigate a range of educational paradigms from Ivan Illich (De-schooling society) and AS Neill (Summerhill) to Tom Bentley (Learning Beyond the Classroom), Oliver Letwin (Grounding Comes First) and the Hillgate Group (New Right Thinking in Education) considering how these views of the purposes of schooling impact on the provision for the social sciences and citizenship."
(Palmer, 2005)

Neill's books inspired numerous people into teaching, or into progressive education, and affected many schools and special units for behaviour problems throughout the world. Yet now with the agenda of schooling to liberate the working class, to provide equality of opportunity for all, Summerhill, Neill, Owen and Bloom are seen as irrelevant and mostly ignored.

"One of the most significant failings of current work on 'personalisation' is not only its blindness to its own silent and unexamined presumptions about how we develop as human beings, but also its wilful disregard for thinkers and practitioners who did not run a business or who had the apparent misfortune to do their best work before 1989." (Fielding 2005)

This is in contradiction to the Government Inspectors who for Summerhill in 1949, and St Georges in 1948, stated in their published school inspection reports that these were the places to learn about the nature and future of schooling.

The irony of HMI threatening Summerhill 50 years later, trying to close it down or force it to give up its values of children controlling their own learning reflects the ongoing battle between training and learning (Newman, 2006). A battle in which these very words are defined such that the 'traditionalists' not only control the debate, but recently have even portrayed themselves as progressive, using terms such as child centred learning, individualised learning, participative learning and active citizenship learning.

Summerhill won a statement of respect, acknowledgement of its values and a unique child rights based inspection system, accountable to scrutiny by the DCSF (through an observer, the first being Prof Paul Hirst and the second Prof Geoff Whitty) and two observers from the school. Its first Report Inspection after this court case was glowing, recognising its importance in terms of citizenship and the development of the individual.

“A strength is the way in which pupils from different countries work together to form the school community, celebrating its international dimension. Pupils learn how to get on with each other through compromise, negotiation and communication within the community so that by the time they leave they are well rounded, confident and mature young people. Pupils develop a sound knowledge of public institutions.” (Ofsted, 2007)

The court case decision was so misrepresented at the time in the press that Nick Cohn on BBC Radio 4 and in the Observer, accused the Department of lying, to which even the then Minister wrote a published letter in reply. These small examples of deceit show the potential importance of the school as a reference point. Professor Bernard Crick deliberately ignored it as an example of citizenship education in his famous Crick Report, that included ten school examples.

In the court case in 2000, ending with the children taking over the court to discuss and vote on the final decision to accept or not the agreement offered by the DCSF, a whole series of questions focused on the attendance at lessons. How could the DCSF claim to respect the school’s values when it expected children to attend lessons? If it respected the choice the children had, when did it become a problem? How many lessons could the children fail to attend? One, two, a week, a month of lessons?

Michael Phipps, senior Registrar for Independent Schools, ultimately came up with the idea of a compelling lesson, one which was so interesting that though children had the free choice to go or not, they would choose to attend. Geoffrey Robertson QC, the school’s barrister ridiculed the idea for over thirty minutes trying to ascertain what about the lesson would make it compelling. Since the case a document has been published by the DCSF about the Compelling Lesson to help teachers in Key Stage 3. Summerhill brings to focus and challenges the use of ideas at odds with a prescriptive system, reminding us that entitlement is about choice, that individualised learning challenges the values of our compulsory, authority based system.

Prof Michael Fielding states the issue with reference to St Georges and Alexander Bloom (2005):

“Here is someone whose work significantly inspired one of the best known novels of the post-war generation (‘To Sir With Love’) and one of the most important literary accounts of secondary teaching ever written in English. Here is someone whose work anticipates and still outreaches even the most creative periods of the comprehensive school movement that were to follow. Here is someone who took the democratic imperatives of lived citizenship education more seriously and interpreted them more radically and more imaginatively than anyone within the state sector before or since and in so doing earned the praise and support of Summerhill’s A.S.Neill [see Neill (1956:85) and Stewart (1968:359)]. Here is someone whose understanding and daily practice of ‘personalised learning’ was immeasurably more profound and more inspiring than anything to emerge thus far from the current DfES (3). Here is someone whose commitment to ‘student voice’ is a humbling

reminder of how far we have yet to go in even approximating to what he achieved in the decade immediately following the end of the Second World War."

In our present schooling system Owen would see that Bell and Lancaster had won. Teaching is a set of transferable skills, necessary knowledge, and a set of effective and efficient processes with appropriate evaluations. If you want your children to succeed and you have been trained to deliver the curriculum then you are a good teacher. The best schools are those that have the best results, value added or not. A teacher sitting on their desk thinking about values, philosophy, the nature of the child and what is happening to their identity and freedom is wasting their time. Inspectors and teachers do not judge success by asking children why they think they are at school, what they think schooling and learning are about? What the children's educational values are and are becoming?

A longitudinal study should be done on the values and perceptions of the children to their schooling, to see how as the children are longer in the system they become worse 'life long learners', worse 'active global citizens'. The majority of academically successful students see schooling as achieving exam success and entrance to Universities or work, and the need for children to be controlled in order to have excellent, well ordered schools.

Summerhill in State Schools

When Summerhill School is presented to successful sixth formers at academic focused schools the students surprise their teachers by forcefully expressing the views that children cannot make decisions for themselves until they are 16, that children would create a violent and immoral society if allowed, that children would not learn unless forced to in a compulsory school system, that children at Summerhill would leave with no hope of a future career or successful life. They portray school as a place to be trained to do well in exams, ideas of citizenship education, of learning about and developing their identities were irrelevant and a waste of time. Indeed one school I spoke at the teacher had the aim of using Summerhill as an inspiration for her sixth formers to create a school council. She was disappointed by the student's response, though instead of reflecting on why this happened she blamed the event. I attended the following year as part of a debate with the Campaign for Real Education, there was still no sixth form inspired school council. The headteacher apologised on behalf of his students saying the school needed to have a stronger citizenship ethos.

This interpretation was reinforced through a question and answer session with a group studying sociology GCSE, the class split into two vocal groups, one was of the academically successful students who criticised and rejected the evidence presented on Summerhill, as opposed to a group who might be seen as 'disruptive', who saw the school as opening possibilities of choice other than academic learning, but also expressed their dislike of the values of the other group through asking about smoking and walking in the woods rather than going to lessons. The female teacher, a trainee being observed, and who introduced me as a guest speaker, expressed her delight at the views expressed by the academic group. She thought they reflected her values and those of the school, and failed to see their dismissal of the description of Summerhill, virtually accusing me of misrepresentation, and the questions this raised in terms of a lack of open mindedness and inquiry.

These experiences are in contrast with work on Summerhill with primary school children in East London. Numerous schools and children have explored Summerhill through workshops. They have created their own rules, they have run their own meetings to discuss

and solve a child stealing another's bike or other problems of behaviour, they have imagined their ideal school.

With Summerhill as a working example their discussion and ideas have challenged those of their schools. They talked about changing the name of the school, changing the structure of the school day. Yet the children strongly believed they could help run their school, that their voice was important, that Summerhill was a natural working school because children their age and younger were capable of making decisions, practical ones, thoughtful ones and moral ones. One school council declared their aim was to learn how to run itself so that they would not need the 'school council link teacher'.

A group of five primary schools took part in a workshop in which they acted as lawyers, half of the children's groups were lawyers for the Government inspectors and DSCF, the other half were acting on behalf of Summerhill School. After an introductory presentation they read jigsaw piece evidence from both sides, created questions for two witnesses, hostile or friendly questions depending on the client, interviewed a person playing the lead Inspector and then playing the Principal of Summerhill. They made summative statements in favour of their clients and then the whole conference acted as a jury voting for or against the closure of the school. They voted 7 to close it and 43 to keep the school as it is.

Robert Owen saw the world's conflict and poverty as a result of people being brought-up and taught through fear, violence and inhumane competition. Neill saw children being brought-up to become the soldiers for the next war. Alexander Bloom saw children becoming destructive out of the fear used to control them.

With the recommendation of two teams of Inspectors; with the excitement and debate these schools create with children, the Deputy Head and Head of PSHE of a large Tower Hamlets Secondary School after her school council visited Summerhill reported that she had never heard so much debate among them, and that she wanted to organise trips for all her year councils; with the need for children to fight for their rights, to become active global citizens, we need to put into our classrooms resources that give them the evidence and questions that will fuel the debate whatever side they eventually decide to vote for.

Mary Thornton, Herts University (weblink) writing about the effect of placements on her trainee teachers, some of whom were placed at Summerhill:

"Discussions of democracy and school councils take on a whole new dimension when direct experience of the 'tribunal' at Summerhill is available in our classroom;"

Classes imagining that they are at Summerhill and holding a meeting, deciding on issues of justice, making laws and changes in the way the school is run. Students creating a constitution for their school council using the statements and structural ideas from St Georges-in-the-East. Children planning and imagining the school they would like to build being inspired by Robert Owen, and the 13 year old East Ender, Nellie, who created and helped run her own school in Whitechapel at the beginning of the 20th century, in 1907 – 'Small the school might have been, but implicit in its aims, organisation and operation was a devastating critique of the national system of education' (Shotton, John 1993) . Children

role-playing the children's courts of Janus Korczak's democratic orphanage in the Warsaw Ghetto and learning about his work with children rights, and the children's justice, an island surrounded by the brutality of anti-Semitism, starvation, murder and the future journey to the death camp. These will support our children's contributions to develop our schools, to input their opinions into the running of these communities, to allow them to start seeing themselves as citizens whose behaviour, views and decisions contribute to the justice, learning, sustainability, rights and cohesion of their worlds, local and global. Like all our cultures these will allow our children to see their struggle for rights as part of an ongoing history, a history of successful and celebrated communities.

Recent Models of Change

Restorative justice has become a guiding set of tools, processes and training in the city of Hull. They are attempting to become the first Restorative City, and are training the thousands of their workers who work with children. Collingwood is the primary school whose headteacher initiated this challenging initiative (Hull Centre for Restorative Practices, 2008). She started it in her school, which had been judged as failing. Through the results it created and her resulting enthusiasm she shared the ideas with colleagues from other schools.

During an inspection the headteacher, at the start, mentioned to the Inspector that he probably would not have seen a school like hers before, his response, indeed similar to that given by HMI when told by Summerhill staff that their values might conflict with the schools (Newman, 2006) that they had many years of experience and had seen everything. Collingwood were lucky, the Inspector, after an hour of seeing the school rushed to the Headteacher's room to apologise and proclaim that it was indeed a surprising school!

The school, which I have visited for a day, does challenge the workings of primary schools. It embeds in its structures and lessons the voice of the child through circles, the use of feeling walls, a full-time restorative staff member who had a room for children's quiet contemplation. It would be interesting to see how this school, with its whole school change, has succeeded where Summerhill, St Georges and New Lanark have failed, to replicate their changes in the wider communities, in other schools, in the practice of an entire city.

This is not to deny the influence of Summerhill on schooling and childhood (Cunningham, 2006), contributing to the progressive moves of banning corporal punishment, mixed schools, the growing importance of children's voice, the emphasis of emotional learning, the idea of the autonomy of the child, of self-directed learning. But we have yet to have schools based on children's rights.

Mark Finnis, the co-ordinator of the Restorative project in Hull when asked about the role of children's rights replied that children knew their rights too well, and that there was a need for responsibilities. His response reflected the books, resources and conference content that based the tool set on the successful outcomes of; participation, happiness and co-operation (Ed. Wachtel and Mirsky, 2008). A list that reflects those of Bloom, Owen and Neill, but in order to promote change uses the black box of unexamined philosophical foundations.

"In contrast to our current predilection for avoiding matters of principle and the philosophical foundations of what we aspire to achieve in our daily work, this is precisely where Bloom started and through 'peaceful penetration, courage and patience' there evolved 'within two and a half years, a homogenous, living force'(Ibid)."(Fielding 2005)

‘Rights Respecting Schools’, a UNICEF initiative in the UK, continues to successfully promote rights in an authoritarian and paternalistic system, by corrupting them with the misuse of the concept of responsibilities. In the fight for human, women, and black rights the issue of responsibilities was the weapon used to continue to deny them. With children it does the same, but sadly the rights discourse, instead of the foundation of the dignity and growing autonomy of the child, is about controlling the children. They have a right to speak but only if they accept the responsibility to listen. They have a right to learn only if they allow the right of the teacher to teach.

“If children have a right to be protected from conflict, cruelty, exploitation and neglect...

…then they also have a responsibility not to bully or harm each other.”

http://www.unicef.org.uk/tz/teacher_support/RRSA_Introduction.ppt

How would the suffragettes or slaves have responded to such a social contract? Why is the central basis of rights, the autonomy of the individual, the accountability of the community for the rights of the individual, hidden beneath participation? Fighting for, living and expressing rights is the way to learn how communities and their members work together to defend their rights. Conditional clauses appear to deny the inalienable nature of human rights.

The children’s rights discourse needs its history, needs its heroes and heroines, needs its culture of struggle and idealism. Our children through learning of the history and heritage of these radical models will be able to start the questioning that hopefully will lead to them to redefining their own communities and cultures of rights and learning, and to redefining their identities as active global citizens.

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