CLOSING THE GAP

The gap between young people’s views about sustainability and the school system’s potential to provide sustainable education

Shan Oakes
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Abstract

Over 200 young people in East Yorkshire, UK gave their views. Young people between the ages of 7 and 16 in 8 schools, and the RAPP, Hull, talked about sustainability and how schools could model it. Reference was made to ‘Sustainable Schools for pupils, communities and the environment’ (sspce, DFES, 2006).

Ofsted says sustainability should now be central in schools. Taking account of the limitations to imagination caused by the fact that young people in school are already ensconced inside the institutions of a system that needs changing, the young people I met clearly agree on the need for sustainability to be central: they care about fairness, compassion, inclusivity and discursive approaches. Fundamental elements in the school system, however, are pulling in the opposite direction. These elements are not emanating from individual schools or teachers, who, like children, are victims of the system. Rather, they are government education policy priorities and their consequences. Teachers are usually struggling heroically to close this gap.

The contrast was stark between the pro-sustainability views of the young people and the unsustainability of the education system. So the research refocused on the gap itself: what is stopping schools being models of sustainability – or, in other words, what needs to change if schools are to be free to promote sustainability? Symptoms of the problem include: the seminary model, teachers and students under extraordinary pressure to ‘perform’, focus on assessment-orientated curriculum, inflexible contracts or job descriptions, ineffective school councils, and inordinate tensions due to time constraints. Less obvious but equally significant and pervasive factors include the hidden curriculum based on anachronistic expectations and practices, power differentials and lack of democracy.

Underlying these symptoms, is a long-standing suite of attitudes in western culture relating to children, schools, what education is for, and what is important in people’s lives.

These are reflected in UK home and foreign policy. It is the unsustainability in the world outside schools that makes it extremely difficult for teachers seriously to address underlying issues. It is currently easier, therefore, for ‘outsiders’ to challenge this country’s dominant paradigm (which seems to be based on nothing more laudable than property, oil, and militarism).
This research points to the necessity for our society seriously to examine its attitudes towards children and the aims of education. We need to cede power to children. We need children's vision to help us develop not only a new appropriate model of education, but also a new model for relating to each other and the rest of the world. We need to LISTEN to children and invite them into a dialogue about the whole business of how we live our lives.

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1. Introduction

The 2006-7 academic year is the UK year of Action on Sustainable Development for Schools, following the consultation on the sustainable schools strategy (DFES 2006b). We are 2 years into the UN Decade of Education for Sustainability initiated by the 2002 Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainability. This research is concerned with the tension between the concepts of education, sustainability, and children. The enormity of these concepts explains the high number of footnotes giving support, illustration or explanation.

1.1 Motivation

The motivation for this work stems from my personal and professional experience working in or with education, and horror at a system which misguidedely imposes such pressure on children and their teachers. There is much focus and expenditure on the symptoms of the problems in education and hardly any on the underlying causes. This research is concerned with attitudes underlying policy – and in particular the attitudes towards children which stop them being equal partners in designing a sustainable future.

I wanted to test my belief that children do care very much about their future and want changes to happen so that the future is one they can look forward to. Children, the direct users of the education system, are rarely asked to comment or evaluate the system in which they are compulsionarily immersed for more than a decade. Considering that the system seems to be designed on a market model perhaps it is not surprising that children’s views are not invited, since children do seem to come, as Wordsworth said, ‘trailing clouds of glory’ and, when asked, do challenge that business model.

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1 ‘Between 1990 and 1995 there was a 450 per cent increase in the rate of exclusions of children from school...according to the Children’s Society, pressure on schools to paint a good picture of themselves in the market place has led to non-conformist pupils being excluded more readily than hitherto (Chaudhary 1998, p7)’ Anne Sinclair Taylor in Lewis and Lindsay (2000) p31

2 ‘In education, research has been criticised for being too distant from the concerns of policy and practice and comprising ‘detailed and unrelated studies of particular aspects of educational activity.’ Evidence for policy and practice information and coordinating centre (IOE) Nisbet and Broadfoot

3 ‘There is only a limited number of studies of the pupils’ point of view of schooling in Britain available...this is a neglected issue in educational research’ Meighan (2003) p.16

4 ‘In the education market, as Ball et al (1994) have demonstrated, self-interest is the driving force: the self-interest of the parent-consumer and the self-interest of the school-trader, pursuing policies to attract the ablest pupils with the most ambitious and supportive parents.’ – ‘Parents rather than pupils are regarded as the consumers of education, (therefore) public approbation and financial rewards are bestowed on schools whose able pupils score highest in statutory tests and public examinations...the key indicator of effective schooling is widely regarded to be exam performance and the key impediments to a school’s success are seen as the unsuccessful pupils and the disaffected.’ (in Lloyd-Smith & Tarr, p. 59, Lewis & Lindsay, (2000))

5 Ode to Duty 1807
1.2 The aim
The aim of this action research was, therefore, to contribute to the dialogue and understanding about sustainability in education at both local and national level. The focus is on the yawning gap between young people’s aspirations and the deducible ‘aspirations’ of schooling in the UK.

1.3 The objectives:

- to find and record aggregated views of young people on education for sustainability in the context of ‘Sustainable schools for pupils communities and the environment’ (sspce, DfES, 2006c)
- to consider the potential of the school system to respond to these views
- to explore methods of obtaining young people’s views, inviting maximum participation and with a focus on how to increase inclusivity
- to note effects of previous work on sustainability in the 8 schools
- to consider findings in the context of current discourses on education
- to make recommendations in the light of all the above.

2. Rationale for selection of focus

‘Listening to the voices and views of children themselves is one of the most neglected aspects of child developmental research. It has been too long assumed that children have little to add to research that is valid and also that the whole business of the child expressing a point of view or desires is too distressing for the child and therefore is ethically unsound.’ Greig & Taylor 1999, p. 81

2.1 shaping reality (theories and perspectives)
I offer my own perspective because all research must be set in context. The old story of the blind men and their different inductions about the elephant (depending on which part of it they felt) is a nice illustration of the fact that our theories of ‘reality’ are moulded by our experience and

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6 ‘the aims of schools are not agreed’ (Meighan (2003) p.125). Sterling says, ‘most mainstream education sustains unsustainability - through uncritically reproducing norms, by fragmenting understanding, by sieving winners and losers, by recognizing only a narrow part of the spectrum of human ability and need, by an inability to explore alternatives, by rewarding dependency and conformity, and by servicing the consumerist machine.’ (2001) p.14

7 A pilot sustainable schools self evaluation tool (s3) says ‘sustainable school self evaluation is not an optional extra’ (Ofsted 2006)
hence our perspectives. We act according to our theories and hence we affect and are also part of ‘external’ reality. So there is a continuous circle of perception→action→reality→perception→ and so on. This circle can be virtuous or vicious and I see education for sustainability being education which contributes to a virtuous circle of reality-shaping. Moving towards sustainability involves deep consideration and review of all the aspects of our lives and how we perceive the world and our place within it.

2.2 My perspective

I jointly run Voice International which promotes education for sustainability (education which focuses on welfare of people and planet rather than economic ‘growth’). I regard education as useful only in so far as it promotes this. Unfortunately the current model of education in the UK, led by priorities for higher education, is mostly doing the opposite because its unwritten aim is to support economic ‘growth’ through top-down prescription.

Formative experiences, both negative and positive, led me, I believe, to an underlying scepticism about human institutions. My father died, aged 45, from lung cancer, a victim, probably, of environmental and substance abuses from his time in the army, and, according to my mother, professional arrogance and institutional failures. It is only recently that I have realised that it was probably this early shattering of my complacency that made me so aware of limits to human knowledge and wisdom. Two years later, my mother and I (aged 7) moved from the city to a rural hamlet and I immersed myself in nature. I believe this was deeply therapeutic for me – to be able to escape and be a part of something whole and alive. This need to feel connected with other beings and nature is what I call ‘spirituality’ (to which I will return).

2.3 Institutions

As a teenager, in the early ‘70s, I became concerned that we were living in an ‘effluent society’, and this concern led me into teaching. I believed I could help address the issue through education. My initial teacher training at Leicester (1975) was ‘progressive’ and focused on the role of

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8 ‘Authentic education, as Sterling argues, has always been rooted in place and tradition. It is oriented to the place at which the young learn well, not by imposed standards and schedules. It has always been open and participatory. Authentic learning engages educues, encourages and enthuses. Instead of rote learning, real education encourages spontaneity, insight, and reflection. Its aim has always been whole persons who are capable of thinking critically and living with compassion, energy and high purpose.’ (Orr D, foreword to Sterling (2001), p.8)

9 The goal of sustainable development is ‘to enable all people throughout the world to satisfy their basic needs and enjoy a better quality of life, without compromising the quality of life of future generations.’ HM Government (2005) Securing the Future: delivering UK sustainable development strategy TSO.


11 ‘progressive education, says Unger, ‘Makes the child available to the school, places capacity above memory, rescues the child from the family’ (1998) p. 231
the teacher as enabler. I taught English and made particular use of discussion and drama. A girl once commented, ‘the trouble with you is you make us think!’ I enjoyed interaction with children, but I did not enjoy being part of institutions with deafening bells, constant pressure, ‘success’ and ‘failure’, competition, crowd control, narrow templates for assessment of children, and being expected to police dubious rules such as the wearing of uniform. Goffman (1961), talks of the ‘coercive, non-negotiable and non-consultative nature of many contemporary institutions including armies, asylums, monasteries, hospitals, and prisons.’ Like Ivan Illich (1970), I view institutions as human devices for processing people and training them to be dependent, to consume and want more of the same (institutions control, whereas individual humans and nature are diverse and self-regulating). With our current preoccupation with institutions (Illich includes health, welfare, etc) it is not surprising that the education industry is booming, and people seem to me increasingly to be becoming either more tamely institutionalised or, as a reaction, more angry, rebellious, anarchic, marginalised, and criminalised.

2.4 Coordination

I became an LEA officer because I wanted to work outside schools to try to improve the system as a whole. Coordination and collaboration (which used to be facilitated by LEAs) is central to sustainability because it brings people together – and in my experience people function better as groups rather than as individuals, and can make a difference if they interact. Since central government reduced the LEA role, schools seem to have become increasingly isolated, and one technique schools have adopted for surviving the extraordinary pressures they are under is the avoidance of ‘extraneous’ contacts (as described in section 4.5 below).

Regarding the development of social capital, Blewitt (2006) says ‘where these relationships of social trust and reciprocity are found wanting, a great deal of work and leadership is required to nurture and facilitate any sense of social connectivity’ (p.128). I believe regional coordinating organisations, or local authorities (LAs) as they are now, could have the potential, still, to be proactive and build community networks of support – not in an ‘authoritarian’ but in an enabling capacity. LAs could promote change if government took the lead and genuinely supported es. At the same time, I have also learnt to be wary of ‘the establishment’ since it tends not to do what it says it will do.14

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12 quoted in Meighan (2003, p.21)
13 We are starting a new century with no fewer than 1 in 5 of the globe’s inhabitants described as a student in formal education’ Wolf (2002) p.1
14 Regarding the untrustworthy establishment - an influential (and deeply shocking) personal experience was the absurd decision of the court system to uproot my two sons when their father decided to move away. As their dad worked away from home, they were, in effect, brought up by a young ‘au pair’ when they could have remained in their schools and with their mum during the week and spent ‘quality time’ with their dad at weekends. The circumstances are of course, too complex to detail here, but the lesson I learnt was that one cannot rely on ‘the system’ or its
2.5 Prescription and imposition

I spent 2001-4 working within the Ugandan education system (with FENU, the Forum of Education NGOs Uganda), and independently, and attended several national education sector reviews. Uganda had been a British protectorate and its education system is based on the British model. Observing this model in the Ugandan context I saw the anachronism of the UK model of schooling.\textsuperscript{15} The main failing of this system appears to be an army logistics mindset which manoeuvres children, teachers and building plans from central offices, removing education from the people. It assumed the government rather than parents ‘do’ education. Our research into the costs of education to the user (Rigby & Oakes, 2003) heard a clear message that people wanted to be involved in the process of educating the young. They did not wish to leave it to the Ministry.\textsuperscript{16}

The Director of Education for Uganda\textsuperscript{17} agreed with Macedo (2000) p.5 that the western model should be called ‘Education for Stupidification’. When we suggested that Uganda could decide to do it differently, he said, ‘We can’t be guinea pigs. Has the UK changed?’ – which helped us decide to return to UK to try to move things on.\textsuperscript{18}

2.6 Formal education versus learning

Recently I accompanied a lively and intelligent little boy (3) to nursery where, on arrival, he had to queue up with his parent to find his number on a piece of card to put on a chart. I watched his face closely as he institutions even to do what they say they will do. The event was doubly ironic because at the time I was working on implementation of the Children Act 1989 which introduced the Welfare checklist and said that the courts, and all public bodies must use it to promote the welfare of children through listening to children, multi agency partnership, and promoting the sharing of parental responsibility. The court did the opposite. This experience sensitised me to the predicament of people who are unjustly treated by ‘the establishment’.

\textsuperscript{15} ‘transferring a modern institution to the developing nations provides the acid test of its quality.’ Illich 1970, p.58

\textsuperscript{16} In a largely non-cash economy, communities can contribute in kind – and they want to. Parents are often understandably sceptical of the quality of education on offer, but if they believe that school education is the way out of poverty they will sell even their land to buy education for their children, ending up destitute and usually with nothing useful to show for their sacrifice. In the UK we pay for education from taxes, so we are less aware of the cost and the quality issues, because we expect the state to provide education. If we were more involved we would, surely, monitor and analyse the results more carefully, asking the direct users (children) for their evaluations. ‘Montessori, for one, regarded the parent as a partner in the child’s schooling’ (Lillard 1972,p145

\textsuperscript{17} Richard Akankwasa, previously teaching in the Education department of Makerere University. Richard died in 2004.

\textsuperscript{18} A series of photographs taken by children of their school experience is collected in ‘Schooling in Uganda: Through children’s eyes.’ (Makerere University, 2000). The pictures show beatings, dark Victorian-style classrooms and grim toilets. It was presented to the Ugandan Minister of Education by the EU delegation (2002) as a way of saying, in the context of the MDGs, that much needs to change, and that children should be respected more. The Minister was understandably not amused, since this inappropriate school model was, and continues to be, imposed by Europeans, who appear unaware of the irony. Recent news from Uganda is that the president is proposing turning one of the country’s last forests (Mabira) into yet another sugar plantation. The EU is, of course, opposing the plan - having decimated most of its own forest centuries ago!
went through the motions (with his Dad) of looking for the right number. His face displayed sadness, boredom and disappointment, in contrast with his usual worm-digging enthusiasm. I felt I was betraying him by tacit support of this forced kind of learning. His older sister (5) has just become a ‘level 3 reader’ and this had coincided with her for the first time not wanting to have a story read to her at bedtime. Reading had become a chore instead of a delight. I was reminded that before school turned reading, and life in general, into ‘work’, I had been an avid reader, often sitting in a tree with my book. School stopped me reading by forcing me to read. It is as if we are still a dynamic part of nature, keen to learn, until we are sent to be ‘schooled’ into becoming cogs in the machinery of the production and consumption paradigm.  

2.7 Nature

Nature has even less of a voice than children due to modern industrialist values and Christian philosophy. It is also cut out of the equation because many schools have little outside space and are too far from countryside for children to have the opportunity to engage with it. Children used to be able to take themselves out to play, but this is not the case now for growing numbers of children due to urbanisation, traffic and fear of crime. Parents are often too busy or stressed to have time to take kids out. Parents buy things for their children instead. So, children tend to become separated and even alienated from nature.

Children do relate to nature if given the chance early on, but seem to lose this close relationship if it is not fostered by continued contact. Their empathy with nature seems to lessen as they grow older: ‘Heaven lies about us in our infancy! Shades of the prison-house begin to close upon the growing boy…The youth…still is Nature’s priest, and by the vision

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19 ‘the discourse on education has become a technical subject requiring only efficient administration by technocrats. From this perspective …the goal of education is little more than to equip the young for the new information economy…this whittled-down version of education is also convenient to those whose interests are well served by a docile, but technically competent, public, otherwise unable to think critically or to act as citizens.’ (Orr, in Sterling 2001, p. 7)

20 ‘The educational system did not take the natural world into account. The natural world, within modern industrialist values, was, and still is, at the mercy of human disposal. According to the father of modernism, Renee Descartes, the natural world was a machine to be manipulated and controlled.’ (O’Sullivan ‘Deep Diversity’ Resurgence Sept 2004 p 30)

21 ‘the fear of earth worship has kept Christians away from environmental issues’ Claire Foster in conversation with J Lovelock, ‘Gaia and Wisdom’, Costing the Earth? The Quest for Sustainability, St Paul’s Cathedral 10 October 2006. A Nigerian friend (Mama Toro) gasped when she saw the dried flowers hanging in my kitchen and said, ‘Eh!...in Nigeria, the Christians would call that witchcraft!’

22 Despite initiatives such as Forest Schools.

23 I see shopping as the modern equivalent to the instinct for foraging for mushrooms, roots, seeds etc

24 the Persil adverts in Uganda had taken on the role of early years advisers and said children need to get dirty to learn. The current little pink princess cult doesn’t encourage girls to rake the compost! Children also seem to spend an inordinate amount of time with TV and computers to the detriment of their relationship with nature.
splendid is on his way attended; at length the man perceives it die away, and fade into the light of common day.’

Yes, I am unashamedly with the Romantics, who expressed deep sadness at the loss of intimacy with nature at the point when people were being moved off the land or migrating to the cities due to the beginning of mechanisation. The move from cottage industries of spinning and weaving to the urban factories of the textile industry is mirrored by the transformation of education from an apprenticeship (learning by example and doing) model to a factory (transmissive) model. Britain was the first industrialised nation, and perhaps this has something to do with the fact that its children are the unhappiest of all the industrialised countries. (Moccia, 2007)

Megan (8) and Dylan(6) attend a Welsh-medium school near Cardiff. When I told them that I was planning some research, Megan said ‘boring!’ I told them that it was about children’s views about how schools could help the future, and asked what they thought. Dylan: ‘we need more outside play area...we should be allowed to play with balls.’ Meg: ‘we should be allowed to play with the nursery children in the playground’. I explained what I meant by ‘global issues’ and asked them if they discussed these much at school. Did they have a globe in the classroom? Dylan: ‘we do but we never use it.’ Meg said, ‘we fill in names of countries on maps but they don’t teach us about life there -- only old stories which would be the same anywhere, - not things that are happening now’. Dylan looked thoughtful for a while, and then said, ‘they should teach us about it.’

3. Education: why, what, who, and how?

Discourses in education are entwined with and are as wide-ranging as discourses on life itself. To illustrate the vast spectrum of discourses, I offer the following anecdote.

I attended a local authority meeting for heads of sixth forms to describe the work of Peace Child (who provide DEFRA-funded sessions for schools on sustainability and with whom we work). The first speaker was from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) talking mostly in acronyms such as LAT, ALPS and ALIS. One teacher asked for a translation into normal language. ‘Learners have a price tag to attract funding,’ the LSC was

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25 Wordsworth, Ode to Duty, 1807
26 ‘Industrialisation seems to charm people into thinking that the prime aim of life and hence of education is the development of industrial power’ (Hutchins R 53:1 in Wolf (2002)) …‘this certainly describes the dominant and increasingly triumphant philosophy of recent UK education policy.’…‘perhaps by calling into doubt some of today’s received truths and cliches we can also start to think again, in broader perspectives, about the sort of education we want for ourselves and for our children.’ Wolf (2002) p. 256
explaining to the teachers (the ‘supply side’). Funding will depend on ‘how many learners you deliver’ (students on your programmes). Success in your delivery plan depends on how many learners ‘stay and achieve’ (get a qualification). If you ‘under-deliver’ you could have money taken from you and given to providers who ‘over-deliver’ - as long as the programmes are ‘within LSC priorities’. The message is clear: you are in competition. The teachers, unsurprisingly, looked and sounded frightened. I wondered (aloud) if anyone had asked young people for their input to the LSC priorities. The contrast between the sustainability focus and LSC education ‘newspeak’ was palpable, not only to me but also to the teachers.

This contrast illustrates the spectrum regarding the aims of and approaches to education. At one end of the spectrum is the global engine of economic growth and at the other is the unique child with all her complex and vast potential, trusting that the adult world will support and nurture her. Teachers in the state system are caught, miserably, in the middle, trying to reach both ends – an impossible task. Sustainability, even if defined only in the modest terms of the ‘doorways’ (appendix 1) in the DfES sspace document, is possible only if we choose to promote the child-centred end of that spectrum. Sustainability cannot be pursued through the existing market priorities.

This section highlights the fact that western education is like the medieval rack. We are being mercilessly stretched between the instinctive humanity which we all have as children and the ‘performance’ exacted by the economic growth machinery which we have set in motion. We

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27 Alison Wolf says ‘In a centrally funded, target-driven top-down organization the main and inevitable concern of lower-level functionaries is the satisfaction of their paymasters. If the things they are being asked to produce are genuinely simple to define and inspect, then the system may indeed produce them – albeit not very efficiently. But if they are complex and difficult to measure, like the quality of a university degree, then the effects of such a system tend to be pernicious.’ She goes on to say that ‘this is especially true when one marries centralized target-driven controls with financial pressures. That, of course, is exactly the situation that modern education systems find themselves in’. (op. cit. p. 247)

28 As I had just been reading about Summerhill, ‘the oldest child democracy in the world’ (A.S.Neill), the contrast was particularly stark. Neill believed that the aim of life is to find happiness (quoted in Vaughan, 2006). At Summerhill, power is shared. The headteacher’s vote at the school meeting has the same value as that of a six year old child. ‘I see it as highly significant that there is much interest in Summerhill from abroad whereas the UK either ignores it or tries to close it down.’ (Appleton, 2002, p. 141)

29 Alison Wolf, professor of Education at the IOE, University of London, and director of the International centre for research on assessment says, ‘In the UK at least, for the last quarter century, education policy has been driven consistently by a preoccupation with growth and with workplace skills, and has involved more and more government intervention at everything from national to classroom and shop-floor level. The results have been frequently disastrous.’ (Wolf 2002 p. 244)

30 Two incidents illustrate the trap teachers are in: a jet ‘plane roared overhead as I was talking with a school council about a Green Fair we are organising at their school. I said, ‘That’s not green: it’s noisy, dirty, expensive, and military,’ then remembered, as one student looked pointedly at another, that many children in the school will come from families involved in military activities, as there is an army training centre nearby as well as a BAE Systems factory. The UK Parliament has
can escape only if we decide to refocus on education through the lens of our common humanity.  

To try to marshal the discourse, I use below the well-tried headings ‘why, what, who, and how?’ These are not, of course, mutually exclusive. 

3.1 Why?
The aims of education - economic growth or sustainability? Money or happiness?

‘Where there is no vision the people perish’ Proverbs 29.18

Currently it is hard to find any official statement which spells out the aims of our education system. Why do we do it? What is it for? One rarely hears reference, for example, to the UNESCO four pillars of education: to be, to know, to do and to live together. After WWII there was emphasis on the humanising effects of literature and the arts (A.N. Whitehead, Alec Clegg, Christian Schiller, Richard Hoggart). In the ‘60’s and ‘70’s there was some unresolved experimentation, and Holt, Illich, Postman and Weingartner, Pink Floyd and many others pointed to various negative elements of education. Since then we have removed corporal punishment from schools, but we seem to have replaced it with something else - a cold ‘managerialism’ which is dehumanising.

John Holt comments on the ‘social role selection’ function (or ‘meat stamping’) role of schools - turning people into commodities. ‘This channelling is not a task that schools do or can do well.’ ‘People once understood that a ‘scholar’ was good in school but not necessarily...

just decided to renew Trident: how can schools logically address sustainability in a country which invests in military enterprise on such a scale? At another school I mentioned the nearby BP processing works and detected the same frisson. The business world agrees. Eg. the vice president, human resources, for Oracle Europe, Middle east and Africa, makes an appeal for people not to ‘leave their humanity at the front door like a dripping umbrella awaiting collection upon exit…(and for) human relationalists to bravely show our human side’ Vance Kearney (2007)

Wolf (2002) says ‘we are sorely in need of clearer thinking about WHICH education matters, HOW, and WHEN?…we have almost forgotten that education ever had any purpose other than to promote growth….the larger and more complex the education sector, the less obvious any links to productivity become.’

‘John White emeritus prof. of philosophy of education at the Institute of Education called on education ministers to decide what the national curriculum was for and spell out the learning achievements it wanted schools and teachers to meet’ (‘What Schools are for and why’ Education Journal, 2 March 2007).

Delors (1996)

‘despite so many of Illich’s predictions of 30 years ago being realised (the World Wide Web, learning networks, etc) there is still no sign of a radical change in schooling.’ Meighan (2003) p. 123

‘the a priori of academic success and increased competitiveness, underscored by parental expectations takes up the reins where the cane left off. In some ways it is even harder to rebel against. The sources of guilt and anxiety are not so easily defined, although their effects are still clearly felt.’ (Appleton (2002) p.149)
outside it,’ ...and ‘teacher-pleasing’ becomes a skill in this context (1972 p.248).

‘So much of what is good about our world is due...to the traditions of independent thought and critical enquiry’...‘Our preoccupation with education as an engine of growth has not only narrowed the way we think about social policy. It has also narrowed -dismally and progressively- our vision of education itself.’ (Wolf, 2002, p. 254-6)

Education ‘is a ‘positional good’ (as the economists call it) – one which gains much of its value from whether you have more than other people...the rewards your education bring are as much to do with being labelled a ‘top’ or a ‘near the top’ sort of person as they are to do with the curriculum you studied...fourteen-year-olds who are failing academically quite rationally lose motivation’ (Wolf, 2002, p.251)

Now there seems to be an emptiness at the heart of education. I have concluded that the lack of a clearly articulated statement of aims is because the underlying aim is not laudable. It is about creating automatons to service the economy, in other words, commodification. If we want sustainability, this will not do. So, fundamentally, and firstly, we have to decide, together, on aims for education that we can be proud of - and keep them under review.

3.2 What?
What are we addressing? - Identity, diversity and spirituality

The current UK model of education is an anachronistic37 device for moulding learners into employees. No wonder we have an ‘overburdened curriculum’38 which tends to deal in abstractions, leaving no room for children to work out their identity (culture) or understand diversity. ‘The power of abstraction’, says Terry Eagleton, ‘is an ambiguous gift, at once creative and destructive. If it allows us to think of whole communities, it also allows us to lay waste to them with chemical weapons.’ He says that political power without culture is a dangerous abstraction.39

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37 ‘Mass schooling was developed in an information-impoverished society’...and is haunted by ‘the ghosts of architects, bookwriters and our ancestors.’ The ‘language and thinking... is hardened history’ (Meighan 2003, p.68-71)
38 Sir Keith Ajegbo’s report January 2007: said identity and diversity should be a new element of secondary citizenship education. Teacher unions questioned adding ‘diversity’ to ‘an already overcrowded curriculum’. The ATL general secretary said ‘though the review suggests ways in which schools can promote diversity & citizenship it does not take into account the lack of time available to teach these issues within the current overburdened curriculum and overwhelming emphasis on getting pupils through tests.’
39 The Big issue in the north 12 march 07 p.21 ‘The Meaning of Meaning’
'So basic is its negative impact on citizenship, that a curriculum which fails to take on the children’s experience of racism is not worth the paper it’s written on.’ Claire, 2001, p.47

Embracing cultural diversity is fundamental to sustainability. It is such a crucial factor that I offer a few illustrative cultural perspectives regarding food, transport, institutions, art, religion, occupation and education:

Discussion with a man of Hindu heritage (and a leading member of a community NGO) regarding sugar-snap peas:
Man: I like these
Me: yes so do I but I never buy them
Man: why not?
Me: because they’re grown as a cash crop using loads of water where water is in short supply, and then flown thousands of miles.
Man: I hadn’t thought of it like that
Me: we explain this in schools – trying to encourage buying of local and ethical produce
Man: Our community (in UK) eats all kinds of Indian fruit and vegetables
Me: well, I think we have to try to eat what grows locally even if we’re used to something else.
Man: yes...
Me: ...for example, some people in UK eat strawberries out of season which have been flown half way round the world in substantial plastic packaging because they’re fragile — it’s ridiculous — we have to stop.
Man:.... in our culture we respect food and the energy it gives us
Me: yes...whereas in British culture there is little respect for food and loads of waste. (2007)

An American I know says he likes to feel the power surge as he changes gear in his car, despite UK roads being so crowded and speed restriction in the US. He says this is more important to him than ‘sustainability’.

Mama Toro (of Yoruba descent, now living in the UK) sees herself as a missionary in the UK, redressing colonialism. She says organisations still speak ‘big grammar’ and, ‘Art in my culture is not just for placing the eyes...it’s functional.’ Of African women she comments, ‘they need a role, but they’ve diverted us with religion.’ Of a young Nigerian graduate she says, ‘she was so bombarded with religion that her brain was all gone.’...'You can see the confusion in new Africans coming here'. ‘Cultural training should be about sharing cultural ideas, not just ‘telling’ one culture’.  

40 To give an idea of her personality, she says, ‘Do I look like someone who can be contained in a classroom?’ – (the answer is not!) Conversations with Mama Toro, April 2006
Cultural conflicts within UK society are explored in the films ‘Billy Elliott,’ and ‘Kes’\(^{41}\): about boys who don’t fit into their local mining cultures. One excels at ballet and the other finds a young kestrel and learns falconry from books stolen from the library. Both families despair of their boys. Do schools help or hinder in situations like these? A sustainable school would welcome diversity, promoting understanding and support through discussion. What about different cultural approaches to dress, marriage, early pregnancy, divorce and domestic violence? The current model of school gives little time or commitment for children to find or follow their own interests or explore vital and urgent life issues (see Claire, 2001, p.107-125).\(^{42}\)

Life involves conflict. Education for sustainability, and its close relative, ‘citizenship,’ acknowledge and address the causes of conflict. They teach alternatives to conflict through participation, equality, inclusivity, diversity.\(^{43}\) Children, (and adults) need and want to understand it, hence the power of drama which explores conflict:

- between different groups of people\(^{44}\) (whether divided by age, class, nationality, culture\(^{45}\) and so on)
- between humanity and nature - at local and global levels.
- between institutions/groups and individuals
- between needs, wants and available resources
- between materialistic and more ‘spiritual’ worldviews

It follows that schools should help students develop the skills needed to deal with conflict such as critical thinking, philosophy, negotiation, role-play, real decision-making - and connections.

Spirituality (a concept which has been hijacked by institutionalised religion) is used here to mean the connection with each other and with nature which is central to sustainability. ‘Gregory Bateson asks, ‘Why do schools teach almost nothing of the pattern that connects?’ A reductionist mindset finds expression in the division of arts and sciences; separate subject disciplines; grade apartheid; individualised learning; the

\(^{41}\) From the novel, ‘A Kestrel for a Knave’ Barry Hines 1968
\(^{42}\) In one of my sessions (only half an hour) a child volunteered (in the presence of his peers) that he had experience of domestic violence. I doubt the curriculum in his school allowed discussion of live issues such as this.
\(^{43}\) Active citizenship, says Claire, involves ‘empowerment, empathy, identity, diversity, ethics, action and vision (2001), p.2
\(^{44}\) Not only humans but other species too get into conflict and war between groups due to dwindling territory or resources, eg. meerkats, chimps.
\(^{45}\) An illustration of an everyday cultural difference created not by religion but by climate and engineering traditions, is the following anecdote relating to insurance staff based in Pune, India. ‘In 2005, for instance, Norwich Union had to relocate back to the UK the job of taking customers’ first calls to make a claim. This followed misunderstanding arising from cultural differences. For instance, customers with flooding from immersion heaters struggled to get their message across to staff who didn’t have such heaters.’ People Management (The magazine of the chartered institute of personnel and development) Feb 07 www.peoplemanagement.co.uk
setting-down of strict and specific learning objectives to be performance tested with no allowance for unexpected or spontaneous insights...; the strict delineation of who is the teacher and who is the learner; and the arm’s length relationship between the school and the world beyond the school gate. Such is the inhospitable environment into which transformative educators have struggled to introduce curricula, teaching materials, and learning experiences built upon the concepts of inter-human and human-nature interconnectedness, interdependence, interrelationship and justice. Seeds scattered on largely stony ground.' (Selby, 2004)

Peace Child runs programmes for schools which do connect the local and global. They discuss our ecological ‘footprints’ in terms of food, energy, waste, water, and so on. The part of these excellent workshops which children especially remember is the description of life in rural India by a young Indian intern. They are invited to compare this life with their own – to make the connection. They imagine sleeping outside to protect the animals from predators, collecting water, cooking with wood, and shopping only once or twice a year. They get a glimpse of lives lived closer to nature than their own. They begin to realise how much ‘stuff’ they have and how many resources they use. Without any reference to religion, this is a ‘spiritual’ approach to education (in that it makes the connection between our lives and non-materialistic aspirations).

‘Spirituality’, says O’Sullivan, ‘for us has been an invitation to open again a door that was closed by modernist values.’

“We need most of all to renew that love and empathy for nature that we lost when we began our love affair with city life,’ says Lovelock (2006, p.8); and Montessori regarded man’s interdependence with nature as both physical and spiritual: ‘the most important fact really is the liberation of the child...from the bonds which isolate him in the artificial life created by living in cities.’

Stephan Harding (2006) has heroically tackled the task of writing about Gaia even though ‘words cannot reproduce nature; they exist in totally different worlds.’ Harding articulates ‘the need for understanding, for contact with the realm of meaning, where we seek intimacy and connection with what has been explained. Understanding...seeks only empathy and a sense of mystery. Explanation is rational; understanding is

47 Olly, my notetaker for 2 sessions, said that it was a ‘spiritual experience’ (and he is not known for being sentimental!)
48 Edmund O’Sullivan ‘Deep Diversity’ in Resurgence, p. 30 Sept 2004
49 Montessori ‘The Discovery of the Child’ p.98 in Lillard 1972, p.141
50 John Fowles, quoted in Harding, 2006 p.13
intuitive. Reconnecting these two several branches of our psyche is a vitally important task if we are to respond appropriately to the vast ecological crisis that our culture has released upon the world’ (p.13)

The business world also recognises that we need both: ‘Intuition and rational analysis can both be effective, but each is fallible – so managers need to be skilled in both approaches rather than applying one or other indiscriminately.’

‘In trying to rise above our own nature we have not become more godly, but have lost contact with the sensations of life that make it such a vivid, all-embracing experience….many religious leaders/prophets have said ‘become like little children’” (Appleton, 2002, p.142-4)

Emotional and passionate engagement in learning has been marginalised by the over-rationalisation perpetuated by our Gradgrind approach to education with its emphasis on measurable targets (despite attempts to redress this with initiatives such as ‘Awe and Wonder’).

‘There is nothing more needed by humanity today than the recovery of a sense of ‘beyondness’ in the whole of life to revive the spring of wonder’ ..

‘children are moulded by an educational system in a language that is written and spoken without being felt’

In his poem, ‘Naming of parts’ Henry Reed (1946) poignantly compares the military and reductive process of naming the parts of a gun with the holistic ‘dance’ of nature which surrounds him.

If the commentators quoted above (and many others) are right, and, as James Lovelock says, ‘emotional connection with the planet is natural,’ it is clear that we need to review our educational priorities. The next question then becomes who should be involved in the debate and who decides on priorities?

51 Eugene Sadler-Smith, prof of management development, School of management Univ of Surrey. People Management (The magazine of the chartered institute of personnel and development) Feb 07 www.peoplemanagement.co.uk
52 This, and other initiatives such as Eco-schools, Extended Schools, Building Schools for the Future, and Healthy Schools are some responses to the felt need to address sustainability through holistic learner-centred education, but they can be embraced only when the old reductive paradigm is dismantled.
53 in conversation with Claire Foster, ‘Gaia and Wisdom’, Costing the Earth? The Quest for Sustainability, St Paul’s Cathedral 10.10.06
3.3 Who?
Children’s apparent ineligibility to contribute to the debate stems from three main sources: lack of democracy in schools, Britain’s ambivalence towards children’s rights, and patronising attitudes towards children.

Democracy
Currently the government decides, hand in hand with big business. In the DfES white paper on further education (2006), the word ‘listen’ comes in only once and it relates to listening to employers. If the ‘who’ changed, so that young people, parents, teachers and the community did the decision-making about education, then the why, what, how, (and probably when and where) would naturally change.

Unfortunately children, and all the other stakeholders, have been marginalised in relation to education by the stranglehold of central government.

‘most public schools are, by definition, conservative guarantors of the status quo rather than institutions of social change…Public schools are the single most important institutions for children in most parts of the world….we need to convince governments that making them centres for promoting local democracy and community responsibility is not only in the interest of achieving sustainable development, but also, in the long run, the best guarantee of the kind of national political stability that schools are supposed to offer a nation state.’ Hart, 1997, p.57

‘no organisation is more important to the progress of democratic experimentalism than the school. The school and the political and economic order set constraints upon each other’ Unger, 1998, p. 229

How can we expect children to be active citizens if we don’t allow schools to be democracies by removing prescription?

‘The involvement of children and young people in education… has not been facilitated by developments in policy and practice. Through the National Curriculum and implementation of numeracy and literacy hours, education has become more ‘monolithic, prescriptive and centralised’

54 ‘we will listen to employers and respond to their requirements as set out in sector skills agreements (SSAs). SSAs, which will be an agreement between Government, the SSC and employers, will be the mechanism for determining priorities for the use of public funding for adult training and skills.’ DFES (2006a).

55 Politicians are conservative about education, so they say that parents want the status quo. When I asked Hilary Benn, Minister for Overseas Development (September 2005) if DfID was trying to persuade the DFES to make global/citizenship/sustainable education central, he replied that parents want the current competition-based model. In my experience, this is not the case: the many parents I have listened to want their children to be happy. I do not agree that parents have been consulted.
These features have continued with the ‘quasi-market’ pressures of performance league tables (Wyness, 2000, p.97) resulting in an ‘emphasis in the products of the curriculum rather than an emphasis on the processes in the school which could be improved to facilitate participation and democratic involvement (Wyse, 2001, p.215). Such involvement has been further undermined by the lack of rights accorded to children within the education system. Davies & Kilpatrick have highlighted the contrast between young people in Britain and their European peers.’

Children’s rights

The UK is clearly wary of children’s rights and neglect of this issue is another major component of the ‘rack’.

Professor Lyon (2007) interrogates the concentration on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) instead of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) in the development of children’s rights in England: ‘The ECHR is potentially a very useful vehicle for the promotion of children’s equal rights as citizens…but the UK government seems to avoid promoting the ECHR either in any guidance issued to those supporting vulnerable children or in any coherent programme relating to taking much further forward the development of the rights of children in England (eg. see the curriculum notes on Citizenship, DfES 2006, and the inspection report on the teaching of citizenship, Ofsted 2006). It could be suggested that the government has no real interest in promoting children’s rights, as was made plain by the then minister for children, Margaret Hodge, in debates on the Children Bill 2004 surrounding the inclusion of any reference to the promotion of the rights of children in the potential duties of the Children’s Commissioner…In reality the government in England seems keener on promoting children’s interests as it defines them (my italics) than in the promotion of children’s rights formulated by an international body. UNCRC is not part of domestic law.’

56 A recent example of this is school staff attitudes to school councils: I was trying to contact a secondary school council to ask if they were interested in getting involved in a local ‘Green’ event. It took tenacity (about 5 phone calls) to make contact with the [senior] teacher involved who said the council was keen on green issues. I expected the teacher to ask the chair of the school council if a visitor could come to ask their views, but instead the teacher asked the headteacher if it would be OK for someone to come in who was ‘from outside school’ and ‘from a lobbying organisation’ (Friends of the Earth) in case there was any ‘lack of balance’. Two years earlier I had tried to invite sixth formers to a free Peace Child workshop, but was fended off by a (different) teacher. This attitude is not untypical of many others in this part of England, in demonstrating the nervousness of many schools when it comes to engaging with the community and with ‘issues’. The school council itself does not even expect to be consulted.

57 She continues, ‘Individual children cannot take complaints to the Commissioner as they can in N Ireland or Wales. The Children Act 2004 part 1 statute in section 2(ii) merely requires the Children’s Commissioner to ‘have regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)” when considering what constitutes the ‘interests of children’...This reference to the UNCRC is...the only time in the Act where reference can be found to the word ‘rights’... The duties of other UK commissioners, and other equivalent office-holders throughout the world specifically
Patronising and confused attitudes towards children

‘Children’s disenfranchisement has also been justified by ‘the western ‘standard model of childhood’ (which) originated in 19th century western thinking and has spread across the globe. As the western model claims to be universal, it makes the collection of information about children seem unnecessary and penalises children whose childhoods appear to deviate from the western norm. It can’t be used for effective policy making... Pursuit of adult interests presenting children as passive and dependent... reinforces monopoly on power claimed by the adult world ... There is a need for increased participation of children in decisions that affect them.’ (SCF,1995, paras 3.4-4.3)

This model of childhood also includes ideas about children lacking responsibility, being unreliable, incompetent and irresponsible. Anxieties about children’s health and safety restrict children’s activities and present further barriers to children’s autonomy. The balance between protection on one hand, and freedom and franchise on the other (the ‘snow in the wellies’ syndrome) has become skewed.

’Society constructs the children it needs. Instead of policies to protect children in the community, the government and media have preferred to promote policies to protect the community from children.’

‘The assumption has long been held that children are either unable or unentitled to have a point of view’ (Greig & Taylor,1999, p.46).

The 3 year old boy ate some chocolate with relish, then pushed his head into a cushion and said with real contrition, ‘I didn’t share it with you!’

highlight the promotion of children’s rights under the UNCRC. Lyon, 2006 ‘Our government now has to make sure that every child has all the rights in the Convention except the 2 they have reservations about (articles 10 and 37): Article 10 is the right to freedom of expression which includes the right to receive information’. ‘New children’s services authorities and children’s trusts etc are all expected, ‘but not legally obliged’, to comply with the requirements of the UNCRC in their work with children and families(Lyon 2006, p.148). Article 14 is ‘the right to be free from discrimination...on any grounds, which includes age.’ (Little Book of Rights and Responsibilities, UNICEF,2003). The media has had a negative impact in depicting the ECHR as giving ‘nonsensical rights’...and the lack of the promotion by the state of awareness amongst children, not only of the UNCRC but also of the ECHR in itself puzzled the UNCRC (2002a) ‘Interrogating the concentration on the UNCRC instead of the ECHR in the development of children’s rights in England.’ (Lyon 2007)

58 ‘Historical analysis of child employment in the UK reveals that it became socially unacceptable only in the relatively recent post-industrial era’ (Goldson, 1997b; Hobbs & McKechnie 1997, in Such and Walker 2004)

59 Franklin, ed 95.5, in Lloyd-Smith & Taylor, p.70

60 ‘In western societies there is a belief in childhood innocence, and allowing children the freedom to indulge their childish ways without the responsibilities of adulthood. However, romantic, sentimentalised views potentially undermine their status as people whose opinions, perspectives and choices should be taken seriously.’ (Pollard, Theissen and Filer, 1997)
Research with children points to their moral engagement with family, peer, community and societal issues. Also, children display moral competence in their discussion of relationships; issues of justice, equal distribution and sharing are confronted” (Mayall, 2002, p.88) in Such and Walker (2004). ‘There is a need for further discussion regarding ‘the concept of responsibility from children’s perspectives’ and a link with the concept of ‘rights’ … children and adults alike engage in morally and socially responsible acts. Recognition may improve the status of children in society which, in turn, may enhance the possibility of children being listened to and their rights being respected’ (Mayall, 2002, ibid.)

Hilary Claire’s research (‘Not Aliens’, 2001), shows that children are seriously under-estimated in their ability, willingness and competence to contribute to debate on complex and serious issues. Children come to school carrying such issues with them, but the issues remain unaddressed (or superficially addressed) due to prescribed priorities.

Patronising attitudes towards children are endemic, not just in schools but in British culture. Meighan says ‘In research into consulting pupils about teaching, heads said:-
-it’s dangerous to involve children in this kind of comment on their teachers
-discipline would be adversely affected by this kind of exercise
-it is bad for classroom relationships
-children are not competent to judge these matters
(even though the teachers had seen information on previous research which contradicted all the above)’ (2003, p.15)

Such and Walker say that ‘modern constructions of childhood are ambivalent about the role of responsibility in children’s lives…such ambivalence can be partly accounted for by the marginalisation of children themselves in discussion of the form, content and nature of childhood.’ (2004, p.232)

What is clear is that the concept of ‘the child’ needs a thorough overhaul if we are to be fair to children and to society as a whole.

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61 Christensen, 2002; Moss & Petrie 2002; Thompson & Holland 2002; O’Toole 03, in Such & Walker 2004

62 ‘The fault-line between children’s moral agency and their low moral status, however, manifests itself in ambiguity in their discourses: children have been shown to both ‘downgrade’ and fiercely defend their moral competence’ (Mayall 2002 p.110) …The findings point to the importance of conceptual rigour in discussions of responsibility. For example, new labour has frequently used the concepts of ‘rights and responsibilities in its discussions of the duties of parents and the anti-social behaviour of children and young people, but has not yet adequately and unambiguously defined what these rights and responsibilities constitute (cf James and Bell 2000, Deacon 2002) The balance between the responsibilities of parents is unresolved in policy and is dominated by the assumed ‘natural’ irresponsibility of children” (Such & Walker 2004, p. 240)
3.4 How?

Efs sees humans as creatures indivisible from nature (in that we affect it and it affects us - both physically and emotionally) but who can choose how we live. Choice defines efs: it is education which empowers individuals and communities by giving us the skills, motivation and information to make responsible choices about how to live our lives with a view to the future.

How much choice is available to children vis a vis schools? Firstly, children are forced to attend school. John Holt says, ‘universal compulsory schools are not and never were meant to be humane institutions…The custodial function is an expression of adults’ general dislike and distrust of the young…school is a kind of dayjail for kids… School attendance laws mean it’s school or jail…some boys choose jail if given the choice…That school is compulsory means we don’t get feedback from students as they can’t walk out. Since we can’t at the same time and in the same place be in the jail business and in the learning business we must get ourselves out of the jail business… one way is to keep schools open all year round…’ (‘72, p. 242-6)

The school system is an ‘essential denial of the child’s capacity for self-regulation. It is a vicious circle of half-truths, a visionary no-man’s land.’ Appleton 02, p.149

If schools were places where children could choose their own programmes of activity and were free to express their views, children would be motivated and compulsion would be unnecessary. Choice is denied, however, by endless testing. The ATL general secretary says that the system of national testing and league tables is failing a generation. ‘This is not education - this is training – and the consequences are catastrophic.’ Fear is a consequence.

‘we are anti-life and pro-death if we are pawns of politicians, merchants, or exploiters. We are pawns because we were trained to seek life negatively, humbly fitting ourselves into an authoritarian society.’

A.S Neill, Vaughan, 2006, p.137

‘Life is about recapturing lost freedoms. Through school and work we encourage each other to believe that we are not free and that we are not responsible,’ says Hodgkinson (2006, p.3)

‘a system that fights against life needs fear to maintain it’

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63 ‘motivation for learning is considered particularly important in the context of concern to develop lifelong learners as needed in the current rapidly changing society’ (Andrews R and Harten W (2006) p290)
64 ‘Primary Schools likened to boot camps’ Alexandra Frean, The Times 2 April 2007
There is too much fear built into our education system, for both children and staff. It is probably the major component of the education 'rack.'

'schools in which children are bullied by autocratic adults, herded, ordered around, shouted at and shown no respect are unlikely to achieve their goals of instilling democratic ideas, and cannot claim to be providing opportunities for experiencing citizenship'. Schools with 'lovely displays' of children's work 'may still be those that counteract the messages with authoritarian approaches to behaviour management' Claire, 2001, p.107

The esf model depends on cooperation and democracy rather than competition and authoritarianism. Esf is about interconnectedness: reconnecting children with adults, school with community, mind with body, curriculum with real life, and so on. Theory and practice go together.

'by placing the development of practical capacities at the centre of education we also give tangible expression to the idea...that there is more in us...than there is in any list of the social and cultural orders, the sciences and the arts, that we have established.'...‘the school should concern itself primarily with the development of generic capacities by contrast to both training in specialized skills and the passive transmittal of information etc.’ Capacities ‘may be practical as well as conceptual ... The heart of this education in capacities is the transfiguration of the actual by the imagination of the possible.’ This would ‘render insubstantial the differences between the conception and the execution of practical tasks’ (and) ‘make the world safer for the type of context–transcending being who should become the agent of democracy and experimentalism alike’ (Unger 1998 p.230)

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65 He goes on to say, 'To remove the fear without changing the system is a half measure that is sure to fall short.' (Appleton (2002) p.149) He notes that Japanese education is preparation for an ant-like society, leading to repressed rebellion and frustration which lead to cruelty outbursts (2002) p.146

66 ‘today’s principles and ideas are too much set on self perfection and self-realization’...The goal of self development is rather for service to mankind as well as individual happiness. (Montessori, (1949) quoted Lillard 1972.p.31) On authoritarianism and democracy see Lippitt & White (1958) in Meighan (2003) p.69.

67 ‘mental development must be connected with movement and be dependent on it’ Montessori, ‘The absorbent mind’ quoted in Lillard 1972 p.140

68 Klein describes a high school ethical fashion show where the kids realise that their uniform is probably made in sweatshops, so ‘the school had its work cut out for it.’ (2001, p.397-9)

69 Instrumental thinking - separating the meaning of the activity from the activity itself - leads to alienation. (Holly 73, in Meighan 2003, p.72)
Schumacher College’s focus on holistic science, matches its holistic philosophy of household management. All participants share the cooking, cleaning, composting, gardening and so on. The related Small School, Hartland, N. Devon also treats food as central: children cook each day for the whole school. In the mainstream however, ‘in most secondary schools, it is still the case that Science has become, in Bertrand Russell’s terms, ‘a grave of intelligence’ because of ‘the polarization of science and domestic science: if it’s relevant or applied its inferior.’ (Meighan 2003 p.112)

Summerhill is well known as a democratic school. It hopes that its students will develop ‘self esteem, tolerance, integrity, fairness, compassion, assertiveness and humour. Its aims are:

- to allow children the freedom to grow emotionally
- To give children power over their own lives
- To give children the time to develop naturally
- To create a happier childhood by removing fear and coercion by adults’  (Vaughan 2006 p.119)

Unfortunately Summerhill has enemies. Its inspection in 1999 by Ofsted said more about Ofsted than about Summerhill. ‘At heart, (Ofsted’s) opposition stems from an anti-progressive and increasingly authoritarian Zeitgeist that has long regarded the freedom of Summerhill as an affront to more coercive notions of schooling, certainly held by the then chief inspector, Chris Woodhead.’  

70 ‘Self esteem, the focus of Every Child Matters, IS sustainability, but the principles of esd need translation for schools’. 05 Jake Reynolds, seconded into the DfES by the Sustainability Commission (JakeReynolds@dfes.gsi.gov.uk)

71 Prof Ian Stronach of Manchester University, the ‘independent expert’ for Summerhill (in Vaughan 06 p.131). Stronach said his chapter about the Ofsted inspection is ‘an indictment of the inspectorial process. It is also a case study of ‘the audit’ culture in action, providing insight into the defective culture and ethos of government agencies, in particular the lengths they will go to in order to make sure that evidence and reason do not get in the way of policy….The inspection neglected the aims of the school because HMI didn’t value these aims. The inspection ‘framework’ conflated ‘the quality of teaching’ with the ‘quality of education.’ …. 100% parental support was discounted by HMI, and despite 8 inspectors for 60 pupils, there are no records of interviews with pupils. One parent said that HMI were ‘entering a racoon at a dog show.’( p.118-122).

‘It was a blatant attack on an alternative model of schooling by HMI. Summerhill appealed and The Nuffield foundation found that Ofsted did not investigate (the school’s) values in practice. Ofsted said the aims were a barrier to ‘real improvement’ (standards). Learning out of lessons was not valued. Ofsted blamed the school for placing an unacceptable burden of responsibility on the pupils tantamount to an abdication of professional responsibility – fundamental distrust of children embodied in Ofsted. Education and curriculum are interchangeable terms….the term ‘education’ seems to have lost all meaning’ (p.119-120)

Students said they ‘felt really harassed by the inspectors’, so some did not attend lessons. Student views were not recorded in the 99 report, except where they were discounted. Teachers views were also discounted. ‘I don’t know how they did it….how they missed the point so badly…Maybe subconsciously they want Summerhill to fail ‘cos they missed the chance to come here themselves’ (13 year old, p. 122) ‘The inspectors had an agenda that young children had a right to compulsory knowledge and compulsory skills by a certain ages…’(teacher, p.123; Vaughan 06)
‘Education is either for domestication or for freedom...an initial choice is required of the educator.’ Joao da Veiga Coutinho in his preface to Freire 1972 p.9

It is clearly time for us to listen to what Montessori said in 1948:

‘humanity can hope for a solution for its problems, the most urgent of which are those of peace and unity, only by turning its attention and energies to the discovery of the child and the development of the great potentialities of the human personality in the course of its construction.’

‘if small children can achieve spontaneously, and without effort, what bureaucrats with their...long-winded speeches find such a struggle to reach,...why do we put so much faith in them and so little in the innate humanity of children?’ Appleton 2002, p.144

4. Theoretical, substantive and methodological issues: an essay on diversity

For reasons outlined in section two above, I regard all knowledge as relative because humans will forever grope towards the truth and argue about the meaning of life. Terry Eagleton’s new book ‘The Meaning of Life' concludes that happiness and love are the meaning of life (rather than power, wealth and desire). The good life, he says, is like a jazz band in which each performer contributes to the greater good of the whole...simply by expressing herself.

No one person or group knows ‘the truth’, so wisdom is to be found, and should be nurtured, in the complexity of the grassroots rather than in the pinnacles of power (whether political, corporate, ecclesiastical or academic). The logical outcome of this view is that we must all listen to each other and work together. In the case of schools, viewed as microcosms, the grassroots is the children, and the younger they are, the closer to the roots they are (assuming that we all become corrupted by

‘Summerhill is an alternative to systems that have not found ways of combating racism, bullying, sexual abuse and which are straight-jacketed by a narrow National Curriculum and undermined by large classes and where the tyranny of examination results is worse than ever....(Ofsted’s) behaviour is frequently in breach of its own proclaimed standards....It is freedom or nothing because if it is not freedom it is not Summerhill...freedom is not negotiable.’ (Geoffrey Robertson QC, p125-6 Vaughan 2006)


73 ...‘The task for politics, then, is to create this sort of community on a wider scale’. The meaning of meaning, The Big Issue in the north, 12 march 2007
powers conferred by the dominant culture – to greater or lesser degrees – to the extent that we participate in it).

I see ‘globalisation’ as worldwide conformity to western values which reify and ‘defend’ consumerism. Bello talks of a ‘crying need for an alternative system of global governance.’ He says, ‘the broad principles of an alternative order have already been articulated, and it is really a question of specifying these broad principles to concrete societies in ways that respect the diversity of societies’ (2002, p.112). My underlying assumption is that we must quickly learn an ‘alternative system’ not only of global governance but also of everyday life. Sustainability is the name for that ‘alternative system.’ Instead of a monetary bottom line, sustainability is measured in terms of inclusion (equal participation) and this is dependent on diversity.

4.1 Diversity is key to sustainability

As an LEA officer with responsibility for equalities and inclusion, it was often a real challenge to persuade secondary schools to acknowledge and celebrate diversity (whether in terms of culture, language, individual learning styles or SEN). Children are problematised, whilst the system is not questioned. Children are not seen as having mental health problems due to the stresses they experience at home and school. Rather, growing numbers of young people are treated as misfits - labelled as having Special Educational Needs, prescribed drugs, excluded or drop out from school. The secondary school can be a hotbed of tension, staff and student absence, and bullying - and prisons are full of dyslexic young men.74

This does not mean that teachers are to blame. On the contrary, they are as much victims of the system as children. The driving force behind the behemoth of the education system is economic ‘growth.’ 75 Our current notion of ‘school’ is based on a factory model which sees the headteacher as ‘production manager’76 and children as units to be ‘treated’ (rather than acknowledging their individual interests, skills, histories, knowledge, learning styles). This mental model has the effect of requiring conformity in the ‘raw material’ on the ‘production line’ which...

74 when an adult ‘client’ gets angry due to frustration with an inflexible system the local authority gags him with injunctions. Colin was diagnosed dyspraxic at age 5 but his family did not know. His dad died just as Colin was due to move school in Hull at age 13 and his world fell apart due to bullying (which dad had previously dealt with). Colin was forced to attend a residential adolescent unit. Many of the other children were victims of abuse and Colin was then subject to their behavioural problems. He was diagnosed as having severe dyspraxia in his 30s. (conversations with Colin who now describes himself as neurodiverse (2007).

75 see Illich, Wolf, Sterling, Kemmis, Holt, Orr, Capra, Kumar, Selby, Tasker to name just a few of the very many who are saying this.

76 Meighan 2003,p.79
means that the system must try to squash diversity and hence the intelligence inherent within it.

Thinking behind education policy is lagging seriously behind the scientific community who have at last acknowledged James Lovelock’s Gaia theory of self regulation and the importance of biodiversity for natural systems. Humans are now beginning to understand the conceptual connections between bio-systems, chaos theory, postmodern ‘relativism’ and human ‘whole systems’ – and struggling towards the implications.

These theories on diversity, and my professional experience with whole-systems working (participatory multi-perspective dialogue) confirmed my sense (and experience) that all voices should be heard, not only for the sake of equity, but also because decisions reached through a multi-perspective process are well triangulated and more likely to yield positive results. If the blind men had talked to each other they might have built up a better picture of the elephant.

Diversity counterbalances the corruptions of power. My experience in SEN, for example, taught me that parents’ and children’s views are more reliable than (powerful) ‘professional’ opinions, since professionals are trained to look at a problem from a particular angle whereas the family experience the problem daily and holistically. The institutionally-produced expert is prone to arrogance so professionals need to communicate more effectively and on an equal footing with each other and with parents and children if they are not to abuse their power and make appalling and far-reaching mistakes.

In terms of human diversity, ‘just as language poses no great problem, neither does nationality or skin colour. These are prejudices that children learn from adults.’ 

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77 Used both to build community and agency relationships at local level and to explore issues such as the effects of domestic violence on children, low achievement in an area, child welfare, or racial harassment.

78 Consider, as an example, the dominance Tesco has acquired over small shops. Also, Freire’s theories about conscientization and participation underpin ‘Reflect’ methodology which uses ‘commissions’ to monitor and address power differentials in groups (Freire 1970).

79 There are many examples, such as the 1980s Cleveland ‘epidemic’ of child abuse cases based on the highly dubious diagnoses of Dr Marietta Higgs which were based on her interpretation of something she heard at a conference. ‘The dangers of the overspecialization involved in professionalism were analysed by Ivan Illich in ‘The Right to Useful Unemployment.’ Illich saw professions as literally disabling because we hand over power to professionals, and submit to the ‘bondage of clients’ (Illich 1977, in Hodgkinson 2006, p40-1)

80 ‘It is where concerns within and across different professions diverge, that no man’s land in between, where children are most at risk of long term damage or even brushes with death’ Greig A & Taylor J(1999), p 17
will be holistic as opposed to reductive. The Romantics saw children as having an innate sense of wisdom (‘The Child is father of the Man’\textsuperscript{81}) and I agree with them that young children demonstrate an instinctive prioritisation of relationships above possessions - the spiritual above the material - which adults tend to lose.\textsuperscript{82}

### 4.2 Modes of thinking/learning/knowing

The concept of diversity underlies postmodern modes of discourse (which return legitimacy to holistic rather than reductive thinking, or, in other words, cultural rather than scientific knowledge). By ‘scientific’ knowledge I mean positivist/reductive/measurable/modern, whereas cultural knowledge is more interpretivist/holistic/intuitive postmodern/ancestral. The former is man-made and the latter respects complexity, culture and nature (cf. Western and traditional healing).\textsuperscript{83}

I would say that sustainability is a postmodern phenomenon whereas schools are the epitome of modernist institutions because they seem designed to reduce complexity. Through commodification (packaging, marketing, insistence on ‘standards’ and branding) they create dependency just as supermarkets do. They impose conformity and suppress diversity (killing the opposition through dominance). People find it hard to imagine life without them.

In the same way that a focus on the appearance of the kitchen (gleaming worktops unsullied by food preparation) hinders healthy cooking (packaged microwave meals replace use of messy fresh foods), streamlined schools and curricula hinder learning about interconnectedness – and how to live one’s life sustainably. My son (aged 29) says, ‘packaged food saves washing up’...but then he has mountains of packaging to deal with, so which is worse? Has his schooling helped

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\textsuperscript{81} Wordsworth, My Heart Leaps Up, 1807

\textsuperscript{82} The Every Child Matters Green Paper (pre Dec 2003) consultation asked ‘What is important to you?’ and explained, 'A year or so ago, we asked loads of people what they thought was important during childhood and what makes children grow up happy and not feel ‘left out’. Not everyone agreed of course, but most children and young people thought it was important to:

- Be as healthy as possible, and choose a healthy lifestyle
- Stay safe and be protected from harm and abuse
- Enjoy life and learn skills to prepare for growing up
- Make a contribution to society and not behave badly or commit crimes

Most adults also thought it was important to have enough money, although this didn’t seem to bother children and young people much: you thought family and friends were more important.' So the ‘economic well-being’ outcome was added.

\textsuperscript{83} I compared 5 families I know well to examine their modes of operation comparing their behaviours on a ‘scientific’ and ‘cultural’ thinking axis. An example of this is their different approaches to medical support. A holistic/cultural approach to health would be focused on nature (high quality organic food and exercise such as walking, running, gardening), whereas a reductive/scientific approach would be based on man-made products (prescribed drugs, branded food supplements, gym attendance). Our theories are apparent in the ways we deal with the various aspects of our lives. One tends to see a consistency of approach to these aspects: eg. food, waste disposal, health, gardening, travel, and so on. (Oakes, ‘Home Thoughts’ on www.Voice-International.net ).
him develop the tools to work out real-life dilemmas? Discussing the issue of sustainability one is aware of underlying theories in various stages of development. Can schools identify and explore these theories? Can they connect our real lives with the big issues such as climate change, peak oil, poverty and excess? Amory Lovins et al (1998 p.50) show, for example, the mathematics of energy used in food production. This is the kind of mathematics which, if taught in school, would be useful. It is what people need to know to make decisions about what they eat, where to source it and how to manage all the related activities of everyday life.84

4.3 Methodology
This research is consistent with the critical theory paradigm in that I am explicitly articulating and challenging power differentials in the status quo and my intention is to assist in the process of change. My research design is, I hope, consistent with my ontology and epistemology (as expressed above) in that it is holistic, broad-based, collaborative and continuing. It is a natural development of my normal activities, one of which involves discussions with school groups about sustainability, evaluating the work of Peace Child International.

Voice International aims to amplify and pass on the views of the vulnerable and the marginalized. My research design reflects my joint aims of catalysing debate, and listening carefully to a large number of young people in order to convey their views into the education policy forum, such as it is.

4.4 Action research

‘Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe’

(H G Wells, 1922)85

If we have any chance of averting social and environmental catastrophe we will have to act fast. My choice of research methodology was action research because I aim to enquire at the same time as helping to motivate changes in thinking habits. I agree with Lewin (1948) who said that research which produces nothing but books is inadequate (in Cohen et al p. 226). Action research is useful for exploration of attitudes and values (ibid. p.226) It is concerned with improving the ‘social conditions of existence’ (Grundy, ibid. p. 227) ... ‘changing individuals on the one hand and on the other the culture of the groups, institutions and societies to which they belong’ (Kemmis and Mc Taggart, ibid. p 227).

84 ‘In the current political climate of the United States, we perceive a chronic lack of the analytical tools that mathematics education ought to equip people with, a manifestation of what Macedo (2000 p.5) calls ‘education for stupidification.’ As Chomsky (2000, p24) stated, ‘the goal is to keep people from asking questions that matter about important issues that directly affect them and others.’...these may literally be life and death issues’ (Macedo D. 2000, pp.1-14
85 The Outline of History, ch 40 of the 1951 edn.
Action research ‘is designed to bridge the gap between research and practice’ (Somekh, in Cohen p. 227). As I was lucky enough to have two sessions with some groups I was able to observe changes which may have happened as a result of our initial discussions. For example, in our first session with Group F the students talked about writing to the local council about recycling bins, and at our second session a LA recycling officer was also present. Perhaps she had been invited because of our discussion? The school council at (E) had put up notices to remind people to switch lights off. Both the activity of discussing the issues as well as the fact that an outsider is seen to be concerned about the issues and interested in their views seems to be an important factor in spurring activity on the part of the respondents.

Positivist research was out of the question because I had little control over most factors: ethnicity, special needs, age, numbers, time, amount and style of teacher involvement, and prior knowledge. As the sustainability paradigm must be highly participative, and respondent-led, a qualitative rather than quantitative research design was appropriate. I tried to ask open-ended questions, and be as non-directive as was possible within the constraints of time and the research question.

‘Research involving children…must be placed into a context’. ‘Good research involves contextualisation. That is the ability of the researcher to really demonstrate that the research problem, the sampling, the choice of tools, the ethics and all other aspects of the research process exist in a meaningful rather than a stagnant way….It is so important (to) take an holistic approach to the study of children’ (Greig & Taylor, 1999, p.160). As the researcher, I was able to continuously reflect on and modify my practice in terms of how best to explain the issues, phrase my questions, respond to the answers, collect evidence, observe the context of school and report back.

Henwood K and Pidgeon N, (1995) argue that qualitative researchers ‘must have a perspective from which to build their analyses and recommend a functional relationship between the data and its

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86 ‘The qualitative approach is based on the scientific activity of induction – the procedure for generating new theories and in which theory emerges from data. The notion that theory is created from or emerges from data is consistent with the view that the child is subjective in nature and that his understanding, knowledge and meanings are subjective and emerges in interaction with others in a given context. Hence, the qualitative framework entails a methodology in which theory is “grounded” in data such as observations, interviews, conversations, written reports, texts and their interpretations. In the house construction analogy, it is a bottom-up procedure and the basic methodological tool is interpretation.’ (p.43) ‘the dominance of the experimental method in developmental psychology has meant that the value of creating valid methods of obtaining the child’s perspective in research has simply been overlooked.’ (p.46) ‘more studies exploring qualitative methods and their application to children are particularly welcome’. (Greig & Taylor 99 p.49)

87 ‘Grounded theory and psychological research’ The Psychologist, March 115-18 95 argue
interpretation. In this way the researchers’ perspectives can guide the questions asked and provide a balance between possessing a grounding in the discipline and pushing it further’ (quoted in Greig & Taylor 99, p. 45). For this reason I gave quite a detailed background to my own perspective in section two above. I include myself as a longitudinal case study to add to the voices of today’s children. As a child I was aware of warnings about human actions 88 and I sympathise with today’s children who are, rightly, worried. I could make no pretence of neutrality on the issue of the need to promote sustainability as this would have been dishonest and not in the interest of my aim of furthering the debate. I see myself as an advocate for children’s views. 89

‘Qualitative research attempts to capture the ways in which our child research participants make sense of the research events under investigation...qualitative research enables the voice of the participants to be heard. It is perhaps not surprising then that the qualitative methods which specifically deal with the child’s perspective have only recently begun to be addressed. The assumption has long been held that children are either unable or unentitled to have a point of view...the younger the child is, the less likely the child is to be heard in research...More studies exploring qualitative methods and their application to children are particularly welcome.’ Greig & Taylor 1999, p45-49

The research question itself changed after hearing some of the children’s views. I had begun by wanting to know how they felt about sustainability and what did they think schools could do to promote it. I soon modified this question for three reasons:

- the young people were all so clearly pro-sustainability that the first part of the question was quickly answered
- the problem about asking children in the school setting directly about how schools could be more sustainable is that it is like asking a fish in a bowl about water quality and life in the sea. 90
- there was such a glaring discrepancy between the children’s views and the expectations imposed on the institutions, that my question became ‘so what is stopping schools responding to such a clear and necessary agenda?’ I stopped expecting a critical analysis of the school system from the children themselves, and instead decided to make a comparison between their views and the

88 Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring (1962) was one of the earlier and better known examples.
89 I also have in mind the likely views of the other than human world, for which children themselves are advocates.
90 I would like to have asked the older respondents more specifically about schools as institutions, but as I was mostly a guest within a school setting, it would have felt discourteous to ask this question for fear of seeming to undermine the host institution or its teachers. For this reason it was good to be able to triangulate this school-based study by asking the RAPP young people outside school settings.
evidence of education priorities in the context of discourses in education.

4.5 Getting schools’ participation

I consider the difficulty I had in gaining access to my respondents is a significant finding in itself, since good relationships with the community is a crucial aspect of a sustainable school. I had expected schools to be keen to participate because discussion about sustainability fits well with citizenship and PSHE as it is participative, child-led and focuses on individual responsibility. For a school council it is an opportunity for them to consider important issues which relate to their own and the institutional life. They can tackle issues head on and in a practical way and be heard.

So I invited all the local primary schools to participate by letter initially. Even though I attached a free offer (a DEFRA-funded Peace Child workshop!) not one school replied! This, according to the local LA support staff is normal – ‘schools don’t answer letters.’ It strengthened my hypothesis that schools tend to be reclusive and overtly pressurised. I did consider sending invitations directly addressed to school councils, but decided against this as I had limited time in which to undertake the research and I did not want to risk schools deciding I was too dangerously child-centred! Responses from schools eventually came through personal contacts and phone calls.91

After a few sessions, I decided to invite some older children’s responses, so approached some senior schools by phone. Schools were fairly typical for non-urban areas. The 9 RAPP respondents were representative of students who were having difficulties at 5 Hull inner city schools.

Knowing the pressures schools are under, I did not want to disrupt the schools so I negotiated with them rather than specified the groupings of children. I offered schools the choice of me working with the school council, whole class groups or other groupings suggested by them. I wished to explore various methods of data-gathering because this would assist in triangulating my findings. I hoped that any distortions would be cancelled out or modified by diversity of approach and high numbers of respondents.

91 - a friend teaching there, 
- guilt! (I had handed the letter to the headteacher personally, but on phoning a week or so later the school denied all knowledge of the letter. When they were prompted to remember the letter (my luminous striped running shorts may have helped) they then allowed me in, for what was a very productive session.
- having had Peace Child previously so we had formed a relationship.
- a phone call which happened to connect with some research the school was involved in.
- meeting the deputy at a social event
- meeting coordinators of the RAPP Anti-Bullying group, Hull at the council’s Joint Area Review meeting
- phone calls to helpful teachers recommended by other people or schools.
4.6 The groups:
A: primary school in a small town  – school council
B: primary school in a small town  – whole class year 6
C: primary school in village  – special interest group (eco-committee, school council and road safety officers) year 6
D: small primary school whole class (years 3-6)
E: small primary school whole class (years 5 & 6)
F: secondary school council (ages 12-16)
G: primary school near Hull, whole class year 6
H: secondary school PSHE group year 8
R: RAPP (rights and participation project), Hull

The sessions ran from December 06 – March 07 and ranged from 30 minutes, to whole afternoons with mixed-age classes in small schools. The approach in each setting was different. Numbers ranged from 3 (H,fgh) to about 36. School councils or small school classes were mixed-age groups. One school (C) selected a group of interested kids. In the whole class (primary) groups and PSHE (secondary) group(H) the kids were used to each other and were the same age, and were good at bouncing ideas off each other. The smaller groups produced more personal anecdotes and thinking aloud than the larger groups, and the mixed age groups sparked off an interesting diversity of ideas. If it’s a selected group (eg. school council) the respondents are in a representative role, so perhaps are more concerned to ‘get it right,’ whereas kids in a whole class group can be themselves and brainstorm the issues. The RAPP respondents are a secondary age group outside the school context, for whom the school system is less than supportive. The adult with them was not aligned with any school, so they probably felt more able than other respondents to criticise their schools.

4.7 Adults
There has been a lot of research on school ethos and leadership and my view is that these factors are crucial in influencing attitudes. In my experience, a community-minded headteacher, for example, seems to inspire the whole school community into a similar attitude. Communicating with a school one can sense the style of the headteacher as it permeates the institution in a variety of ways. So I consider the ‘style of operation’ and attitudes of teachers or other adults as highly influential. Teacher involvement in my sessions with young people ranged from none at all to quite a lot.

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92 See appendix 2 for detail about this group who are victims of bullying in schools.
93 ‘Focus groups …are now used widely…as a means of assessing attitudes and opinions. In this context they are a particularly useful forum for discussing both the past and the major issues of the day. Focus groups are particularly appropriate for collecting testimony from people who may be very reserved on a one-to-one basis, but draw confidence from being in a familiar group…eg children’. (Slim & Thompson, 1993 p.68)
94 ‘Professional assumptions can also influence our views of children. Teachers are likely to see them as objects of learning and development. In addition, historical or cultural trends come into
My own style is to relate to children as equals and use adult language as much as possible, staying alert to check whether the children understand. I tried to restrict my input to an introduction to what I was doing, definitions of terms (e.g. sustainability or ‘looking after the planet and all its life for the future’), and outlining what I wanted to know. In each setting my introduction and amount of prompting was different because I tried to respond to the young people concerned.

I explained that Voice International promotes education for sustainability and that I was doing a course and had chosen to research children’s views about the future and particularly about education. I introduced my notetaker. In general, I started by asking children for their views about the future, leading in to sustainable education (or ‘what schools can do to improve the future’).

To help introduce the idea of sustainability, I showed or circulated some later groups the sspce document and the ‘doorways’ diagram. Earlier sessions tended to depend more on what the respondents perceived as sustainability issues. With whole classes I tended to give a more formal introduction. This was less necessary with more intimate or specialist groupings where it was possible to monitor the respondents’ understandings as we went along and clarify or explain where it seemed necessary or when asked. For example, the students of the RAPP project had all suffered bullying in school. Their experience in schools was often of not being listened to so the crucial thing was to convince them that I really wanted their views. With them I felt able to point out that the school system we know is not the only possible system for the education of human young.

Methods for collecting evidence were slightly different in each setting. In line with grounded theory,96 I wished to invite children to lead the discussion as far as possible because I was aware that I have my own theory that the school system could do a great deal more than it does to promulgate sustainability. Therefore, I did not want to lead the discussion play. For instance, a teacher trained in the ‘child-centred’ 1960s would have perceived the child as an active player in the development of knowledge, requiring only the provision of an appropriate environment and the biological readiness to learn. Compare this with the early twentieth century view of children as passive recipients of reading, writing and arithmetic....The child is always so much more than it is professionally convenient to believe.’ (Greig & T 1999, p. 77) The current approach which treats schools as the ‘supply side’ feeding the demands of business logically imposes the imperative to add ‘market’ value to the raw material of children. This is behind the notion of ‘standards’ which currently dominates education.

95 Different adult styles I observed included: enabling, enthusiastic participation, quiet but firmly leading, total lack of interference, teacher offered clarification a few times, friendly and relaxed, joined in and gave their views alongside the kids, strong influence of science teacher who was not present but who had provided the kids with a lot of interesting ideas.

96 i.e formulating theory out of research data rather than developing theory first and testing it empirically (Plant 2005, p.80)
more than I had to. With some groups I had to make more input than in others. Interestingly, I found I had to give the most input to the secondary school council, to explain the set 2 issues (around relationships with local and global community, buildings and grounds). The primary children seemed, on the whole, more aware than secondary students of connections, and more open to the idea of sustainability.

4.8 Talking, writing, drawing, completing questionnaires?

In planning my research I had thought that asking the children to draw or write would be helpful because it would allow them to express themselves in their own way, but a problem with asking children to write or draw in response to questions is that some get hung up on the technicalities of spelling or drawing skills so it takes longer to get responses than in discussion, and time was short to explain and get meaningful responses for such a big subject. Some children are less inclined to writing or drawing, and the results are more difficult to interpret for academic purposes. On the other hand, it allows individual, imaginative and holistic responses which can be directly reproduced, so, in future I would want to offer the respondents the choice. I was grateful for teachers’ and respondents’ assistance in offering additional sessions where we needed more time.

A questionnaire (Q,) was developed for use with the secondary school council because the teacher suggested it, and I felt it would be interesting to try out this method to compare it with the group interview method used previously. It was helpful in that it showed some group priorities for that particular school, (appendix 4) but for my (formative) study it was possibly of less use than spending the time in discussion. Within a positivist research paradigm it would have needed complex computation to yield useful findings. Some of the issues were not well understood, so it would have been more helpful had we had more time for properly discussing the issues beforehand. Discussion, on the other hand, brings out the respondents’ worldview in the examples they give, and their responses trigger further questions. Variety of learning styles is respected by discussion, although in some groupings a few children can dominate either because of being older in mixed age groups, or having higher confidence levels about the issues, or both. A questionnaire ensures individual priorities are recorded.

Recording interviews was done by a note-taker which obviated the need for transcription. A machine might have been helpful in the smaller groups, if more direct quotations were required. For the purposes of this research, (which is exploring the disparities in attitudes towards education, sustainability and children) the note-taking method seemed appropriate. It was unobtrusive and the note-taker provided a useful triangulation in discussing findings afterwards.
4.9 Audience

I see an important audience for this research as the schools involved. They know Hull and East Yorkshire and they will know who they are! I have been careful to defend confidentiality by blurring descriptions of schools and teachers. The intention of the research was not to compare schools (they have too much of that) but to gain a broad-brush feel for children’s views and what it is that the school system needs to do to reduce the gap between itself and students’ aspirations. The only real comparison made between groups is age-related.

In terms of validity, it might be argued that where I stood on the issue was clear, so the children gave me what I wanted. I would refute this, since the sessions began with open questions about the future and the planet, and it was the children who immediately led the discussion into problematic issues such as global warming, excess waste, lack of care and so on, revealing gaps in understanding or information along the way.

I told the children what I was doing and why. The children were all in groups and at no time was any child expected to respond apart from when they wanted to. Several of the schools asked us to go back for another session and the teachers did not express any reserve about the activity or the data collection methods (see teacher’s letter appendix 6). Teachers are understandably wary of scaring children by raising ‘controversial’ issues and I was very conscious of the need to keep balance, and encourage focus on strategies rather than on doom. Many children probably have a very good idea of the implications of carrying on ‘business as usual’ and they do want to engage with the issues and be heard. They are frustrated by adults’ inaction and hypocrisy: ‘Oh yes, we’re concerned about global warming and loss of biodiversity...no, we don’t recycle, we don’t turn off electricity, we still drop litter.’ (sspc 2006, p9)

We promised children that we will pass on their views to government and its agencies and we will do so.

5. Young people’s views

The groups’ views and descriptions of sessions are appended so that a full picture of each group’s views can be seen. Findings are, of course, circumscribed by the shortage of time in each session to both properly explain the concept of sustainability and to explore what that means in any depth. Even so, all the young people, as groups, seemed easily to

97 In line with good participatory practice, I hope that the schools involved in this research might respond to this paper so that the process does not stop here. The schools will be invited to have copies of this research so that it might be of use for them in considering the issues.
grasp what is meant by ‘sustainability’ and demonstrated a keen awareness of the need to change our lifestyles and a desire to know how.

I comment on findings under the eight ‘doorways’ used by the sspce document. These can be broadly divided into 2 sets:

- the first 4 (mostly personal, daily behaviours):
  Food and drink, energy and water, travel and traffic, purchasing and waste

- the last 4 (mostly local and global community long-term relationships):
  Buildings and grounds, Inclusion and participation, local well-being, global dimension

The first set came to mind more readily in discussion of sustainability, whereas views on the second set tended to be extracted with more prompting as they did not usually arise naturally (in the time available) as being part of ‘sustainability.’ I did not try to ask each group about each doorway. I opened the discussion on the general idea of sustainability and then encouraged the young people to talk freely. Different groups focused on different doorways. In the later interviews, I prompted the groups specifically about the second set of doorways.

A note about ethnicity: like much of Eastern England, East Yorkshire has a very low percentage of ‘minority ethnic’ groups. Hull has a more diverse profile, but this has emerged only recently with an influx of political and economic migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. A recent report (Craig, 2005) shows a major racism problem in the city.

6. Doorways: (respondents’ views are in italics)

6.1 food and drink

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>obesity: why?</th>
<th>Foods (cheap, fatty, salty, sugary, nice taste) too much sitting down – can’t be bothered to make a proper meal – just go to supermarket – people dropping rubbish, spitting out chewing gum, more smoking - problems all because of us humans.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group A</td>
<td>‘It was someone from the school council who suggested having a salad bar…..’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The respondents were aware of most issues but on a superficial level. The concept of organic food, for example, was generally not understood, even though a range is now widely available in most supermarkets. If concepts such as organic, genetic modification, animal welfare, seasonal, local, ethical are taught, young people are able to make, or
help parents make, informed shopping, gardening or political choices. From this understanding, they would learn the broader issues which will increasingly confront them as citizens.

A lot of waste – packaging is an issue due to canteen being too small so have carry-out food in plastic. The vending machine sells water in plastic bottles.

Group F(b) commented on packaging and waste and the fact that the cooks are contracted and don’t know the ingredients in meals. A hidden message in that school is, therefore, that the issue of food is less important than academic studies: it can be contracted out and does not deserve careful consideration. The idea (b) of food preparation being part of the curriculum was not popular!

RAPP respondents emphasised the importance of choice, including cultural choice with reference to the food needs of Sikhs (c). They strongly resented the imposition of a change to their diet, even if it was healthy(a). They mentioned the issue of quality (home-made or mass produced). Healthy food should not be imposed but gently introduced as some children are ‘addicted’ to junk food.

Lack of empowerment of young people is evident both in their general lack of information about this everyday issue, and in the fact that they are consulted patchily, if at all, even on something as vital and as personal as food.

Sustainable education would focus on issues which are crucially important to our everyday lives (and connected with the lives of people far away) rather than on ‘academic’ issues. Education could then reconnect with life.

6.2 energy and water

None of the schools is showing signs of planning to model wind or solar power, or harvesting water, despite one having a technology and one an engineering specialism.

where does electricity come from? - Telegraph poles -power cables - Power stations – alternative energy sources. Girl 9 says tidal power in Humber. Boy 8 suggests motorbikes as alternative to cars

There was a basic lack of information (eg. where electricity comes from). In almost every setting we had to explain the term ‘fossil fuels’ and the

98 At another school we interviewed previously, the school council said that their food choices (as well as many other issues) were completely circumscribed by the fact that the school were in effect tenants of the site in a public-private partnership.
information that in using them humans are putting carbon, which had been taken out by nature millions of years ago, back into the atmosphere.

Respondents knew there were big problems relating to energy use, but were vague about what exactly was causing the problems or what could be done about them. Recycling seems to be the panacea - rather than the minimisation of resource use. Computers- too many and left on too much – were mentioned a few times by primary kids. One primary head explained that it is easier to leave them on with different groups going in and out of the computer room.

In most class rooms the lights were on and often the blinds were closed (Ga). White boards need semi-darkness to be seen so teachers tend to prepare the room to use the white board, whether they use it or not (see group H d.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you had any thoughts since our last session?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Yes – I noticed the lights on in lessons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- we had a power cut yesterday, so I know what its like to live without electricity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- the longest I’ve spent without electricity is a night in a tent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- we lived in an old house and had a log fire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

we turned lights in the room off and pulled the blind up. Students said one teacher won’t let them turn the lights off. F d.

The issue of heating was hardly mentioned, and the idea of designing buildings to reduce fuel use was not on the agenda at all. When we brought it up, the response tended to be blank or move to recycling. Considering that we all live in buildings, and architecture is recognised activity, it is strange that our young people are not encouraged to consider building design. Our learning is overly academic due to an ‘institutionalised’ mindset: we leave crucial ‘real life’ issues to other people and therefore have no clue about them. Children living in rural Africa can probably build their own house, provide their own food and water and make tools and toys. Children in UK are taught in schools on the assumption that they can leave the provision of houses, fuel, water, clothing etc. to others. Sustainable education would bring these real issues to the fore.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Water – why is that an issue? African country has so little– US consumes a lot. why does this matter when we can just turn on the tap here? It costs money – you have to build dams.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Hb</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Group F questionnaire showed that water issues and using the built estate to model good practice were at the bottom of the respondents' priorities.
6.3 travel and traffic
All were aware of this as a problem. It was the 2nd highest priority on the questionnaire

bike shed is always full. Coach system of transport to school very poor – no flexibility (eg if other school not open, the buses just don’t turn up) – old, dirty coaches. Bus monitors get free travel but do little. Feeling of little care for the customers on the buses Group F c.

‘Traffic…we need less cars, more walking, cycles etc’ RAPP.

The head teacher (group G) said they were focusing on travel and wished public transport was more integrated. Children seemed well aware of the traffic and travel issue. This may be because traffic is a real danger to children, or is it perhaps because it’s outside school so is not in conflict with the curriculum?

6.4 purchasing and waste
Younger children had difficulty in understanding the idea of ethical policies for buying things like furniture.

What about fair trade? Enthusiastic response: It’s a very good thing but not much advertising about it…we need more information. Not much encouragement as FT goods are usually much more expensive Group Fm

There was a patchy awareness of the notion of fair trade, presumably depending on extent of direct input. The local FT group had written to all schools in the town - and had received no response.

Recycling – our school doesn’t do it – The teacher said there are no bins – seems to be to do with money, effort, not in caretaker’s job description …. No one is ‘pushed’ to support recycling. Have you written to the council? They have emailed but it’s expensive to buy recycling bins Group Fa

Most kids engaged with the recycling issue, possibly because the council has recently appointed 4 new officers who are visiting schools. Group H,c got quite animated on the issue and it was top priority for group F.

Like the traffic issue, recycling can be addressed as a bolt-on. One can blame the council, and it does not have to impinge on the curriculum which may be why these two are less challenging for schools than some of the other doorways.
### 6.5 buildings and grounds

Primary kids were more enthusiastic than secondary about growing things, compost, and various uses of school grounds including community use.

What could the school council do to be more involved in community? Ideas such as wildlife area – compost. What is compost? purpose of compost? Some people put fruit cores in bushes – but a named bin would get smelly. What’s the difference between compost bin and other bins? (the teacher confessed she didn’t know that much about it) – ‘I’m not the best person to explain’… are we going to do this at this school?

Shan asked about growing things at school...children said there was a wildlife area and a veg growing initiative in school. 8 out of 15 kids grow veg in their home gardens. Group A g.h.i

When asked about buildings and grounds, the PSHE group launched into rubbish, recycling and compost. (Hc)

*use school land for Nature Intelligence: invite members (of public) on nature walk once a month in the country. a group that goes outside every day and waters the plants (to keep plants healthy.) a rota and people make sure nobody litters. get a solar panel for the school. a club that makes sure that everyone is eating healthy. don't cut down any trees* Group Dc

We turned lights off and opened blinds and asked about design of buildings and how we can use sunlight instead...*put in a skylight – TV design ideas – waste of energy – pointed out ‘air purifier’ plugged in as teacher said the room gets sweaty. can you open the windows?...hardly open at all...* Hd

The built environment was the lowest priority according to the FQ result and the grounds were also a low priority. Students were not forthcoming on this. We explained a bit about design and passive heating, but students did not engage. They are not involved in discussions with school management about heating, and other household matters. (Group Ff)

*We have gardens at our school, but they are vandalised*. Why? ‘copying’. RAPP

### 6.6 inclusion and participation

According to group A, primary school councils are to improve things, to make school safer, to get children’s point of view put forward, to
discuss improvements, help outside groups, to sort out bullying it can come to the school council and not be hidden away). All this is done by talking - groups are needed.

School council...how is it organised? How do you involve other students? Teacher began answering this but we said we would like the students to answer. It’s developing at the moment. Feedback mainly through assemblies. We have 2 elected from each year group. You seem interested in the issues we are discussing...are the other girls excited by these issues? If they were more informed they would be interested...they DO ask, especially in English. You couldn’t say they are ‘excited’!...they are ‘excited’ by parties etc! We, the school council, can inform others but we need the information first. The point of the school council is for students to help students, but, yes, we can use help from outside. Assemblies are quite a good way to feed back as they are in the hall and will listen.

Do you have a school council? Yes...what do they discuss? They ask how they can help the school. If there is a meeting we give them the ideas. Does it work well? Sometimes...teacher said generally they do listen. Can you tell us an issue? The tennis courts filled in (holes), climbing wall in sports hall, bully box – free chocolate for all!

RAPP respondents had a lot to say about inclusion: ‘Schools should listen and not tolerate bullying. You should be able to take it further, like see the headteacher - but they don’t do owt.’ .... ‘They should listen to you more. They give warnings but...More teachers are needed on the playground cos that’s where most bullying happens.’

The RAPP respondents are a good example of young people who are excluded from a system under enormous strain (see Craig’s introduction in appendix). Hull is near the bottom of the UK league tables and feels under siege. Respondents were clear that YP need choice and not imposition, even if it is imposition to make them healthy.

They want to be heard. They need support and see schools as not doing enough to stamp out oppressive or discriminatory behaviour (on the part of both YP and staff). They volunteered an example of useful intervention (re food) by the school council. They cited bullying due to difficulties with spelling, and gangs versus ‘loners.’ It is ironic that a project is needed to take the victims of bullying out of school rather than dealing with the bullying issue in school; it is clearly seen as peripheral to the ‘real’ work of schools. All kinds of tactics are invented to try to deal with a problem which is much bigger than individual schools.

The respondents’ views coupled with the comments by Craig suggest a creaking system which is imposing impossible ‘standards’ on teachers and
children. The respondents are likely to be only a tiny fraction of the ‘fallout’ from such a dysfunctional system. The young people reacted very well to being listened to, although I could sense their initial instinct to play up when I first met them. However, when they realised I was serious about hearing their views, they settled down and gave considerable thought to my questions and each other’s comments.\(^9^9\)

Hull ‘Headteachers were livid at the report ‘Tell it like it is’’ – a result of the impossible tension between the needs of young people and the school system. The heads are stretched on the rack, as are the teachers who are banging tables, being discouraging and bullying kids (RAPPg).

FQ had prioritised inclusion second and third. Group F views on ‘what they like to learn today and in the future’ emphasise inclusive learning modes such as group work, discussion, linking with others, more relaxed working atmosphere, and so on (Appendix 5). RAPP views on schools appear in Appendix 3.

**6.7 local well-being**

‘It is essential for schools - along with services like childcare and youth work – to help children contribute positively to their local areas, learn about them in more depth, and have fun. In this way schools can play an important part in realising sustainable communities.’ Sspce p11

Group G (and primaries in general) had lots of visitors into school and were impressing the local elder community with home-grown harvest gifts and Christmas concerts.

| Orchestra plays for people. Do people enjoy coming here? Yes we are all polite and know what to do. Do we walk round looking miserable? – no we’re happy. A,e |
| What is local well being? Everyone feels OK in the town. Group H,e |

Group F(i) was a bit nonplussed at the idea of discussing ideas with groups outside school. This seemed consistent with the fact that this school cannot host local community events because of its restrictive kitchen arrangements (b). Group H school does not hire out its internal premises to community groups at weekends.

Secondary schools tend to find communication difficult in general (both within school, and between school and the outside community). If one phones them you hear, ‘Dial 1 to report a pupil absent, dial 2 for the

\(^9^9\) ‘Research evidence from S Africa (Dean, 2001) confirms the necessity of the need to address respect for others.’ (Claire 2001, p.26)
exams office’ and so on. It is usually difficult to make contact with teachers by phone, and often by email as well. They vary tremendously in terms of good relationships with the community: some behave like Fort Knox whereas others invite partnership with the community.

FQ interestingly assigned a low level of agreement for this issue, but a higher prioritisation for the school.

– you get a feel for a school ethos - for example, admin staff ‘behind bars’! First impressions say a lot. Craig, staff member, RAPP

6.8 global dimension

At a recent DEC workshop in Hull it was reported that some Hull parents wouldn’t allow their primary age children to go on a trip to the local mosque. When asked why, one parent said ‘I don’t want him to get bombed.’

students in a nearby seaside resort said there is racism in school, and directed towards ‘wessies’ (people from west Yorkshire who go to their town)

A ‘them and us’ attitude seems to become stronger as children get older. Primary children seemed empathetic with people in ‘developing countries’ (Aij) whereas a rather technocratic view that ‘we’ should not be expected to live ‘like they do in Africa’ can be seen in this response from an older respondent to a comparison made between the ecological footprint of a small child in UK and a Tanzanian:

But we are developed...we can’t live in the same way...we can’t go back! It’s important to sort out recycling in school before dealing worldwide group Fj

Of course, we do have to ‘go back’ to go forward - in the sense of learning to live more lightly on the planet. The recycling that we are now getting used to is something ‘developing’ countries have done for a long time. The west has become complacent and expects to live differently from ‘the third world.’ There is an assumption that the west should ‘teach’ ‘developing’ countries how to do things our way100 but in fact now we

100 Young people of the G8 nations (the Junior 8) said ‘we strongly believe education is the foundation of everything...when we worked on the G8 themes we found that education is the key solution to all of our world’s problems,’ and one of their recommendations was to ‘establish a programme called ‘Teaching Teachers’ where educators from the developed world should go to the developing countries to pass on their teaching skills.’ UNICEF Voices of youth: (G8 summit, 2006 in St Petersburg) From a perspective which values intercultural knowledge and skills, the notion of the ‘developed world’ teaching ‘developing countries’ is arrogant to say the least, but
must learn from ‘developing’ countries how to live more resourcefully and less wastefully.

The teacher’s query regarding terminology, (Ai) is an illustration of teachers’ lack of confidence in this field.

Group H g was a focus group of 3 volunteers. This session demonstrated a lack of awareness of ‘other cultures’ apart from the aid focus at the church, and an interest in reasons for wars, racism and terrorism.

The term ‘global dimension’ tended to be taken to mean physical Geography rather than cultural issues (H second session). After clarification it was understood mainly in terms of red-nose day, helping the ‘third world’ (A), and fair trade (F l). The term ‘other cultures’ had limited meaning for respondents (see H second session and Fj).

6.9 The need for action.

The overall response was very clear and strongly in favour of sustainability but, in general, the younger they were the less respondents said about how schools could respond. This was partly due to time constraints since the issues are big and need a reasonable amount of explanation to begin with, which took up much of the time. Other constraints were lack of familiarity with the vocabulary (‘fossil fuels’, ‘renewable energy’) and lack of knowledge about basics such as where does electricity come from.

The primary children were totally committed to a sustainable future and the need for changes in behaviours and considered the situation very seriously. No child questioned the need for sustainability. They wanted assurance that their views would be sent on to the government who, they said, were responsible for making change happen. In the secondary phase also, the need to push government into action was expressed: ‘We could put more pressure on government. If kids at all schools joined in they couldn’t ignore us’ (F,a).

Older respondents were critical of their schools regarding recycling (F,a), time (H and F,e), lack of consultation (RAPP) and attitudes towards bullying (RAPP).

Younger kids were imaginative about potential school activities and suggested positive ideas such as the use of school grounds, gardening, involvement of the community and so on. Secondary views regarding schools’ role were more circumspect, or less imaginative. There was less awareness of the school as ‘theirs’ – hardly any views on the use of

It is hardly surprising to find this attitude in young people who have been chosen as ambassadors from the richest nations, and who are probably successful in schools’ terms.
grounds or buildings, and little awareness of the potential for the school to be a ‘hub of learning and change in their community.’ The explanation for their lack of vision for the school is likely to be the prescribed nature of schooling. How can young people engage with an institution that is being ruled from outside itself and run by adults? It is not theirs to mould.

Younger children tended to take a more holistic view and more readily engaged with the broader (set 2) issues, possibly because primary schools generally have closer relationships with their communities and their curriculum relates more closely to their lives. Another reason for the lower level of secondary response on the last 4 doorways seems to be the overburdened curriculum factor (F, e).

Younger children thought that you have to teach kids about the issues when young because when children get older they get pulled away into other things (Ba, Ce). This view seemed to be confirmed by some of the comments and the questionnaire results of the older students which seemed rather ‘institutionalised’ in assuming that school is unlikely to involve children’s passionate engagement. They seemed less able or willing to see the connections between their own lives and the lives of others either locally or globally. The secondary PSHE group knew a lot of facts and some of the science but lacked a grasp of the big picture. The indignant ‘It’s important to sort out recycling in school before dealing worldwide’ (Fj) comment demonstrates a rather ‘adult’ practicality and ability to distance oneself from the circumstances of others. In fact, exactly the same sentiment—the idea that global citizenship was a step too far—was voiced by the head of a beleaguered secondary school in York some years ago. In contrast, younger children seemed able to empathise with others quite easily (A,i,j) and entertain a vision of a more desirable and inclusive school-world.

There was little apparent awareness of the need for cultural diversity and for cultures to learn from each other, apart from group G where the Thai boy had clearly educated his group about different ways of life. This was the only group with a member obviously from a minority ethnic group, and the only group which was able to articulate more than a superficial understanding of cultural diversity.

101 SSPCE 06, p. 17
102 It is perhaps significant that secondary school councils were in an early stage of development (Fh) or discussed fairly marginal issues whereas in the primary schools visited there was a sense of a functioning council.
7. Conclusion and recommendations

David Lambert, chief executive of the Geography Association (GA), in answer to the question, ‘What is stopping schools being models of EFS?’ says,

‘The priorities of schools/teachers are fairly unambiguous, driven by the performance agenda that has been strengthened over recent years. When ESD becomes part of what is meant by a high achieving school, then it will become a priority.’ 103

The ‘performance’ agenda started in higher education and has been filtering down through the rest of the system. Secondary education is thoroughly imbued with it, more so than primary, although the preoccupation with testing is clearly a major barrier to child-centred learning in all phases. 104

Considering the competitive nature of education, it is not surprising if increased age (or time spent successfully in the system) coincides with less empathy with other cultures, the community beyond school, and nature, and more concern about jobs and money. 105

Institutional ‘treatment’ does work! 106

What I learnt from this research was that children certainly do care about sustainability and they easily make the connections between the ‘wicked’ issues, which is not always the case with adults. A five year old asked why she should switch the light off. When told it would help animals and the world she immediately switched it off. Young children’s instincts have been less corrupted by materialism and competing demands on

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103 David goes on to say, ‘There is also a profound difficulty over meaning. What do teachers understand by ‘ESD’? And finally, pedagogic challenges – teachers are often nervous about teaching (what they perceive to be) ‘controversial issues’. Do the KS3 changes help (from the point of view of the GA)? ‘Probably they do. BUT with great risks unless teachers are supported in their curriculum development. Some will default to ‘I don’t need to change anything/we are doing it already’ and some will confuse the ‘key concepts’ with the ‘content’ they need to teach and pervert the potential of a concept-based curriculum. Some will do brilliantly, as they always do. Some senior managers will simply note that there is not much content in geography, and therefore it is ‘unimportant’. As I say, big challenges.’ (correspondence March 2007)

104 Dr Mary Bousted, ATL general secretary, said, ‘We have become wearily accustomed to this government’s ‘never mind the quality, feel the width’ approach to education. This latest round of yet more statistics from the DfES does not help solve the fundamental problems with schooling in England. The Key Stage 3 review, if allowed to blossom freely, will make schools more interesting for pupils, but would do it far more successfully if the Government removed the yoke of constant testing.’ (regarding KS3 results, reported in Education Journal, 2 March 07).

105 Primary age children ‘expressed strikingly unmaterialistic views about the importance of wealth in their lives…they asked only to be comfortable within the family and not to struggle to pay the bills’ (Claire, 01, p.86

106 Cathie Holden, comparing the attitudes of younger with older respondents (7-18) regarding ‘what can you do to make the world a better place?’ speculates that the ‘increased pessimism of the older pupils could be attributed to the onset of adolescence and a natural tendency to become more sceptical as one matures’ (Holden in Holden & Clough 1998, p.48). But this is by no means clear, and there is plenty of evidence that institutions are very effective at conditioning people.
their attention than most adults. They retain an inherent empathy with nature and other people. The adult justification for inaction, ‘Well I won’t be here then’ - is not an escape route for children.\textsuperscript{107}

Unfortunately, the locus of power currently resides with government and with adults. Children are virtually powerless in our society and are rarely asked their views, particularly about education.\textsuperscript{108} ‘I get bored when we don’t have the opportunity to say our opinion’\textsuperscript{109} but ‘saying our views,’ is seen as getting ‘side-tracked’ (Hg)…from what? From school work which is accepted as academic: ‘safe’ things which ‘the establishment’ (the ‘academy’) has decided are legitimate knowledge?

’a radical agenda should be informed by a sense of what children themselves think understand and know, and not just top-down induction from a set of prescriptive curriculum ‘oughts’. …Some children said that it was unusual and a privilege to have an adult devote concentrated time to their ideas and opinions. Many people have noted that children are seldom asked in school what they think about things, let alone invited to talk about their concerns and set their own agenda’ Claire, 2001, pp. 8-10

There is a lot of rhetoric about school councils but a worrying hypocrisy about their role in practice.\textsuperscript{110} Even though it propounds a whole school approach, and empowering pupils, the sspce does not mention school councils.\textsuperscript{111} Young people clearly want to be involved and have a lot to offer, but is the adult world going to let them in? They will only be allowed in when the pressure to ‘perform’ is taken off schools so that schools can feel relaxed enough and confident enough to seriously engage with young people’s priorities.

\textbf{Clubs and societies –there’s no encouragement – seen as of little importance.}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{107}] Young people’s views in East Yorks were broadly in line with the 347 young people’s views collected by the consultation reported in the sspce (06, p.9) in which 63% thought the world was becoming a worse place to live in and only 11% thought it was getting better.
\item[\textsuperscript{108}] asked at York university library for books on children’s views on education and the answer was zero. The head librarian at my local library tried to find books on the aims of education for children on the internet and failed. Apart from Socrates and Plato nothing at all was found. Ruddock et al (1996) convincingly argue that in developing school improvement strategies, the views of pupils are of fundamental importance’ (Lloyd-Smith M & Tarr J, (2000) in Lewis A & Lindsay G, (2000) p.60)
\item[\textsuperscript{109}] Learning about teaching from students’ Fotini Mitsou, Educational review May 2006 vol 58 no2 pp 159-170 Routledge
\item[\textsuperscript{110}] In ‘100 ideas for teaching citizenship’ Ian Davies writes, ‘schools are not democracies, but it’s vital to give the impression that students will be able to achieve something through the council.’ Continuum 2005 p.68. It is significant that a secondary school head’s PA I phoned didn’t know who was the contact for the school council.
\item[\textsuperscript{111}] ‘Despite a strong belief in the value of active participation by pupils, Crick did not recommend that school councils be made a requirement under government policy. He subsequently explained the reasoning for this: ‘we were acutely aware of the dangers of appearing to overload the bending backs of so many teachers.’ (Crick 2000, p.81 in Cotmore 04, p.55)
\end{itemize}
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High flyers and SEN given attention and opportunities but those in the middle get left out.

Sport – why doesn’t it get more attention? Time? Yes F, e.

Time is necessary for dialogue and deep thinking, but secondary school timetables are packed with prescribed activities. Schools have little time for sustainability. Respondents touched on the lack of (and multiple demands on) teacher time in secondary schools (Hg). Schools are under bombardment by the ‘standards’/league tables/assessment agenda and until this stops they will not be able to change to ‘a way of thinking about how we organise our lives and work – including our education system – so that we don’t destroy our most precious resource, the planet.’ (SSPCE 2006, p.6)

7.1 Information

New information is needed both by teachers and by students. Both demonstrated a lack of confidence in ‘new’ issues (terminology, science, and understanding of the theories and assumptions underpinning cultures), as well as basic(real life) information such as how power and water get to our homes or what is compost, or how we talk about other countries or cultures.

The secondary school council said they could help pass information on to other students but they need information themselves first (F,h). Teachers tend to hesitate to raise many of the issues we discussed. Is this because they lack information, confidence or the time to find out – or, more worryingly, that they feel they would be disturbing the status quo? This then raises questions about pedagogy - Why should teachers feel they

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112 ‘We don’t get the chance to go deeply into things’….. ‘Mrs Clarke said in science there’s a lot more things we could do but we’re not allowed – because of the national Curriculum’ (14 year olds, in Holden, Holden & Clough ed. 1998 p.52)

113 I asked a parent why she had chosen to send her daughter to a Steiner school. She said she wanted a school which would ‘support the child’s social and emotional wellbeing, work on a slower more natural rhythm – more in tune with the seasons –operate at a heart level – making the connection with self and other people. The pace is slower and not so pressurised – it aims for rounded individuals who can make their own decisions, with a strong sense of self and their place in the world. The needs of the whole (not just the individual) are the focus. It is underfunded but the atmosphere is good. A bit tatty –relies on parental involvement (painting, cleaning etc) but this is made into a virtue as parents get to know each other. Children help with the cooking. The state system is linear and goal-oriented whereas Steiner philosophy works with nature’s rhythms so becomes more circular. The child was surviving rather than thriving in her previous school. She is now much happier and more stimulated. She learns faster as has a thirst for knowledge and interest in life. The state system is exposed to emphasis from the media – sexualisation of young children and loss of childhood. It lacks a ‘spiritual dimension’ - reflects the emptiness of secular society.’ (Interview, March 2007)

114 Milton Brown, who set up the SPACE (sports participation and cultural equality) project in Huddersfield says that people are frightened to ask each other about what they perceive to be ‘sensitive’ cultural issues such as identity, beliefs, and physical differences.

115 School staff have commented that it is easier for outsiders to raise certain issues (eg. ingredients and packaging of branded food that some children bring for lunch).
have to have all the information? Sustainability is new territory, so why not discuss with the kids and find things out together? That would be inclusive and participatory.\textsuperscript{116}

Not only do we need technical information regarding renewables, buildings, etc, but also how to live more frugally (individually and as a community) and how to stay healthy. ‘Consumption is rooted in everyday practice and more sustainable living needs to be rooted there too.’\textsuperscript{117}

Some information about different ways of doing ordinary things can be drawn from within the group if there is time to think and talk (e.g. communication, decision-making, reducing, reusing and recycling, ethical trade, food miles, cooking, making compost). Other information can be found from sources such as the internet, books, other organisations and individuals (e.g. horticulture, wildlife conservation, diverse cultural perspectives). Hilary Claire describes ‘a radical curriculum including economics in political literacy.’\textsuperscript{118}

7.2 Relationships and real involvement.

In terms of relationships, ‘sustainable schools are guided by a commitment to care’\textsuperscript{119} which requires a power-sharing school ethos, awareness of the hidden curriculum\textsuperscript{120} and, again, enough time and space to demonstrate respect. Real involvement will happen when schools are able genuinely to involve children as equals, making real decisions on real issues as part of the community.\textsuperscript{121} Partnership at local level is needed to support schools in addressing this agenda. Parents must be brought on board, or traditional expectations of school will impede progress.

As Selby, Sterling, Harding and many others have shown, we need to engage in dialogue - between cultures, inter-generationally, and with the other than human world. When we can see the connections between our own lives and planetary issues, and act on them, we are less likely to

\textsuperscript{116} ‘If children are allowed to discuss their concerns they set the agenda: it is their role as active citizens (now and in the future) which is under discussion.’ (Holden in Holden & Clough, ed. 1998, p.53)
\textsuperscript{117}Blewitt, 06, p. 108
\textsuperscript{118} ‘The responsible citizen: tools for thinking’. Claire, 2001,pp.129-152.
\textsuperscript{119} ‘care for oneself, for each other (across cultures, distances and generations) and for the environment (near and far)’ (sspace, p14). ‘Young people form connections between what is happening on their doorstep and larger global issues….the most commonly voiced connection is a lack of care’ (sspace p. 11).
\textsuperscript{120} The hidden curriculum is ‘collateral learning of attitudes by children’ (Dewey J in Meighan 2003,p.65). ‘Psychological tools ...are not just confined to abstract ideas and logical arguments but are,...concretely manifest in the social relationships, practices, routines and cultural objects and artefacts of the school. These are the things that (young boys) think with when constructing their (masculine) identities and thus these are the things that we need to critically engage with and change’ - ‘The masculine habitus as “distributed cognition”’ Paul Connolly (2006)
\textsuperscript{121} ‘At Summerhill, when you are old enough to do your exams, you have got a school to run as well!’ Vaughan, p.106
feel helpless and resort to denial mode. We can begin to feel (and enjoy) being involved.

7.3 Support
The support schools need, therefore, to give them access to the information and understanding of the new paradigm of sustainability is:

a. technical support
regarding, for example, energy, grounds use, buildings and equipment, both current\(^{122}\) and new (such as ‘skype’ for direct linking with distant schools).

b. contact
• with nature to allow ‘radical interconnectedness’\(^{123}\)
• with diverse cultural perspectives, as different cultures must SHARE their wisdom rather than the ‘developed’ or industrialised countries assuming they know it all.

c. pedagogical support
for methods which do not require the teacher to be the fount of all knowledge, such as role-play, discussion, learning through doing and creating and peer-led learning\(^{124}\). Children said an effective way to learn is by example and direct experience \((D,b)(H,f)\)\(^{125}\). Children recommended that TV advertisements should be used to change opinions. John Blewitt describes how living in a sustainable community ‘enables a normalisation of eco-friendly behaviour’ (2006, p. 111).

\(^{122}\) we found that some teachers do not know the potential of equipment already in schools, such as white boards
\(^{123}\) David Selby proposes ‘dance (of the free-form variety) as a metaphor for the way we need to conceive of the world at a deeper and third level of presence.’ He emphasises ‘the need to know and experience the three levels at one and the same time: the discrete self, the relational self and the dancing self. Mainstream education is good at the first, weak at the second and blind to the third. To counter this imbalance, education for sustainability has to involve working with relational modes of knowing that address our inner connectivities of body, mind, emotions and spirit, and our deep connectivities with each other and nature.’ Selby warns that ‘sustainability has not shrugged off mechanism. Its “business as usual” paradigm, so attractive to government and the corporate sector, especially when put forward as “sustainable development”, is less than embracing of the dance of the world, so vital for deep transformation. …Recipes for education for sustainability… should be diced with a goodly sprinkling of “education for ephemerality, education for elusiveness, and education for ineffability.”’ (Selby 04, p22)

\(^{124}\) Peace Child recognise peer education as particularly effective. They run an ambassadors programme to help young people to teach others about sustainability. In “Peer led focus groups and young people” Cathy Murray says, “the power differential between the adult researcher and the researched is removed, at least at the point of data collection rendering peer-led focus groups one of few research contexts in which young people can speak collectively with no adult present” Murray, Univ of Stirling, vol 20 no 4 sept 06 Children and Society, the international journal of childhood and children’s services, NCB. There is a strong argument for peer-led research.
\(^{125}\) We installed secondary glazing and this generated enormous interest and some replication. Living in Uganda taught us to conserve water. We now use less than half the water we used previously.
Support could be organised through coordination, modelling and networking at local level. Links between primary and secondary schools would assist with the pedagogical aspects, as well as community linking. Technical and contact support could be coordinated by LAs in conjunction with NGOs (which themselves need support).

7.4 Policy implications
I promised to convey the children’s views to the government, because children assume the government needs to act. They must be right: I am not aware of any research which indicates that the current educational paradigm is still appropriate. Further implications of my findings are:

The need for a new Great Debate on Education

In 1983, Kemmis stated the need for ‘talking about where our schools are going...we need to get the facts right about exactly what they’re doing.’ We have not done that talking, and, although there have been several major media surveys of children’s views in recent years, (and a great deal of research) showing the importance and usefulness of children’s views, the fundamental attitudes towards children and education remain unchanged.

My findings concur with those of Lynn Davies, et al, regarding what teachers and learners need for Global Citizenship Education (2005, Appendix 7) - that ‘inspection and LAs should support freeing up from National Curriculum and to facilitate networking of teachers.’ I would add that young people should be invited to participate in a national multi-perspective debate about what education is for and how it could be improved.

Participation by children must be central to the new paradigm, since kids
- have a bigger stake in the future than adults,
- are ‘on board’ far more than most adults (connection with nature, other animals),
- could contribute ideas more imaginatively because they are not oppressed/compromised by mortgages and car ownership,
- are more likely to carry out agreed changes if they have been part of the decision-making process
- have a right to be involved

What can be done?

126 ...‘crudely speaking, there are just three views of education available to us today: the ‘job-slots’ view, the ‘cultured persons and survivors’ view, and the ‘members of society’ view.’ (Kemmis 83 p.162-5)
no litter – hearing about how to help the planet – alternative ways to get fuel – grow trees – fewer computers - school council can improve school group

The simple answer is to stop pressurising schools to ‘perform’ which will allow them to relax and relate as human beings, get involved in local activities and engage with the world outside. Children’s voices could then be heard as equal contributors to the dialogue.

what can we do? we can exercise, recycle, learn, cook our food, help animals -all good for the planet- support charities, PSHCE, fruit & veg, healthy food, school exercise in mornings, drink water instead of fizzy drinks, salads, more PE, recycle in every class, balanced diet at school, no vending machines

As the Polish educationalist, Janus Korczak said, ‘You are mistaken if you think we have to lower ourselves to communicate with children. On the contrary, we have to reach up to their feelings, stretch, and stand on our tiptoes.’

Up until recently, it has not been commonly understood or acknowledged (in the west) that the human race is up against the buffers of the planetary capacity to cope with humans’ ever-increasing demands, so our education systems were based on a presumption of endless economic growth, which we now realise cannot continue. Now that we know this, it is imperative that we review the whole purpose and style of education. Children can help us to take a fresh view - and to close the gap.

\[127\] 1926, ‘When I am little again,’’ Quoted by Appleton M.02.p. 58