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THE LEGACY OF A.S. NEILL IN FINLAND

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Abstract: This article looks first briefly on the history of education and the influence of A.S. Neill's ideas in Finland, and then turns into a roundtable where three people – two mothers and one son – discuss their own experiences of the Summerhillian kindergarten in Finland, and the future of alternative education in the era of neo-liberalism.

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The Legacy of A.S. Neill in Finland

This article looks first briefly on the history of education and the influence of A.S. Neill's ideas in Finland, and then turns into a roundtable where three people – two mothers and one son – discuss their own experiences of the Summerhillian kindergarten in Finland, and the future of alternative education in the era of neo-liberalism.

The discussants in the roundtable are:

- Sirkka Ahonen, born 1939, Professor Emerita at the University of Helsinki, Department of Teacher Education. She has a long research history on educational beliefs, being a recognised scholar of the history of pedagogy in Finland and beyond. Sirkka experienced personally some of the Summerhillian experimentations in Finland as an academic and "alternative" mother of one in the early 1970s.
- Leena Eräsaari, born in 1948, Professor Emerita in Social Work at the University of Jyväskylä, and mother of Matti. She has theorized on the architecture of bureaucratic places and is widely known for her radical ideas on how to re-organize hierarchies on social work sites. She has intergenerational experience of A.S. Neill's concretized ideas in Finland as her two children and three grandchildren were in Lastenpaikka (Children's Place), the early Summerhillian kindergarten in Finland. Leena was somewhat active in the parents' group that gathered there. Her daughter Jenny was born in 1970, her granddaughter Aada in 1995 (as well as Aada's twin brother Eskil), and grandson Otso in 1997.
- Matti Eräsaari, born 1975, is the son of Leena. Matti was in Lastenpaikka for a short period as a kid. He holds a PhD in anthropology, and works at the University of Manchester as a Newton Research Fellow.
- Antu Sorainen, born 1963, is a Docent and Academy of Finland Research Fellow at the University of Helsinki. She is the moderator and translator

of the discussion. She was never in kindergarten as her mother was a stay-home mother of four. Antu thinks that this early childhood history influenced her (anti)social skills and her quest for personal autonomy in her later life. Therefore, she is interested in concrete utopias and the conceptual changes in pedagogy and education.

Introduction: Experimental Education and the Modernizing State in Finland

Finland is a liberal and democratic country, which has invested in education as a national strategy. A country proud of its leading PISA results, Finland is a good example of the educational success of the democratic welfare education systems. The Nordic pedagogy ideologies developed in the course of profound socio-political discussions in the 19th and early 20th centuries. There was always space for *the utopian* in the Nordic education sphere, especially at times of larger societal changes. While Nordic countries each have their own pedagogical histories, the comprehensive school that offers 10 years obligatory, free of charge education for all children was one shared major utopia materialised.

In Finland, A.S. Neill's ideas were actualized in concrete way only in the 1960s. The decade of the 1960s was of a particular national importance in many ways: a deliberate shift in governmental politics from an agrarian society to a modern state took place at that time, and rapid urbanization and democratization processes were changing the country in a profound way.

A group of liberal and leftist intellectuals worked tirelessly throughout the late 1950s and 1960s to modernize the course of Finnish education, legislation, economics and the social policy system. The notion of comprehensive schooling had already been seriously discussed after the war, and it become more common for children to go to middle and upper secondary general school in the 1950s. From the 1960s also the tertiary level education

expanded rapidly as families got wealthier and wanted a better education for their children. The major after-war challenge in Finland was to fit all the children in the large age groups into primary schools. Finally, as a result of a political debate, experimentation with the comprehensive school began in the late 1960s. It aimed at guaranteeing a primary school education to all children. A law on the basis education system was enacted in 1968. It introduced a 9-year universally free municipal comprehensive school, and was implemented from 1972, starting from the north of the country working south, and completed finally in Helsinki in 1977.[37]

In this situation, Summerhill offered some testing ground ideas for the developing comprehensive school in the late 1960s Finland. Some of the educators who were originally involved in the creation of the comprehensive democratic school system in Finland in the 1960s were also interested in A.S. Neill's ideas. For example, *Erkki Aho,* Head of the School Ministry from 1973 to 1991, and the main ideologist of the comprehensive school, attended at the inaugural meeting of the Free Experimental School Association in 1969 in Helsinki. Further, a wide array of psychiatrists, MPs, psychologists, journalists, professors, artists, theologians and university students participated in this meeting, which was moderated by a well-known politician and feminist activist, *Marianne Laxén*. In the meeting, it was decided that A.S. Neill was invited to become a support member of the advisory board as the original idea of the Association was to establish a Finnish Summerhill School.

During the tumultuous period that marked the implementation of the comprehensive school system, it did not, however, appear to be an appropriately democratic project. However, it still made sense to create a Summerhillian kindergarten, which could later be transformed into a school. Hence, *Lastenpaikka* (Children's Place) was opened in 1970. It was perceived to

[37] The current law sets a statutory school age, covering the age groups 7 to 16, from which a person cannot be freed from it.

work as an experimental site that could work as the basis for creating and testing ideas to feed the evolving Finnish preschool system.

Finnish Specifics – How Summerhill Fits the German Idealist Tradition?

Antu Sorainen: Until the mid-20th century, the Finnish education discourse was deeply affected by the German idealistic tradition. The ideology of comprehensive schooling was first debated in Finland in the late-19th century, when two principal ideas about the content of this new concept were in competition. The first line of thought underlined the concept of *Sittlichkeit,* originating in Hegel's philosophy. It refers – roughly put – to the habits of the nation combined with the political courage to make judgment when needed. The Finnish national philosopher, J.V. Snellman, was the advocate of this first line. For him, education was never universal but always aimed at raising a specific historical person – Finnish, female, agrarian, or something else. He saw the child as a future member of society and the state. Therefore, the child needed to be educated to understanding fully what the membership of the state means and requires. It is also worth pointing out that Snellman, who is usually seen as Hegel's interpreter and translator in Finland, also refers to Rousseau in his major works.

The second line of thought stressed positivism, science and innovation. It was promoted by Uno Cygnaeus. For him, the origin of education sprang from the Nature itself, and its target was to develop and cultivate the personal internal ethics of each singular pupil. This latter view was more successful and it came to dominate the first steps of the evolving Finnish elementary school. However, these two ideological streams have both been influencing, in some form, Finnish school throughout its history.

The early decades of the 20th century witnessed a certain shift from Hegelian idealism towards positivism and Rousseauan self-regulation in the Finnish philosophy of education. Rousseau stressed the importance of learning

through concrete things in a natural environment, with the help of the senses. A.S. Neill himself followed Rousseau in seeing the doctrine of "original sin" as a means of control. This thought invokes Rousseau's idea of children being born innocent and good, *tabula rasa*, with society corrupting them and making them miserable and cruel.

Rousseau's ideas were adopted in Summerhill where children were encouraged to build tree houses and play in the forest without adult control, a practice that quite clearly originates in Rousseau's ideas. In *Émile*, he promoted *Robinson Crusoe* as the ideal (and the only) book that a child should read before its 15th birthday – provided that those parts where the "corrupting" Friday enters the scene were cut. As a result, Robinson Crusoe was the first fiction book that was read in all parts of society in the global North thereby instilling two centuries of children with ideals of courage and fearless enterprise.

In line with this Rousseauan praise, the 1950s Finnish school reader contained a short story about two boys who wanted to play Robinson. The story was considerably adjusted, however, as the adventurous boys, looking to encounter nature independently, soon returned from their deserted island to the safety of the family, where mother's pancakes and the joys of the domestic sphere were awaiting them. The success narrative of individual genius was thus not impressed quite so heavily on Finnish children as it might have been in other countries: while it was fine to try to go it alone, failure to cope was also permitted, even embraced. Immediate "results" were not expected in learning how to be independent, as society in the form of the family network was readily at hand, supporting the child in growing up "slowly".

This complicated and particular history of educational philosophy is, of necessity, also reflected in the implementation of A.S. Neill's ideas about education in Finland. Doesn't this make Finland an interesting case in thinking about both the practicalities and conceptual lines of everyday utopias in the interstices of differing state and education ideologies in Europe?

Sirkka Ahonen: What you Antu say about Finland is true at least in one important sense. For Snellman, it was crucial that people would identify with the state, which represents the highest decency and ethical level compared to the selfishness prevalent in the business world and the competitive interest groups in the civil society. In Finland, we had remarkable utopianists, too. It would be interesting to know, for example, how Matti Kurikka organized children's education in his utopian Finnish migration community Sointula in the early 20th Century Canada.[38]

Antu Sorainen: Well, in the contract Kurikka had to sign with the government of British Columbia to get hold of the land for his collective, it was agreed that "all children need to be placed in an English-speaking school in two years after they reach the general school age". They built a separate school early on with native English teachers, such as John Stevens, a Scott who almost died once when he was lost in the utopian island's wilderness for two days. Kurikka's aim was to create a society where public kindergartens and schools would take care of children's upbringing and education so that women could participate in the work force equally with men, even though in gender separated tasks. In 1903, two years before the collective collapsed, there were 88 children in Sointula. In 1904, the first kindergarten was opened. The idea was that every mother could bring all their children, except those who could not walk yet, in the kindergarten, under the condition that they forfeited all their rights to bring up their children themselves. Children lived in the kindergarten day and night, and the house took care of their clothing and hygiene. If some mother wanted to take her child home for a night, it was not resisted in any way but afterwards she had to take care of the repair and washing of the child's clothes. Not every

[38] Matti Kurikka (1863-1915) was a Finnish Tolstoyan teosophian-socialist-utopianist journalist who founded a utopian community first in the North Queensland, Australia, and a second one, *Sointula*, in the British Vancouver. In Kurikka's letters at the time, it is obvious that he did not want to return to Finland without "canons and Mauser riffles", because he saw the country to be at the hands of a "Russian criminal government".

mother was happy with the care that the kids received in the house. This prompted Kurikka to address the issue separately in his magazine, in a rather Rousseauan terms. He asked why it should be enough to carry a child, give birth, breast-feed, wash and caress the infant to make one a good educator: ”How big is the majority of women who spoil their children’s sense of justice during its first year by teaching it to manipulate its mother by crying? By following their own weaknesses and whims they forget that education starts only from that moment when the mother starts to study the true reasons for its child’s evilness, and find ways to cut this off.” (Halminen, 1936.)

Lastenpaikka from the mothers’ point of view

Antu Sorainen: But back to Finland – how did you, Leena and Sirkka, as young mothers came to put your children in Lastenpaikka; and how you became familiar with the place?

Leena Eräsaari: For the first time I heard from Lastenpaikka from our neighbours. Their son had been there and they were joking about some details they had observed, I think it was about the meals: there was always food at the table and children could eat whenever they wanted to. But this habit had already been given up when my son entered the place.

We did not choose Lastenpaikkaa because of its ideology but for the fact that other places on offer were so crap. At the end of the 1970s and early 1980s, when Matti was there, other options were scare. Matti and my older child, Jenny, were both first in Pikku Iita children’s "garden". It was meant for 1-4 year olds, and kept by the Students’ Childcare Society. For children under 4 years old, there really were not that many places. Pikku Iita was located very far from our home, at the other end of the city, but it was a very good place.

When Matti could not go to Pikku Iita anymore, we put him into a council family care for a year. The place was awful, and I felt bad every morning when I took a child there. After this we decided to move him to Lastenpaikka,

and that was such a happy thing to do. No more had I worry about childcare. Matti stayed there until we moved to Jyväskylä in 1982. Even though he upgraded to the Finnish-Russian school he still went to play at Lastenpaikka after the school, together with other boys from there.

My daughter also later took her twins to Lastenpaikka, and also his son, who lived with his two gay fathers.

Sirkka Ahonen: I taught at the time in an experimental school (Helsingin Yhtenäiskoulu) and was interested in unconventional education. I discussed Lastenpaikka with my friends and liked the idea of the non-scheduled practice here.

Ideological reflections

Antu Sorainen: How do you think about the ideology of the Summerhillian schools?

Sirkka Ahonen: Originally, Summerhill was a profoundly philosophical idea. At the same time, Bertrand Russell founded his own experimental school. Both men, A.S. Neill and Russell, grounded their pedagogical thinking on the vitalism of the time (Bergson's *élan vital*, and similar ideas by others).[39] From this springs the intensive attention they gave to children's corporeality and bodily needs and desires. For example, in Russell's school children spent summers naked.

Neill agreed with Freud and Jung in that they saw that many matters and material things are symbolic. In his book, Neill tells about a boy, who stole a wristwatch. According to Neill's interpretation, the boy did this to compensate the lack of love he had experienced.

[39] *Élan vital* was coined by the French philosopher Henri Bergson in his book *Creative Evolution* (1907). In the book, he addresses the question of self-organisation and spontaneous morphogenesis of things in an increasingly complex manner. *Élan vital* was translated in the English edition as "vital impetus". Usually it is translated by his detractors as "vital force". It is a hypothetical explanation for evolution and development of organisms, which Bergson linked closely with consciousness – with the intuitive perception of experience and the flow of inner time. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Élan_vital#cite_ref-1)

Neill did not actually approve any "impressionist" relationship to study. For him, nothing was obligatory but once one started to study something, one was expected to show perseverance to reach one's goals in the subject.

Antu Sorainen: I agree. Neill was deeply influenced by Sigmund Freud and Wilhelm Reich – one of the most radical members of the second generation of psychoanalysts after Freud and the author of the renowned analysis of fascism's mass psychology – in his belief that children should not be denied sexuality: otherwise they would inherit adult fears. The core idea of Summerhill was 'release': "Allowing a child to live out his natural instincts". Neill believed in self-examination and often invoked the concept of "self-regulation", adopted from Reich (1930; 1931), who famously defended the right of youth to genital satisfaction, suggesting that all behaviour should come from the natural self of the child. Neill's thinking on the child as a free creature was revolutionary, but also closely tied to liberal ideas which are conjoined and consolidated by the British tradition of interest politics: groups of individuals positing a free will uniting to protect their shared interests and rights against the authoritarian state. Hence, there is also a strong stress on the concepts of *rights and freedom* in Summerhill ideology.

Leena Eräsaari: Personally, I had become familiar with Lastenpaikka before actually reading Neill's books. It may even be that I have never read his texts! A couple of year ago I bought his book from a second-hand shop but it is lies unopened in my shelf.

What comes to the pedagogy literature I read a lots of Soviet pedagogical books back then, Makarenko, and who else…and oh a plenty of those totally boring books from the DDR. Only recently I put those to trash, actually. Had I known that Summerhill in the 1960s Finland would start to interest scholars again, I would have saved them and donated to you! In one of those books, for example, education was attached to State Monopology (*Vamokap* in Finnish, *Staatsmonopolistische kapitalismus* in German). But only Makarenko was

interesting, others I had no powers to read. There were probably other important Soviet pedagogues who were defending communism, but I have forgotten their names now.

I remembered these old "hobbies" when I read Ljudmila Ulitskaja recently. I now advertise her books to everyone! She writes in several of her books about the Soviet education. But now when I come to think about it there was this couple in the Lastenpaikka crew who were enthusiastic about the Soviet education. Also the leading figure behind Lastenpaikka (Seppo Bruun) was at least at some point very impressed by the views on play presented by the DDR pedagogues.

In my own research I have focused on organisations as "travelling ideas" which arrive in a new environment with an already readymade organization. In this environment new ideas and practices are implemented and rooted. From this point of view, I would guess that in Finland, Neill's thinking was complemented and moulded with the old German pedagogical ideas that we already had "ready" here, and then some new Soviet ideas were added. But this is just my rough guess here and now.

Antu Sorainen: Are you still interested in Summerhill, or have you actually visited there?

Sirkka Ahonen: When working in Britain in 1977-1980 I followed up the Summerhill story and would have liked to visit the place but was not received. Generally, in my view, children are no guinea-pigs. A school must work in terms of informed common sense. Educational opportunity must be equal; therefore I trust the free (without fees) universal public education and detest all kinds of school shopping.[40]

Antu Sorainen: I do not think that it is an exception that you were not received there. Apparently, Summerhill children, even though they are quite

[40] See Ahonen 2014.

conscious of the contradictory response from their immediate environment and wider society, are, at the same time, highly protective of their school (Cooper 2014).

Self-construction in a Summerhillian environment

Antu Sorainen: What makes Summerhill a unique School is that it is based on the principle of children's self-regulation. According to Neill (1960, 21), "no culprit at Summerhill ever shows any signs of defiance or hatred of the authority of his community" since they all have an instrumental part in creating and sustaining it. Neill believed that "free children are not easily influenced; the absence of fear is the finest thing that can happen to a child". It has been claimed that, consequently, adults who spent their childhoods at Summerhill (theoretically) have an integrated and secure identity that is not easily open to outside threats and neuroses.

In the mid-1970s, some of these kinds (most Summerhillian ideas) in Helsinki *Lastenpaikka* had already been changed – but it was still resolutely utopian, alternative and experimental. Matti, you entered the kindergarten at this point as a child. How would you describe your relationship to the Utopian now?

Matti Eräsaari: I have noticed that I am reflecting on my psychological inheritance from *Lastenpaikka* all the time with my own child: she is really strong-willed and stubborn, and I am quite proud of this! I even take some credit for it, because I have let her do her own decisions from the start of her life (and so has my spouse): "Do you want to do X or Y? Shall we take bikes or train?" Etc. I know that most parenting manuals tell you that the child should not be allowed to decide on too many things on her own, but it does not seem to have affected my daughter in any negative way. But then again, we, as her parents, have been affected: nothing ever happens quickly as the child has the power to influence things, and she never accepts ungrounded imperatives but

offers strong counter-arguments if one tries to tell her what to do. But I think it is great wisdom to be capable of questioning things that are offered to you as self-evident, and to assess arguments that have been presented to you as something natural or righteous.

Antu: Do you see a difference between your experiences of the children's culture in *Lastenpaikka* and in the comprehensive school?

Matti: I think that the moment when I understood that I had adopted a new "ethos" was in my new hometown Jyväskylä. I met a group of my old mates from *Lastenpaikka* and the Finnish-Russian School. There was some kid we did not want to hang out with, and I suggested that we should get rid of him. The other children told me that this was not the way to handle the situation – it would not feel nice for the kid. I then made another inappropriate suggestion: I started to share my candy with others when this "wrong" kid was not around. Again, the other children told me that it was not a right thing to do. When I defended my position by explaining that we had too little candy they corrected me: "A good person will share even if they don't have much, a bad person won't no matter how much they have."

At that moment, I remembered that "this is how we always did it" in *Lastenpaikka*. I understood that my new mates in Jyväskylä were acting on the basis of a totally different set of rules than my old group: that in this new "normal school" gang other kids can be shunned; that it is OK to refuse to share candy with everyone present, etc. I had never before realized the difference between these two different spheres of rules that had been actualized in my child life. But when I realised it, I felt ashamed at once, because the morals of the old *Lastenpaikka* gang felt right – and my alienation from it felt wrong. The background for this was the explicit ideal of equality in Lastenpaikka, even though I do not remember how it was taught to us kids.

Generally, the shift to a normal non-metropolitan Finnish elementary school in Jyväskylä (mid-1st grade) came as a shock. I had no skills at all! I was

sitting and raising my hand to teacher's questions in a too disciplined manner, because this was how I was raised to behave in the Finnish-Russian School; I could not sing the normative Christian songs which all the other kids memorised without notes; I tried to teach to my new friends that one cannot talk about "Russians" ("ryssä") in a dismissive way, and that bad guys do not fight with MIGs… Finally, I befriended a Swedish-speaking boy who was as equally "out" in a Finnish-speaking school as I was in the "normal" sphere of the comprehensive school in Jyväskylä.

Antu: Summerhill children's identities are more internally than externally generated, claims Gorman. In his approach, in viewing the curriculum as a development, or as a becoming, or as a pathway, or as, perhaps, a milieu, these open and ethical views can find sustenance and support in the actual lived experience of former students, and thus function as the living proof in its former students' adult lives. Matti, what are your views on this; in which ways your self-image has been influenced by alternative education?

Matti: I would say that *Lastenpaikka* produced self-confident, extroverted children, but what kind of self-image can be attached to this? It is difficult to speculate on what was created in the kindergarten and what comes from somewhere else. I am quite confident, however, about my own understanding and skills in problem solving in acute situations. This may be seen as one heritage from the alternative education.

Leena: In my understanding, Lastenpaikka influenced Matti's self-perceptions to some degree, but other things influenced him, too, which surrounded him when he was a kid. Where I saw some influence of Lastenpaikka on Matti: He fell in love with the Narnia books, and in particular, in Tolkien's Lord of the Rings. Matti collected Tolkien's books in different languages and studied mushrooms in the same way that hobbits did. There is this family anecdote of Matti that we tell to everyone. He wanted so desperately to be a hobbit that he glued pieces of woollen yarn to his legs.

The reading he did, and Lastenpaikka as an early educational environment that he participated, together probably strengthened Matti's faith and desire for "an original communism" or whatever gift-changing economy it was that he was convinced of. I mean: all these factors together influenced his world-views. But on top of this, he and some of the Lastenpaikka boys had bands; there were always bands in Lastenpaikka, and there have always been different bands in his life ever since – it is a form of boy sociality.

My daughter Jenny was not directly influenced by Summerhillian ideologies as she herself was not in Lastenpaikka, but there are indirect routes: sometimes she went to Lastenpaikka to pick Matti up, and also other times because one of the ideas was to "treat the whole family". Also, Bruun boys spent a lot of time in our home so Jenny met them a lot. Further, Jenny also went to the Finnish-Russian School and speaks fluent Russian. Matti did not learn it so well because he was so small and in Jyväskylä there was no teaching available in Russian.

People who gathered around Lastenpaikka were those of our own "bubble" – our friends, of both of the parents and children, even one of my teachers from the university, in Social Work. Seppo Bruun and his boys became actually family friends. The boys came to visit Matti several times in Jyväskylä, and Matti travelled to Vantaa to visit them. When Olli, my youngest son was small we lived in Jyväskylä where there were not many options to choose anything alternative in terms of kindergartens.

I do not know if all the children of the founding members were in Lastenpaikka. The most important fact is that it was a social meeting place for parents and other adults who supported its ideas – hence, it took care also of adults. There was beer at the cash bar in parents' nights, for example. There were really many types of people active around Lastenpaikka, hence it was educating for everyone involved.

Sirkka Ahonen: In our case, Lastenpaikka was not close enough to

home, thus my son stayed in it only a few weeks. Therefore, I can't estimate the affect of its idealist framework on his self-perceptions. In the Summerhill book, there is a lot of about the experiences of the children.

Leena Eräsaari: I would like to add this: I did not witnessed it myself but one of my former schoolmates since 50 years told me that her children had also been in Lastenpaikka. But these kids were girls, and she found that in girls were "underdogs" there. The leading figure, Seppo Bruun, had only sons himself, so it is theoretically possible that he put boys in a higher esteem than girls… But personally, I did not see anything like this happening. My daughter's daughter Aada (one of the twins) is the only girl whose path in the Lastenpaikka I followed closely, and she never complained about how girls were treated there. And she is very sensitive to all forms of discrimination.

Antu Sorainen: The involvement of parents and the rest of the family in Lastenpaikka is interesting, as Neill believed that the function of children is to live their own life, not the life that anxious parents and other adults think they should live or one governed by the purpose of educators who think they know what is best for children. Interference and guidance on the part of adults only produces *a generation of robots*, Neill wrote. *Lastenpaikka* was understood as an extended family that created a safe environment for children to grow in. Education freed from bureaucratic restrictions was seen as an important element in the growth of *independent* life and in taking *responsibility* for oneself and others. Obviously, this idea could be matched with the "education of parents", but it must have felt culturally strange at the time?

Leena Eräsaari: Co-operation between the kindergarten and parents was new at least since my own childhood, as it was not usual in the 1950s or even 1960s that parents were involved in their children's education.

I myself had never been in kindergarten, as those were targeted only for the kids of the really impoverished families. My mother was a working mother, but the neighbourhood women took care of their own and some other children

(like me). My school was typical German pedagogy-influenced institution where authority was highly appreciated. I think that my parents, who came from the lower middle-class would not have dared to co-operate with the school because for them, middle class presented some scary and redeemed people, up from their own rank.

There were several people in the original Association Board (for example Marianne Laxén) who were also long-time activists once the place existed but I did not know all of them. In the kindergarten "field", there were hierarchical struggles based on one's education, as it mattered in terms of authority whether one had a university degree or some lower level education. For example, Seppo Bruun came in the picture only after he took his MA degree first elsewhere. He retired only a several years ago.

To Conclude: The rise of home schools and neoliberal thought

Antu Sorainen: *Lastenpaikka* continues in its original location in the middle-class Helsinki suburb even though The City of Helsinki has reduced its freedoms in considerable ways during the last years. However, while its working principles have been adjusted and renegotiated many times, A.S. Neill's ideals of 'free' education form the deep basis of its everyday organizing, for example, that children should be largely left to play and learn without knowing adults, in a site that offers plenty of options for playing.

This autonomy of children seems to contradict the current trend of attachment parenting and another alternative rising trend among the middle class parents: homeschooling. What do you think about the current "boom" of home schools in Finland?

Sirkka Ahonen: I would not compare the recent alternative and home schools that have been developed in Finland to Summerhill. Many of those are Christian schools, based on the "Philistine" ideas that "our children are far too good to go to school with the random children". Only a small part of those

schools that have distanced themselves from the comprehensive school ideology have been pedagogically revolutionary; for example, Ilola School at Vantaa (a city next to Helsinki). In Sweden, free schools are mostly Islamic schools, or, alternatively, they are about making business as they make profit on the expense of the state, which is then sent tax-free to the Cayman Islands.

Antu Sorainen: Yes, it seems likely that the current stress on individualism will be prompting some radical resistance in the education sphere but an actual Summerhillian School has yet to be actualised in Finland. The idea has been revived recently in social media groups and activists meetings in Turku and Helsinki. One idea that has been implemented has been to establish a 'free' online *Feeniks School*. It follows the pattern of home schools first made popular by hippies, and later adopted by extremist Christian sects, mainly in the US. It remains unclear to what extent the activists behind the Feeniks School and other home schools are interested in applying A.S. Neill's ideas as many of them are also influenced by the so called eco-parenting and attachment parenting ideas that do not parallel Summerhillian ideologies without certain problems.

Here, a relevant question is to ask if the emerging alternative schools, in attempting to divert their curriculum from the state schools, could avoid being dovetailed with neoliberalism's interest in encouraging individual "choice". This question touches not only the relations between the individual and the culture but also those between social movements and the state, as utopian sites always have a complex and complicated relationship to mainstream culture and its norms.

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