DOSSIER

INSPECTION AT SUMMERHILL

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Abstract: This paper considers issues surrounding the 1999 OFSTED inspection of Summerhill school (in Suffolk) which led to a Notice of Closure, and subsequent successful appeal on the grounds of inappropriate judgements made by OFSTED inspectors. It is useful to note that Summerhill School has existed in the independent sector offering 'progressive education' since the 1920s. However, following a 1990s inspection from OFSTED, its existence was threatened in terms of its freedom in future continuing to offer an independent UK-based fully 'democratic' schooling (despite the fact that parents pay for their children to attend Summerhill outside any UK state offering). This paper identifies problems for organisations subject to inspection which do not conform to the formal organisation model.

Keywords: Summerhill, School Effectiveness, Independent School Inspection.

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Introduction

The extent to which an OFSTED inspection of an atypical independent school (Summerhill) is able to make appropriate judgements about that school remains a matter of some contradiction and consideration. The purpose of inspection is to improve schools yet given different philosophical standpoints that underpin education at Summerhill, the question of how far might inspection undermine potential for improvement at Summerhill throught the constraint of the very process in attaining accuracy of judgement is posited.

Summerhill maintains child democracy or freedom as its unique focus. Summerhill School has existed in the independent sector offering 'progressive education' since the 1920s. However, following a 1990s UK state inspection, its existence was threatened in terms of its freedom in future continuing to offer an independent UK-based fully 'democratic' schooling, yet at appeal, the DFEE dropped its case against Summerhill after only 3 days of tribunal hearing (Playdon, 2000).

Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) had been responsible for the inspection of Summerhill school until OFSTED replaced HMI in conducting the 1999 inspection. However, HMI inspection was infrequent nationally and reports were relatively secret (Ormston and Shaw 1994). Whereas, the intention of OFSTED is not only to expose 'failing schools' but to work towards international comparators, which allow economic judgements to be made with our global competitors in terms of educational provision (Ormston and Shaw, 1994). Yet Summerhill attracts learners worldwide and parents choosing and funding a Summerhill education had not perceived the school as 'failing' or Summerhill would fail simply by the parental withdrawal of student cohorts. Summerhill had a longevity exceeding 80 years.

In 1999, OFSTED inspection judgements were based upon evidence from observations; pre-inspection evidence (which includes statistical evidence from the school as well as policy and curriculum documentation and staff job

descriptions). The examination of pupil work; and discussions with Headteachers, Deputy Heads, Senior Managers, pupils and teachers supplemented pre-inspection evidence (Clegg and Billington 1994). Whereas, independent schools had largely been able to avoid the full UK governmental model (Dunsford 1998). The independent sector negotiated separate 'modus operandi' to that forced upon state-funded provision. Possibly, this suggests a lack of acceptance for OFSTED inspection methods.

Simple analysis of test results does not necessarily offer any indication to educational standards given the differences of children and any difficulties they may incur. Report publication may merely result in an educational provision being 'submitted to trial by inadequately informed opinion' (Barton et al, 1980). Parents may be the least able to interpret inspection if they do not 'buy into' educational consumerism' (Radnor et al, 1997). Yet, in the Major era of increasing 'consumerism' of the public sector, viewing education as a commodity purveyed through market mechanisms, had meant that internal scrutiny of schools was generally accepted (Bush, 1994). There is a parental need for confidence that real improvement takes place within institutions. Since political accountability is determined by policy popularity or level of interest to meet needs of voting public this 'confidence' needs to be held within the community (Radnor et al, 1997). Compliance to national educational 'norms' were thus imposed by a national inspection regime (Bush 1987).

Since inspection highlights any managerial failing to meet educational 'norms', self-managed educational institutions no longer hide shortcomings it was claimed. Compliant behaviour and discipline are judged together with the quality of learning experience (Smith, 1995). A fundamental methodology lies with a prescribed criteria and thus, perception for behaviour and order against which levels of learning might be judged. This might have proved to be a source of 'difficulty' for any inspection of Summerhill since Summerhill sets out to meet demand for an education which falls outside of educational 'norms'. It

should also be pointed out that learning and education are both intangible. Both are open to highly different interpretations of 'quality' eg exceptionally high standards, consistency (zero defects), fitness for purpose, value for money or transformation (Harvey, 1993). Summerhill may have 'fallen foul' of this and subsequent to appeal of the inspection judgement, Summerhill set up an independent inspection. Summerhill heralded the judgement as being directly at variance with Summerhill school educational philosophy rather than being issues for educational improvement (Cunningham 2000).

The Centre for Self-Managed Learning, (which Cunningham chairs), carried out an independent inquiry to successfully counteract the OFSTED inspection. This included another inspection (Cunningham, 2000). The Independent Inspection team produced visit reports facilitating each inspector as free to comment, unconstrained. The independent inspection time comprised university lecturers, a psychologist, teaching school heads, an educational consultant and a children's author (Cunningham, 2000). The independent inquiry argued that the statistical evidence of exit award attainment used by OFSTED at Summerhill was an inadequate method of comparison to other schools. To explain, low school entry numbers for a small school, in any one year, skews any true interpretation with national trends (Cunningham 2000). The independent inquiry claimed a 'better picture of the school' could be achieved by a longer inspection visit (Cunningham, 2000). Further distinction may be achieved from comparison of the autonomous reports from the independent inspectors with the report derived from grading criterion of OFSTED inspection which suggests that inspection 'judgements' lie with affiliations of 'schools of thought' as to what is 'measurable' quality or leads to raised standards.

The OFSTED inspection included a review of the prior 1990 HMI report (OFSTED 1999) and previous reports since 1949 (Cunningham, 2000). The independent inquiry also reviewed Social Services reports including those

made after the OFSTED visit and surveyed leaver, parent and community attitudes to the school. The drawing by the independent inspection team of wider documentary sources reveals a perception of insufficiency in the textual sources used to inform government inspectors (Cunningham, 2000). The Independent Inspection team autonomously produced reports with free comment, unconstrained from each observer. Whereas the OFSTED report observation grading was flawed at best, at worst deficient or inadequate since 'behaviourally-anchored criteria' grading is inappropriate as it provides only a 'unidimensional' measure (Wragg 1999). Observing and judging 'good teaching' is dependent affiliation to school of thought. Where 'concerns' for pupil control over curricula have been cited as 'problems' within Progressive Education (Silcock, 1997). The Notice for Complaint served at Summerhill identified areas that must be addressed yet a standard template feedback was not 'contextualised' to meet the needs of 'democratic' schooling. The statutory responsibility of inspection is to report the 'quality' of education, the standards achieved, the efficient use of resources and the spiritual, moral and cultural development of the pupils (Clegg and Billington, 1994). Yet the time constraints upon OFSTED inspection may only result in a 'still photograph' of the institution rather than any reflection over time of the spiritual, moral or cultural development (Bowring-Carr, 1996). Possibly, this suggests that the need to report back on Summerhill took predominance over any encouragement for proactive change or real improvement. Weakness must lay also in any philosophical failure of inspection in terms of fulfilling 'local accountability' (Radnor et al, 1997) needs of Summerhill parents and governors.

In order to gain reprieve from the notice, the independent inquiry mainly highlighted the noted inadequacies of inspection methodologies. Methodologically, 'observation validity' is founded by the purpose of the observation (Croll: 1986). Observation 'snapshots', absent of recognition for the underpinning theory-laden values against which judgements are made

(Hammersley:1994, Hitchcock and Hughes: 2001) may originate from within a reductionist, politically-founded paradigm through compliance to national educational 'norms' (Bush, 1997). A different methodological and philosophical approach may have facilitated a different outcome. The independent inquiry identified OFSTED claimed a 'drift' in standards which could not be substantiated through Summerhill's results. As a result, the independent inquiry considered that it was the school's philosophy, rather than observation evidence, which resulted in the 1999 OFSTED Notice of Closure (Cunningham, 2000). The independent inquiry was successful in defending OFSTED's resulting Notice of Complaint, therefore, it may be argued that a difference of philosophy was at the root. Summerhill argued that inspectors did not assess 'out of class learning activities' through 'time constraints'. Summerhill pupils complained that inspectors were only interested by 'lessons' and held no other interest in other aspects of the learning (environment) (Cunningham, 2000). The framework for inspection measures institutions against educational norms and Summerhill claimed that this basic element would result in inappropriate judgements of Summerhill. This paper then deliberates upon school improvement and effectiveness and whether inspection could provide vehicle for improvement for Summerhill given the idea that pre-defined constructs may not facilitate 'reality' upon observation.

Views of A. S. Neill in his and others' writing (Hart (1970), Hemmings (1973), Walmsley (1969)) provide background to the acclaimed 'unique', philosophical approach of Summerhill and potentially, Summerhillian thinking regarding inspection. The work of AS Neill provides indications of the influences since founding of the school over 80 years ago. The philosophical underpinnings of Summerhill as an independent, self proclaimed 'Free School' is an important starting point. A. S. Neill, the founder of Summerhill, had authored texts, which outline the school's philosophy which he espoused as an antedote to the negative influences of traditional restrictive timetables and

schooling programmes. Neill's publication, Hearts not Heads in the School, (Neill, 1944), written when Summerhill school was 23 years old. It relates the use of psychology in school – possibly visionary opinions for the time of writing - that asylums hold people who are considered mad merely because they cannot fit into an insane society. Neill (1944) suggests the world was moving away from Individualism to some sort of collectivism with the future of education treating the masses in such a way that the individual will be more likely to be pliable. He claimed the gregariousness of Summerhill lay with 'a mother-child attitude' (Neill, 1944, p 17-28). Neill's (1944) views of social psychology and its application to education (as control) are illustrated, when discussing Curriculum. Neill's deeply held views of a state educated 'Powerless Youth' are clarified by claims to the role of play as opposing to classroom discipline arguing only a small per cent of teachers are on the side of the child (p139). It might be drawn that Neill felt other schools were not generally developmental socially nor embraced the theme of freedom - which was of politically fashionable importance at the time of much of his writing. He considered freedom as an essential need, which might be attributed to a post-First World War period of writing. Within his work, it would appear that much of the 'deviance of learners' appears to be attributed to a failure of satisfying children's need by educationalists. Neill (1944) appears to feel that rather than addressing the whole needs of the individual, education is delivered in a functional fashion. This might be evidenced by his questioning of the opportunities for fellowship within schooling. Neill (1944) argued that there was no real fellowship unless community is free from taboo and morality and fear, that crime will always flourish in a society whose emotions are repressed. Education, he argued should aim at preventing buried emotions from being inimical to society, education should concentrate on feeling and not on thinking (Neill, 1944). Neill (1972) in Neill! Neill! Orange Peel! provides additional insight, in particular, providing some reflections upon Neill's view of his educational role and relationships with

inspection. Much of his writing is littered with the failings of state education which coloured the philosophy that Neill proposed as the foundations of Summerhill. Neill (1972) illustrates comparisons to educational development in Britain by claiming it the freest country in the world since he believed Summerhill would not be allowed elsewhere (p 53) due to old patriarchal demand for obedience and discipline being as strong as ever in state systems (p. 186).

Perceptions of public accountability are included in the analogies of Neill (1972), where he considers that it is the external validity of educational practices which are endorsed by the users and providers of education. Neill (1972) radically suggests that public accountability does not meet the needs of the child but merely the views of the general public. Neill (1972) fundamentally challenges the approach of inspection of Summerhill suggesting this promotes insincere judgement of educational need insofar as educational accountability for state provision by each government lies with the acceptance of practices through the ballot box.

Historically Summerhill had a mixed experience of inspection. This seems to be explained by Neill as being largely dependent upon the individual HMI inspector. At one level, he suggests that the individual inspector might be limited by own culture and intellect versus at another level, that of the inspection regime. Despite the main commentary of inspections lying with the deficiencies of traditional teaching practices at Summerhill, by contrast, on one occasion inspectors suggest that the progressive philosophy of Summerhill was appropriate as an educational environment but merely mis-delivered. This suggests a looseness of HMI inspection which facilitated differing views of the appropriate standard, or nature of the Summerhill educational experience. Insight to Neill's view of the potential validity of inspection of self-funded schools might also be drawn from expressed Neill views, where a clear sense of resentment that, despite parental approval of the educational experience of

Summerhill, the state would only accept Summerhill's educational role if it were fully consistent with state educational policy. Having abandoned lessons Summerhill pupils often bloom late but a visiting Inspector would class this as 'failure' (Hemmings, 1973). Neill (1944) suggested inspection makes for insincerity. The kids tidy up but they feel self-conscious and unhappy. He questions why the teaching profession should tolerate inspection when other professions would not, claiming that for fifty years educated and intelligent parents have sent their children to Summerhill pleased with the results, why should Summerhill be judged by an official standard that is not appropriate to its philosophy. Neill claimed that Summerhill is primarily for living and refused to be judged by a body of people who think of learning and teaching methods and discipline only (p 155). Yet clearly, despite claiming the UK to be 'the freest country in the world', Neill (1944) viewed the role of the state in educational terms as powerful. One to which Summerhill (and Neill) would need to conform sufficiently in order to be able to continue Neill's mission of 'free schooling'. In essence, this suggests potential conflict between Summerhillian philosophy and inspection. Neill (1944) identifies views inspectors as contradictory to Summerhillian ideals. He suggests that Summerhill is concerned holistically with the individual and their future engagement in life and freedom. Whereas, he perceives state-led education as based in examinations and timetabling, despite, fundamentally that Summerhilll has attained examination success at the end of schooling (Neill 1944).

Critics of Summerhill

Should Summerhill be compliant in its educational practice, if those seeking academic accreditation still achieve qualification? Neill and Summerhill have been both admired and criticised internationally. Much of Neill's work is considered controversial, particularly as his texts address issues of sexual freedom within schooling as well as religious beliefs based in psychological

interpretations. Historically, Summerhill has been under worldwide scrutiny by those who interested by what has been accepted as a unique and possibly pioneering approach to schooling. To present any possible reception of Summerhill by educationalists, review of some of the arguments attracted by Neill might illustrate the emotional feelings that Summerhillian philosophy has attracts Potentially, such literature also may have influenced an inspection team (although they may have been aware of this prior to inspection) since the study of Summerhill has not been an uncommon topic in teacher training and this may have impacted upon their judgements when conducting inspection.

Contributions from the following authors (Barrow, 1978, Culkin et al, 1970) provide some of the arguments surrounding Neill's approaches and present a range of impressions of Summerhill - to include further reflections upon earlier HMI inspection mentioned by Neill in his work. One adverse view of Summerhill, that it was 'old hat' rather than revolutionary. The child as a Noble Savage, needing only to be let alone in order to insure intellectual salvation, or they develop horrid neuroses later on in life. By leaving the kids alone they'll educate themselves was educational 'guff' as old as the human race (Rafferty 1970, p. 11). By sharp contrast, claims that Summerhill made educationalists understand that instead of requiring the child to fit himself to the requirements of the school, schools should adapt to the requirements of the child. By putting the child on an assembly-line, continuing traditional methods of 'education' have really nothing whatever to do with the functions and purposes of a genuine education (Montagu, 1970). Neill allows it to be seen that a teacher should be one who cares for the student ministering to the unique needs and personality of each student toward creativity.

Some of the concerns of traditionalist education are also echoed in criticism of Neill insofar as he recognises that by making the school 'fit the child', life in later years will not recast its iron imperatives to fit the individual - a human being must come to an arrangement with the world about him

(Rafferty, 1970). Whilst schools meet individual needs and differences it cannot 'fit' every child (Rafferty 1970, p 14). Traditionalist, modernist criticism of Progressive education is evidenced when lessons are optional. The Progressive Education strand which runs through the tapestry of Summerhill suggests that what is learned is less significant than how it is learned. In particular, that nowhere in the Summerhill philosophy does there seem to be the merest hint that children should learn to think and act in an orderly, disciplined manner despite the experience of the great mass of humanity over the centuries which has demonstrated that 'the easiest, most efficient, and most economical way to learn is in organised classes' (Rafferty 1970, p. 16-17). Yet Culkin (1970) writes that although they had never visited Summerhill 'it is a holy place…charged with wisdom, love' and suggested that the terror of educational critics of the idea is probably the most accurate measure of its validity have (Culkin 1970, p. 27-28). He suggested that the wisdom of Summerhill is exquisitely suited to the needs of the child of the electronic age. It begins with the respect for and love for the child and Neill's concern for total cognitive and affective growth of the child has never been easier to acknowledge than in our day when the gravitational pull of the electronic media is pulling us. Yet, traditional institutions stress the fragmented and compartmentalised style of life (Culkin, 1970, p. 31).

A more cynical viewing of Summerhill argues against Neill's ideology, suggesting that the underlying dogma of the Summerhill faith is 'that children, if not subjected to any adult pressures or influences are perfect seeds that will turn into beings of predestined goodness' (Herchinger, 1970, p 35). Whilst accepting Summerhill as a startlingly successful in approaching its own ideal, would Summerhill have remained intact if it had many more than 45 youngsters? Simply, the great majority of the world's parents would not believe in Neill's basic concepts so there would be no way of setting up Summerhill for great numbers (Herchinger, 1970, p35-38). Barrow (1978) argues the

Summerhill philosophy of self-regulation is problematic as Summerhill cannot sensibly be regarded as neutral foundation territory and that child immediate happiness of freedom to attend lessons might not be the most suitable for preparation to happy adult lives in wider society. Whilst educational theory is tested through practice, the absence of systematic inquiry, evidence or due caution leads to inaccurate conclusions. Neill's philosophies, absent of these factors fail to recognise the nature of children changes as they grow older and this may be a consequence of their schooling rather than innate qualities (Barrow, 1978). Setting up a school within an ideology does not necessarily prove the wisdom of it. It is the long-term consequences which allow judgements to be made. By presenting 'problems' with Summerhill philosophy, Barrow (1978) further unveils problems for inspection. He contends that simply looking at a school in practice does not allow for judgement of whether a particular system of education is working. Equally, even if Summerhill works in practice does not present that it is a good school.

Walmsley (1969) might assist appreciation of the literature-depicted atmosphere at Summerhill. Consistent to this image portrayed, impressions might also be gained from Walmsley (1969), and by Hemmings (1973), of the atmosphere of Summerhill as a demonstration of an 'anti-school' (p194). Yet the 'effectiveness' of Summerhill school might be thought about in light of Bernstein's work, in The New Era (February 1967) and Psychology Today (October 1968) USA. He interviewed 50 Old Summerhillians. It is noted that the descriptions are probably no more damning than might be expected from a group of ex-pupils of any school. It was not apparent that this sample had been permanently handicapped in their careers. It would appear that Bernstein's research substantiates an academically effective school. Though Bernstein (1968) noted the descriptions were simply unique when describing Neill. Descriptions included that it was always difficult to know how much Neill was seeing since he was curiously aware and yet unaware of what went on in the

school - Neill at Summerhill was like seeing the tip of an iceberg - in touch with everything yet seemingly totally oblivious.

School improvement is fundamental to the validity of inspection (West-Burnham, 1997) however. Whilst the inspection draws on qualitative evaluation both the time constraints and reliability of judgements present issues in terms of interpretation (Ferguson et al, 2000). These issues may have contributed to the invalidity of the Summerhill inspection since it was unique. Yet claims for improvement through inspection warrant cautious examination. Rather than gaining greater or multiple insights (eg from pluralist post-modernist inquiry, against which actions 'for improvement' might be negotiated with the 'democratic' or progressive education being inspected), inspection possibly reinforces compliance to educational 'norms' rather than improvement. Certainly in the Summerhillian case, Neill (1944) forecast a government agenda which might predict the emotional reception of an inspection as a threat to Summerhill's existence.

The assertion is that an effective school is effective for all its students irrespective of ability, gender or age. Many schools seem to be 'effective' in catering for the needs of some of their students but given finite resources, struggle to provide an equally high standard for all – do such schools qualify for the title 'effective'? Nowhere does school effectiveness debate the educational values against which indirectly schools such as Summerhill may be unconsciously judged. Its motivation is that raising achievement will enhance competitive economic status of nation state, it under-theorizes and such assumed self evidence of the raising standards chorus is bound to fail. Difference is to be valued and not to be closed down by straightforward recipes and as such calls for more careful robust responses (Slee, 1998). School reform has frequently failed in the past because educators and policy makers are reluctant to acknowledge the nature of education problems and willing to accept partial answers. Optimism has helped avoid dealing with tough questions.

Governments need to take a more balanced policy approach to assessing school performance and making them accountable. Even using a value-added analysis, schools will not perform at the same level (Thrupp 1999). Good policy would acknowledge that schools will be more or less effective but will also be realistic about the nature of the students (whilst typically this argument refers to equality in state schools this can be equal to uniqueness of Summerhill).

Education in Britain has been a turnstile for employment or academic success. Historically, truancy amongst girls was allowed and not seen as an educational problem since they might service the home – arguably a 'backdoor' Summerhill-style philosophy for non-compulsory lesson attendance. It is only the labour market crisis for skilled labour that mass compulsory education has marched forward in terms of ensuring educational provision is achieved via marketisation, report competition and league tables (Slee et al, 1998). However, there is little clarity of thinking upon a democratic school in a boarding school context, as would be the case for Summerhill.

Summerhill as an independent school is selective in terms of its pupil population and generally, as it is self-funding, pupils would tend to be from middle-income earners. However, since Summerhill attracts learners globally, ethnicity might be a factor for the school yet the Summerhill philosophy treats them as 'the same' – one best way? Yet, issues of motivation are key themes of Neill' criticism of educational provision and areas that Summerhill philosophy is 'held out' to address where the ideas of A S Neill advocated that the school should 'fit the child'. It is clear that the initial inspection regime did not set out to inspect independent schools such as Summerhill. However, it was within this same inspection regime that the Summerhill appeal case arose and in its intention to 'raise standards', Summerhill was threatened with closure.

Summerhill might also have suffered from its organic structure as Bush (1995), in terms of his theory surrounding an ambiguity model for analysing the school as an organisation notes issues of the ambigious school. The ambiguity

model portrays an organisation composed of an aggregation of loosely coupled subunits, which are subject to change (Bush, 1995). Relevance to Summerhill is clearly evidenced by testimony both from students and staff of Summerhill. Students claimed Summerhill as constantly changing. Problems may have arisen by the demands of a democratic culture, which loads consensual agreement, upon possible factions or subunits of Summerhill staff. Educational professional 'freedom' and deeply held anarchical teaching philosophies may have hampered the consensus required, in terms of time span, for agreement of staff to work towards many of the preparations for inspection offered by 'friends' advising Summerhill.

Within an ambiguity school, there is uncertainly over the relative power of parts of the organisation and power varies dependent upon the levels of fluid staff participation. As an analytical model, the ambiguity organisation assumes a 'problematic' technology insofar, generally, the processes are not properly understood. However, loose coupling translates into groups based on common values (Bush 1995). The unplanned decisions emanating from a 'fluid democracy', depicted in both Neill's writing, and the testimony of Summerhill staff, and students, stresses the decentralisation of Summerhill. It also illustrates potentially the difficulties of accountability faced by Summerhill. Within the ambiguity model, vague and unclear objectives provide inadequate guides for institutional behaviour. Rather than pre-determined objectives determining practice, decision making represents an opportunity for discovering goals (Bush, 1995). This might be consistent with the democratic processes of Summerhill since the lengthy pre-inspection staff discussions appear to suggest a review of teaching practices by staff, assisted by externals, leading to a discovery of the varied translations of Neill's philosophy by staff's own interpretive classroom practices.

The rules for the decision making process of Summerhill are clearly defined by the 'democracy' advocated by Neill's work. This contrasts against

any perceived lack of definition for decision making of the ambiguity structure. Yet, issues surrounding the extent of staff participation reflect the model. Particularly this is evidenced through the interview with member of staff, who noted that Summerhill staff meetings do not translate into full staff attendance and may be 'dysfunctional' and staff 'don't see it relevant'. Where Summerhill differs, perhaps, lies with the delegation, or potential abdication, by the management translating educational practices from Neill's philosophy and allowing freedom of attendance to staff. This 'freedom' dictates a fluid participation and fundamental ambiguity. Equally, the staff member interviewed confessed 'staff don't always get informed', suggesting further ambiguity of purpose and practice. A further feature of the ambiguity model is the formation of cliques or factions who attempt to rationalise the environment to translate its practices and possibly judgements of 'dysfunctional' lie with the perceptions of insiders or outsiders of such groups.

Within the ambiguity model, specific goals may be unclear but teachers accept the broad aims of education and there are predictable features which serve to clarify expected behaviour in accordance with 'rules'. The professional socialisation of staff assimilates the expected patterns through re-mentoring and reduces the uncertainty and unpredictability of education (Bush 1995). Much of Neill's work is composed as an antedote to the inadequacy of other educational provision, it may be inferred that Summerhill sought to 'cut itself off' as a sanctuary from state educational provision. In isolating itself from the outside world, despite still admitting pupils internationally, it may be interpreted that Summerhill produced a stable environment for its democratic community. It might be considered that Neill's philosophy sought to provide impervious boundaries for Summerhill. If Summerhill was an ambiguous organisation, would present itself with difficulties insofar as ambiguous models offer little practical guidance for its leadership (Bush 1995)? Yet if the notion of democratic Summerhill community meetings is about consensual 'law making',

by contrast to the Ambiguity model should Summerhill be considered a collegial model?

Collegial models emphasize that power and decision-making should be shared within the organisation (Bush 1995). Summerhill might be depicted as purely collegial. There is a common set of values through Neill's philosophies and these lead to shared educational objectives between both staff and students. Size is a feature of Neill philosophy. Popenoe (1970) argues that Neill would have been upset if Summerhill operated on too big a size as it would be impersonal. This might be consistent with the difficulty of lengthy decision-making to avoid contrived collegiality. Equally, collegial models present for ambiguity for external accountability. In the case of Summerhill inspection process, the collegial nature of debating all matters within the community led to conflict in terms of the expectations of inspectors of their educational leader.

A feature of collegial models is that the structure is an objective fact which has clear meanings for all members of the institution (Bush 1995). Summerhill does not provide clear meaning for all members. It might be considered there is a lateral structure for Summerhill. That the leader does not strongly influence decisions. This is consistent with a colleagial model. However, this leads to tension of leadership conflicting between accountability and participation. It could be suggested that like collegial models, Summerhill is strongly normative and this tends to obscure. Whilst consensual decision making seems to lie at Summerhill's heart, fluid participation may mean that the effectiveness of a collegial model is either undermined or its collegial nature forfeited to ambiguity insofar as apathy by staff or pupils to attend meetings fails any collegial model. An interesting perspective might be that should Summerhill prove to be collegial, then it should be applauded as a 'preferred' model to be aimed for by educational preference (Bush 1995) by contrast to an ambiguous model, which might be judged as chaotic and unstable. The inspection report suggests that inspectors perceived a chaotic educational

freedom. Whereas the court appeal case appears to have perceived Summerhill as collegial and as such, a valid philosophy to delivery of a broad and full curriculum at parent's choice. Perhaps, the leadership of Summerhill provides further evidence of whether Summerhill aligns more closely to collegial or ambiguity models.

Dimmock (2000) argues that school effectiveness is essentially reviewing 'failings' by schools. Therefore, judgements of Summerhill pupil attainment at key stages in core subjects would lead to perceptions of failure, despite Summerhill appeal defence that final examination results did not support judgements of educational failing. It can only be considered that concerns for Summerhill were such that their sole route for improvement was to issue the Notice of Complaint. One analysis for subsequent improvement might be provided by the concerns with regards to protection of the pupils, also indicating differences of beliefs surrounding child vulnerability. It would appear that the culture of Summerhill was not judged as a vehicle for improvement, unless improvement is defined as the changing of their culture by compulsory attending lessons. The drive for consistency between schools and wider state-provision would suggest problems of attendance would appear to be a 'school of thought' driven by the 'answers' offered by School Effectiveness ideas. It is interesting to reflect that Summerhill did not have an attendance problem. Simply, that as a boarding school where lessons were not compulsory, attendance was not a feature. To which the court appeal would not have changed Summerhillian culture but reinforced both their commitment to freedom of child to attend at child's discretion and a Neill-philosophy driven 'democratic' culture. Hopkins (1993) thinking concerning school improvement perhaps extends this filter and might be used for further analysis. He suggests that School improvement approaches to educational change embody the long term goal of moving towards the vision of the 'problem solving' or 'thinking' or 'relatively autonomous' school. Clearly, Summerhill is an autonomous

school, yet the parent and staff interview evidence suggests that whilst a review of practices was undertaken in light of the threat of OFSTED's Notice of Closure, the longer term goal for the school fundamentally lay with future avoidance of any spectre of adverse inspection.

The foundation of Neill's philosophy is the Summerhill-style preparation for life, rather than academic achievement, despite criticism for the vague ideology of such 'natural development' (Barrow, 1978). Individual attainment could be evaluated in terms of how well pupils reached or exceeded the standard expected for a typical pupil of that age. Whilst it recognised that for some schools, attainment would be low, the shift of importance would lie with the progress individuals make. Effectively, this might be a 'common-sense' reference to 'improvement'. Almost all pupils progress over time but their progress is not necessarily linear. Judgement about whether a pupil is making progress that is reasonable, good or poor should be made in relation to how well all pupils of similar prior attainment progress during the time.

Equally, if the sincere democratic principles of Summerhill are accepted, a triumph of the appeal case for childrens' rights is the agreement that future inspections will involve the children's opinions. However, it might also be concluded that this was further evidence that the inspection system was devised upon school effectiveness of the formal school and a democratic model might prove problematic since the OFSTED processes did not facilitate tools to address such occurrence.

Conclusion

This paper explores and considers the extent to which inspection of an atypical independent school (Summerhill) is enabled to make appropriate judgements about that school. By considering the arguments for school improvement and effectiveness presented, questions to whether the processes undermined and constrained both the potential for improvement at

Summerhill. The discussion surrounding analysis of Summerhill as an ambiguity, collegial or democratic organisation equally presents thinking as to the inspection of organisations dependant upon their structure. Perhaps, this reinforces the steerage of a heretic model of inspection insofar as problems associated for inspecting democratic, collegial or ambiguous organisations may reflect an intention that 'effective schools' should be formal. The effective school as the goal would lead to the role of school improvement by inspection to possibly lead to restructuring 'poor' organisations. A possible conclusion then may have been that the theoretical model informing inspection of Summerhill has been inappropriate. Perhaps the outcome of the court judgement was to further 'put right' poor judgement. Another view, which may be taken from the analysis of the case, may lie with an argument that the judiciary failed. A key issue from the independent inquiry noted that should Summerhill have been closed then Summerhillian would not move to institutional educational provision but home learning. The defence that Summerhill provides learners the opportunities to benefit from learning within a community is suggested as preferable to the isolation of home learning. Whilst it should be recognised that home learning falls under the responsibility of the local authorty, it is then a matter for judgement as to whether this would be a destination for Summerhillians post-Summerhill. Further, value judgements as to whether home learning would be lesser provision than that judged by the inspectors of Summerhill circles around whether any duty to protect learners was failed by the appeal case ruling. Perhaps, there is a need for a guardian for Summerhill insofar as it offers alternative educational experiences.

One impact of the inspection lies with the regained confidence of Summerhill in its defeat of the inspection result at appeal. Perhaps, this 'confidence' can be further judged by Summerhill setting up of the AS Neill Summerhill Trust (EADT, 25 May 2004). It appears that the trust might not

solely lie with their commitment to Neill's philosophies but a new 'confidence' that the state might have to work with them on their terms as an alternative school, rather than their conceding to any threats of future inspection. The setting up of the trust is aimed at raising bursaries for Summerhill school fees for parents on lower incomes and to offer residential places for teachers. The new trust to promote the school possibly suggests that one concluding outcome from the inspection in terms of the appeal case was to assure Summerhill's sustainability, rather than raise its standards in school effectiveness terms. The inspection and subsequent appeal case may have acted as a Guardian of the right to offer Neill's doctrine simply because a lack of demand by parents might be the sole (democratic) judge of the school's effectiveness. Plainly, as an independent school it would not be able to financially sustain its provision if it could not satisfy its role of external accountability to the parental audience. Since the inspection the advent of the 'free school' has been developed by the conservative government across the UK, whilst each school differs in its aims perhaps the emergence of the importance of the voice of the child and the democratic element of schooling discussed herein have influenced this far further than the current UK government might reveal.

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