An Examination of Participatory Self-Government as a Pedagogic Tool with Special Reference to Sudbury Valley and Summerhill Schools

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Abstract

The concept of the self-governing school was pioneered by the British educator A S Neill at his Summerhill school. Since his death in 1973 interest in the model has waned in the UK but a similar model based on the Sudbury Valley school in Massachusetts has seen more than 30 imitators worldwide. At a time when there is increasing international concern about the quality of democratic education, this dissertation examines the mechanism of self-government in both Sudbury Valley and Summerhill in the wider context of democratic educational theory and practice.

This dissertation concludes that it is reasonable to conflate the evidence from Summerhill and Sudbury Valley to form a reasonably coherent whole, that there is good theoretical support for the model and that there have been several successful implementations which tend to suggest that self-government can be a positive educational tool which is flexible enough to be capable of implementation under a limited mandate, under a relatively wide set of circumstances, but that it is by no means an easy option either for students or educators.
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1. Introduction

“Turn a deaf ear to people who say, "scientific men ought to investigate this, because it is so strange." That is the very reason why the study should wait. It will not be ripe until it ceases to be so strange”

(Charles Sanders Peirce, On the Economics of Research, 1902)

Two comprehensive international studies of democratic and civil education conducted by the International Education Authority in 1999 and 2009 have highlighted two questions which are of growing concern to governments of the many democratic countries which are currently facing high or increasing levels of voter apathy and low turnout. How can education prepare its future citizens for democratic society and engage them in it? How can today's youth be persuaded that government and politics are relevant to their lives?

Most schools today would claim to have a democratic element to them, perhaps in the form of a student council or possibly lessons on democracy and civics. Few however would go as far as to put the students in charge! Self-government by children sounds almost like a contradiction in terms, yet Summerhill School, founded in the 1920s by AS Neill, claims not only to provide just that, but also to prepare students to be engaged, cohesive members of tomorrow's democratic society without sacrificing the overall quality of their education. If that claim can be sustained, it should certainly be of interest to anyone concerned with tackling the problem of democratic engagement in schools as described above.

Over the past 90 years a huge volume of literature has been written about Summerhill school. Many attempts have been made to copy its approach; nearly all have ended in failure.

Sudbury Valley school (founded 1968 in the USA) appears to have bucked the trend and now has approximately 30 satellite schools worldwide. Has the time come to stop thinking about this model of education as 'radical' and start bringing it into the fold?

2. Aims

Both schools mentioned in the title claim to use several unusual teaching practices, which include amongst other things, complete freedom at the individual level, and free mixing of age groups. The aim of this dissertation is to test the claim, made by both schools, that the methods they use result in graduates who are uniquely democratically engaged, and to consider whether these methods are
capable of being used elsewhere. If that claim is reasonably made out, I will then go on to consider whether or not the wider use of the model is likely to be useful and/or desirable.

If the claims were made by just one individual or school I would probably consider myself bound by Peirce's economic maxim set out at the beginning of my introduction, namely that there is little to be gained from the close study of something which may turn out to have been a freak occurrence, dependent on variables which may not be capable of being reproduced. However, the fact that there is now a seemingly healthy and growing organisation which appears to use the same or similar methods with the same or similar outcomes (namely Sudbury Valley School and its satellites) suggests to me that here may be an educational method which is in fact repeatable elsewhere and which may now produce an outcome considerably more valued and sought after by mainstream educators than was the case during AS Neill's lifetime.

The word 'uniquely' is key here; the general concept of democracy in mainstream schools is well established and in some countries (e.g. Sweden) it is a legal requirement that schools shall be run in a democratic way. Thus, participatory self-government has to be seen in the context of differing and possibly competing visions of democracy; this context and its implications form an important part of this study.

In order to narrow the focus of this study I have settled specifically on the task of examining their claim to be a self-governing community. I ask the following questions:

- What actually is self-government? What does the term mean in general and how has that concept been interpreted within an educational context?

- Is 'self-government' a fair description of what these two schools actually do? How does it compare to examples of self-government in the real world?

- Are the methods and environment of Sudbury Valley the same as or at least directly comparable to those of Summerhill school? Are we talking about two incommensurable experiments, or can they reasonably be conflated into a single, cohesive, reproducible concept?

- What theoretical support is there for this approach to education? What kinds of benefits and disadvantages might we expect to see when using self-government in schools?

- How easy or difficult might it be to reproduce self-government in other educational contexts?
What other conditions might need to be fulfilled? What other factors might need to be present?

3. Method statement

As a statement of predisposition I can say that I have no connection with any of the organisations or individuals mentioned in these pages.

My initial interest was sparked during a series of conversations with students during my VFU observation periods. There seemed to be a general dissatisfaction with the student council; it was seen as lacking in any real authority and irrelevant to their daily lives. I recalled that there was a school in the UK that claimed to offer a more tangible form of democracy to students and I decided to investigate further. I soon learned that a similar school, Sudbury Valley, was operating in the USA and had been the subject of a number of field studies.

I considered the following broad categories of written material:

− detailed field studies of both schools
− literature written on behalf of both schools, being a mixture of essays, website information, and in the case of AS Neill, several full-length books.
− Factual and analytical literature, both academic and popular, relating to democracy in schools in general, and to participatory self-government in general.

I was also able to obtain a copy of a TV documentary of Summerhill originally shown in the UK in 1992 which included footage of school Meetings and to which I have made reference, based on my own viewing notes.

I have tried to build a representation which highlights my research object wherever possible, but also allowing it to be seen within its context and with due attention being paid to what appear to be interconnected factors at work. I have looking at sources which have on the face of it the highest probability of producing uncontentious data. I have preferred field studies which have been published in the academic literature and subjected to peer review. I have tried to remain alert for contradictions and for multiple explanations.

In terms of my methodology, I cannot claim to have worn a white coat or used a test tube,
nor have I begun with strict ideas about exactly what qualifies as correct, relevant or sufficient on questions of evidence and analytic procedure. Why then have I chosen the source material that I have? In the case of Summerhill in particular, it rapidly became clear that there was a vast body of literature and that I could not hope to read more than a fraction of it. How does one choose? At what point should I stop searching for that hidden gem that might be in the next paper?

Charles Sanders Peirce (The Economics of Research, 1902) wrote that, with a limited research budget, time needs to be allocated to its best foreseeable use; I have found two guiding rules to be particularly illuminating:

- The utility of getting extra knowledge about a subject is likely to be more limited, the more knowledge we already have
- Do not waste time on questions about which facts are scanty and not to be gathered

Peirce seems to have believed that this was the sort of logic which, though self-evident to anyone who has actually had to pay for research and then live with the results, might be less readily apparent to the academic community and I therefore include it here for completeness.

In obedience to the first of these principles, I have not read more than a fraction of the Summerhill academic literature; I have concentrated primarily on the available field studies, the accounts of the school and on the writings of its founder, consequently neglecting much of the fine commentary that exists in the academic literature; consequently I risk repeating what others have said and ignoring important insights. As to the second, during the course of my reading for this project I also came across several other schools claiming to offer the same or a similar concept. I decided to confine myself only to schools where I could find mention of them in the academic literature. I have therefore included a sketch of two other schooling projects which seemed to bear more than a passing resemblance. In doing so I have probably missed many fine examples of schools and studies which could have provided support or contrast for my research object.

On the question of the breadth and choice of sources, I have been particularly inspired by Richard Rorty's (1987, pp58-62) exhortation to the postmodern literary critic as philosopher, in my willingness to consider all sources and to cross disciplinary boundaries, including the literary, for inspiration guidance and probative value. According to John Dewey, scientific method can make no claim to produce a special or elevated category of knowledge and social scientists certainly should not feel that they are limited to asking only "scientific" questions (in Biesta & Burbules, pp.77, 89). That would seem to leave me free to look not just at seemingly unscientific ways of discovering what is happening but also to ask whatever questions seem good to ask and to be guided as much by
common sense as by what science 'usually' does.

To the extent that I have analysed the material gathered in an attempt to answer the normative questions I have set myself in the aims section, these are questions which will not yield a precise answer for all cases any time soon. I take my lead once again from Peirce and his abductive technique; a quick example of inductive vs abductive reasoning will hopefully illuminate:

1) A box contains a large number of balls. We take a reasonable sample from the box. All of the balls in the sample are red. We predict that the next ball we take out from the box will also be red. This is induction.

2) A box contains balls, all coloured red. We are handed a number of balls, which are also coloured red. We 'guess' that the balls came from the box. This is abduction (Burch, 2010).

Abduction can be thought of as a starting point; a form of pattern matching, the purpose of which is not to provide a definitive answer, but to provide a working theory which can if necessary be further supported or discredited through further deductive / inductive analysis and experimentation.

In many cases, particularly within the social sciences, when we set off down the path of investigation the odds of obtaining an answer that proves to be correct for more than one set of particular circumstances may not seem usefully high. But, the world continues to turn and decisions continue to be made nonetheless. Should those decisions be made on the basis of political conviction, strong a priori belief, or on the basis of flimsy evidence, guessing and half-baked induction? Peirce recommends the third option; see e.g. The Fixation of Belief (1877) for his full reasoning. The answer that has at least some empirical support, bears some plausible explanation of cause and effect and lends itself to refinement by further investigation is likely to be a good candidate for abduction. Peirce considered this stage of thinking to be the first step in the scientific method as he understood it; the creation of a working hypothesis (Burch, 2010). Given that we are in this dissertation dealing with an unusual phenomenon, it is probably the only useful kind of answer that I can hope to give to the questions I have set myself in this dissertation and thus the standard of proof that I would expect my conclusions to be judged by needs to be set accordingly.

What relevance do the dusty writings of a 19th century scientist have to research methods today? My approach to the subject matter of this dissertation is informed chiefly by pragmatism, a school of thought widely acknowledged to have been founded by Peirce. My understanding of pragmatism as a way of thinking about research today is that it seeks to shape 'science' through intersubjectivity, which in practice means taking proper account of as wide a set of views as
possible, and that it does not subscribe to universalism; that is to say that any law or rule, no matter how seemingly universal and fundamental, remains open to interpretation given a particular set of facts (Rorty, 1987 p.60.). As such, any 'law' of science should not be viewed as correct, it should be viewed in terms of degrees of usefulness. The more fundamental the 'law', the more often it will explain a future set of circumstances. But, pragmatism preserves the idea of exceptionalism, the idea that there may arise a set of circumstances, an outsider's viewpoint, that does not fit into the 'law'. The essence of pragmatism, at least as I interpret it, is the willingness to look at an exceptional set of circumstances with a view to accommodation rather than to seek to make the exception go away in order to preserve the 'law'; but at the same time maintaining a healthy skepticism towards exception-based challenges against ideas which have served well in the past. A problem is considered solved when there are no remaining objections and the issue is at rest, but pragmatism sees no reason to nail the door shut at this point, accepting as it does the possibility of future objections which cannot currently be foreseen.

What do I mean by 'the law' in this particular context? There are two points to consider here:

1) Children of compulsory school age and lower are now the single largest identifiable group excluded from the running of society in the sense that they cannot run for public office, are legally presumed to be incapable of managing their own affairs, and they cannot vote. Such rights as they have tend to be formally articulated minimum guarantees such as the UN Declaration on Rights of the Child. In order to overturn this presumption of incapacity, it is generally necessary to create specific legislation such as that found in Sweden (see e.g. Swedish Education Act 1985, ch4 s.2, “Pupils shall have an influence over how their education is structured”). One may well question the legitimacy of this presumption of incapacity, though to do so is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

2) Most schools today have some sort of democratic mechanism to serve the interests of the student body. In keeping with the general structures found in most democratic societies, the interests of students are usually articulated on their behalf by a representative; direct participation in decision making is generally limited to the choice of representative. The idea of direct democracy, in which the student body as a whole exercises direct control over the affairs of the school and is able to vote on individual issues, is exceedingly rare, as we shall see in this dissertation.
Pragmatic thinkers would therefore be expected to start with the general assumption that schoolchildren probably do not have the capacity to behave in a genuinely democratic way and that when we talk about democratic decision making in schools, we generally mean representative democracy. Pragmatists may well be sceptical of any claim that tends to contradict either of these assumptions. However, pragmatists will not confuse assumption with dogma and will be prepared to admit to the possibility that PSG may be the right choice for some students and indeed to the possibility that it may offer advantages to many others. They will read with an open mind and see if the case is made out. Pragmatists will be interested in the likely consequences of implementing PSG outside of the fairly narrow parameters in which it currently operates. They will ask practical questions about whether the benefit of adopting such a system is worth the cost of doing so. They will want to understand as fully as possible the ramifications not just of adopting PSG, but also the substitution cost of abandoning whatever other democratic structures are currently in place, in order to make room.

How then will I apply these methodologies and ways of thinking in this dissertation and how will I answer the concerns that I expect my pragmatic readers to have? In my aims statement, I have set out a number of questions which I intend to try to answer as best I can.

Point 1 is essentially descriptive; in this case I have compressed information from two independent sources. The information here is unlikely to be contentious.

Point 2 involves firstly a description of the two research objects and secondly a detailed examination of their differences and similarities. Here it is not enough simply to describe. One of the central questions in this dissertation is whether we are now beyond the point at which the practices of Summerhill school can be regarded as a one-off. If we are not, I am fairly sure that Peirce would tell me to stop wasting my time and to look for something else to study.

I then go on to consider the question of whether the model can be reproduced elsewhere and if so what challenges are likely to be faced. If there were a statistically significant sample from which to make these predictions, this process might fairly be described as inductive. As there is not, the best I can hope to do is to abduce a working hypothesis, based on the observations that are to hand. Here I have attempted to widen the empirical base by considering literature which describes implementation of other sorts of democratic structures in an educational context, as well as the experiences of two other similar but distinguishable articulations of direct democracy from the USA, being the Gary and Brookline cases.

The third of my broad questions, and the most difficult, is to ask whether it is worthwhile to implement this model anywhere else, given the amount of risk and effort involved. To answer that question, we need to have a clear idea of the benefits and drawbacks of the model. We do have the
benefit of two outcome studies, one for each school, but neither provide data in sufficient quantity to make any convincing inductive predictions, beyond a tentative conclusion that students are at least no worse off in terms of long term outcome than they would be if left in mainstream education. In the absence of meaningful data, the best I can hope to do is to speculate on the basis of the information in this dissertation, a process I would characterise as abduction in its loosest and vaguest sense. I make no apologies for doing so (except insofar as I may have overlooked something as a consequence of poor scholarship) because as I have said, I am not seeking to make any definitive statements on the subject and I would hope to have articulated sufficient of my reasoning for others to be in a position to draw their own conclusions, should they disagree with mine.
4. Participatory Self-Government as a Concept

4.1. Participatory Self Government (P.S.G.) as a mode of governance

In the context of this dissertation, my use of the term 'participatory self-government' or PSG should be taken to mean the active, direct control of the running of the affairs of that community through the direct participation of all of the members of that community. All decisions affecting the community are taken at a deliberative assembly on the basis of one person one vote, with universal enfranchisement.

4.2. PSG as a form of democracy

Political theorists often describe PSG as one of a number of different ways in which a democracy can operate. Variously described as pure democracy, direct democracy or participatory democracy, PSG is often seen as one of the three standard idealisations of democracy, the others being representative democracy, and deliberative democracy (see e.g. Almgren 2006 p.19). It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to give a detailed treatment of each model, or of democracy in general; a brief summary of competing models will have to suffice.

Representative democracy relies on the concept of a group vesting its collective power in a representative, generally but not necessarily on mandated terms and for a limited period. The representative then speaks for and exercises power on behalf of the group.

Deliberative democracy has at its core the idea of consultation and debate and thus focuses on the decision-making process rather than on the identity of the persons entitled to exercise power. The aim is to achieve consensus by considering all reasonable alternatives and achieving the best possible synthesis of all views. As such pluralism is taken as the starting point. Deliberators are expected to start without preconceptions. The giving of explicit reasons lies at the core of the process; it is this which gives the process legitimacy, by enabling the threads of a decision to be traced back to a fair deliberative process (Cohen 1989 pp 17-34).

PSG is not reliant on delegation and can therefore be said to be the model which by design involves the greatest measure of participation. However, it is important to emphasise that because of its focus on process, deliberative democracy is not mutually exclusive in relation to the other two options; one can participate in a deliberative way, or allow a representative to do so. Ellen Almgren (2006, p19 et seq.) for the purpose of her extensive analysis of democracy in Swedish schools, conflates
participatory and deliberative democracy under the heading of “integrative” models of democracy, as opposed to “aggregative” models. Integrative models regard democracy as an end in itself, a way of life and thus would include both deliberative and participatory forms of democracy. Aggregative models regard democracy as a means to an end; an instrument to achieve an outcome.

4.3. **Real world examples of PSG**

It should be borne in mind that the three basic models of democracy are idealised (Almgren, ibid.). Real-world government may be found to have elements of all three models to a greater or lesser degree. For example, the referendum (or plebiscite) is a device commonly used to settle a single issue and again relies on a popular vote to settle the issue. The USA in particular is characterised by participatory mechanisms not often found elsewhere, such as recall (vote of no confidence in an elected official) and initiative (voter-proposed legislation) which are popular and well-used, though there is no consensus regarding their political effectiveness (Dyck & Lascher 2009).

As a basis for everyday government, perhaps the best known active form of the model in developed society is the New England Town Meeting, at which the entire congregation or township meets and acts as a legislative assembly. Such models are however rare outside of these small communities if for no other reason than the formidable logistics involved in assembling and canvassing large numbers of people each time a decision has to be taken (Bryan 2004).

Various practical limits of scale to this type of democracy have revealed themselves even within the New England community. It is not unusual for there to be a select committee serving between full sessions, with authority to interpret and execute the decisions of the assembly and in larger villages or towns a representative meeting often replaces the open meetings of smaller townships. In some areas there is a rigid cut-off, above which representative assemblies are permitted (Bryan, ibid.).

It appears that there is no particular lineage from Greek conceptions of democracy to the New England model, which appears to have evolved out of the special circumstances of the early Puritan settlers and which focuses on the engagement of the community (Zimmerman 1999).

Switzerland also practices a form of direct democracy known as the Landsgemeinde that continues to delight and baffle students of European integration; the meetings are almost indistinguishable from the New England town meeting except that they are held outdoors. The unwieldy logistics involved, together with concerns about anonymity whilst voting have seen the practice wane. Low turnout (25%-40%) is commonplace though there is hope that e-initiatives may improve numbers in the future. As with any form of democracy, participation levels can radically change its character and it is a common complaint that low turnout can rapidly lead to an oligarchy
by default. The model seems therefore to have found most practical success in small, close knit communities with a well established group identity, where many group decisions are likely to have a direct impact on the community as a whole and where the ideological starting point is a distrust of political authority. (Bryan 2004, Zimmerman 1999).

4.4. Democratic participation within a representative system

At face value, this may seem a contradiction in terms, given that the point of a representative system is to surrender power to the representative. However there is also the question of civic engagement in a private capacity, a concept which is frequently packaged as part of citizenship classes in the USA and UK, as can be seen for example from Key Stages 3 and 4 for the UK (QCDA 2010).

The concept of civic engagement is a large topic in itself, well beyond the scope of this dissertation; suffice it to say here that the idea of civic engagement outside of the political sphere has its roots in the writings of De Tocqueville, Hegel and Marx. Typically this engagement takes the form of charities, non-governmental organisations, unions, societies and so forth and in educational terms it is generally included under the heading of participation in civics and democracy studies. The question of where to draw the line between the private and public spheres may well determine whether an act of participation is seen as a political or civil act (LSE Centre for Civil Society 2004).
5. **Summerhill School**

5.1. **Background**

Probably best known to the teaching profession during the period 1950-1980, AS Neill founded Summerhill school in in the UK in 1921. He died in 1973 and the school is today run by his daughter, Zoe Redhead Neill (Vaughan 2006).

Generally consisting of between 50 and 100 pupils aged between 5 and 16 who are separated into three age groups for sleeping purposes, the school is almost exclusively boarding (OFSTED 2005, 2007). The school is a charitable organisation and is funded primarily by student fees, though the fees are described as comparatively low and the connected charitable trust offers assisted places to families in need (Vaughan, ibid.).

The school has an international reputation for its radical approach to education; most notably for its rejection of any compulsory curriculum, its system of self-government in which children and adults all have a vote in all school matters, an absence of fear of adults, which could only be avoided by an environment in which adults and children are treated as equals. Above all, the emphasis is on the happiness of the child (Vaughan, ibid.):

> “all that it required...was a complete belief in the child as a good human being...this belief...has never wavered, it has rather become a final faith...I would rather see the school produce a happy street cleaner than a neurotic scholar” (Vaughan, ibid., p6).

Students are entirely free to do as they please throughout the day and there are no compulsory examinations. AS Neill was at pains to point out that freedom does not mean licence and that respect for the individual meant respecting others equally (Vaughan, ibid.). The current Principal points out that there is now as much concern with setting boundaries as there is with freedom as a result of over-indulgent parenting and that this is a current focus for the school (Daily Telegraph 2006).

All decisions concerning the school are taken by the school council, consisting of a deliberative assembly of all adults and children at the school, all of whom are eligible to vote. The council meeting takes place three times a week (Stronach & Piper 2008). The meetings are chaired by a student. All rules of the school are subject to review; any new law can be passed by majority. Disciplinary issues can be and are raised at the Meetings. There is also an Obudsman system whereby an elected adult or more responsible student volunteer will suggest a solution to any problem, in order to take some pressure off the committee (OFSTED 2005).
The Meetings have no formal structure and are student led; thus the quality of them, and the justice they hand out, can vary a great deal. There have been periods of relative anarchy, as the system relies for its stability on the experience and conservatism of its elders and it can happen that radical groups can increase the level of anarchy (Vaughan 2006).

Ian Stronach and Heather Piper (2008) observed a number of the school Meetings, attended by approximately two thirds of the school and at which school rules could be debated, approved and removed if the council wished it. The authors noted 174 rules in place at the time of observation, including such existential gems as, “Len can have a lighter that doesn't light, but sparkles” (Stronach & Piper 2008, p.14).

Occasionally the Meeting will vote for all laws to be rescinded and the school then functions in a state of near-anarchy for a while (Vaughan 2006). In the made-for-TV documentary “Summerhill at 70” (Middlemarch Films 1992, dir. Peter Getzels), students were recorded during such a period; the focus of the documentary was on abandonment of bedtimes but it was clear from the dialogue that all standing rules were rescinded. Despite the abandonment of the rule book, there remained enough latent authority in the legitimacy of the School Meetings as a deliberative assembly for the community to be able to continue to meet in the usual way and eventually to re-enact the pre-existing rules after a few days by popular vote.

The school has a policy of not providing information to parents about the activities of their children at the school unless the child has specifically authorised it, leading at least one parent to make an anonymous complaint to the school inspectors (OFSTED 2005).

The school has had many imitators, including the short-lived Beacon Hill School founded by the philosopher Bertrand Russell and his wife and a slew of schools in the 1960s and 70s in the USA, none of which survived for any notable period (Stronach & Piper 2008). Two identifiable attempts have been made within the state funded sector in the UK to implement AS Neill's philosophies to some degree: Risinghill, a publicly-funded comprehensive school based on Summerhill during the mid-1960s, in which the headmaster was said to have been unseated by a barrage of allegations of unsuitable sex education and refusal to administer corporal punishment (Limond 2005) and a Leicestershire comprehensive school which adopted the principle of self-government in the 1980s, an experiment which led to the adoption of similar democratic structures, but which was ultimately abandoned by the headmaster in 1985 (Darling 1992). Aside from this, any interest in the model in the UK seems to have been drowned by the tide of neoclassicism which rose in the wake of Margaret Thatcher's accession to government in 1979 (Carr & Hartnett 1996).

Popular attention returned in 1999 when Summerhill once again found itself the focus of attention as a result of a sustained and determined effort by OFSTED, the UK body responsible for
school inspection, to force radical reform or closure. The central issue appears to have been the school's failure to ensure or even to encourage pupils' attendance at lessons or to see to it that they acquired qualifications (Vaughan 2006).

The school decided to fight, on the basis that OFSTED was judging them on unfairly narrow criteria, and that the best features of the school were not valued at all. The matter eventually ended in settlement on terms which appear not just to preserve the core values of the school, but have allowed for an adapted inspection regime in the future which takes account of the school's aims and is more favourable to it than would otherwise have been permitted by legislation (Vaughan, ibid.).

Nonetheless, the school's current principle, Zoe Redhead Neil, records that:

“...at the moment there is rather a strong emphasis on lessons and classwork...” (Vaughan, ibid., p.73).

Fears remain that the school continues to be under threat and may not survive another determined attack. In particular there remains the problem of unwelcome changes in the school culture, centring particularly on risk management and staff/student boundaries (Stronach & Piper 2008). The school inspection of 2005 records the need for substantial changes to be made in relation to the school's laissez-faire attitude to internet access (OFSTED 2005). However, the most recent inspection records only minor concerns, the most significant being that, in their view, more could be done to encourage students to set learning targets for themselves (OFSTED 2007).

During the litigation against OFSTED, a comprehensive independent report was prepared by a team of academics led by Ian Stronach of Manchester Metropolitan University. The report was funded by the charitable Nuffield Foundation. The findings of the report can be summarised as follows:

- 40 of the then 59 pupils came from outside the UK, and often did not have English as a first language. Many of these had become bilingual, predominantly through immersion rather than by training (unfortunately there was no separate commentary regarding reading/writing skills)

- Educational achievements were better than the national average. On the one hand this was to be expected and might even be a disappointment due to the predominantly middle class and wealthy backgrounds of the students, but on the other hand a “significant portion” had previously had troubled educational experiences.

- Pupils reported themselves as (and presented to the research team as) notably responsible, tolerant, thoughtful, patient, assertive. The researchers loosely grouped these qualities as
'emotional intelligence' and considered the learning to be a consequence of the responsibility that goes hand in hand with the freedom to choose. These skills or qualities were learned, but not taught.

- The school has classes and a daily timetable. It was a matter of personal choice if children wished to attend these classes. As an independent school it was not obliged to follow the National Curriculum.

- It was a matter of academic debate whether the National Curriculum provides an appropriate and valuable education; in particular the value of maths at more than basic level was questioned.

- The UK Government's own LearnDirect program, described as a remedial measure intended to encourage self-directed learning, seemed to emphasise the very abilities most noticeable in Summerhill pupils, raising the question as to whether these skills should have properly been developed in mainstream education.

- The inspection regime was geared towards a particular kind of mainstream school and found itself unable to cope with the concepts upon which Summerhill operates.

- Parental levels of satisfaction with the school were extremely high compared to the national average, perhaps unsurprisingly given the efforts needed to send their children there.

- Inspection regimes in other countries such as Denmark, Canada, New Zealand and Israel were able to accommodate publicly-funded schools with cultures similar to that of Summerhill which suggested that there was something wrong with the inspection culture in the UK.

(Stronach, Allan, MacDonald, Kushner & Torrance 2000)

As previously discussed, the most vocal critic of Summerhill has been OFSTED, who in 1999 claimed that pupils were “foulmouthed” and that the school was “mistaking idleness for liberty” (Shepherd 2007). The 1999 report is no longer publicly available and I have been unable to obtain a copy.

The most recent reports of 2005 and 2007 gives the following broad picture (assessment criteria vary considerably between inspections, hence the gaps):
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of curriculum:</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching:</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare policies and procedures:</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Satisfactory / minor issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships:</td>
<td>Very good.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil progress:</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pupil satisfaction:</td>
<td>Very high</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil influence</td>
<td></td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil responsibility</td>
<td></td>
<td>Very good</td>
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It is not possible to make any meaningful comparison between these results and those of other schools; as discussed above, unique assessment criteria were agreed upon as part of the settlement of legal proceedings in 2000 (Vaughan 2006).

One feature of the school which was supported not only by anecdotal evidence from those involved with the school (Vaughan, ibid.) but also by the school inspectors (OFSTED 2005, 2007) and indeed by all parties is how happy the students were, particularly in view of the troubled history experienced by so many of the students before their arrival at Summerhill (Stronach et al. 2000).

Professor Stronach returned to Summerhill more recently as part of a wider qualitative study centred on the issue of touching in schools (Stronach & Piper 2008). The authors speak of the “benign panopticon”, an inversion of Michel Foucault's dystopian vision of surveillance and control, created by the close interaction between pupils (Stronach & Piper, ibid., p.4). The almost complete lack of a private space (almost a complaint on the part of the staff) seems to prevent artifice and ensure that the individual's true self is called forth, as well as providing a very effective mechanism to prevent secrets and abuse. The idea of touching as something to be controlled and restricted was almost a pollutant; the authors found themselves embarrassed for having raised the subject and felt that they (and HM inspectors who were concerned about this issue) might have induced some self-consciousness about an issue that simply did not arise in that place (Stronach & Piper, ibid.).

5.2. The Philosophy of the School

“...I could easily tell a boy who threatened to jump from a high window if he did not get his own way, to go ahead and jump...” (Vaughan 2006, p63)
According to Summerhill's website (www.summerhillschool.co.uk) AS Neill authored 22 books, many of which are no longer in print. He began his career as a Scottish 'Dominie', or schoolmaster and his earliest publications, written before he founded Summerhill, are in diary form. They provide a record of the author's early attempts to articulate a philosophy of education which was in opposition to the practices of the day.

One of his chief preoccupations was with the use of coercion. According to Neill, only the weak teacher had any genuine need to resort to punishment but it was expected of him by his colleagues, the parents and even sometimes the children themselves (Neill 1916). His attempts to stop using the 'tawse' or leather strap are expressed in the somewhat wistful manner of a person who would like to give up smoking but cannot quite muster the will; he even goes as far as to admit to a certain sadistic pleasure from its use:

“I whacked Peter with a fierce joy” (Neill 1916, p.33).

In other words, Neill is quite willing to admit to being one of the “weak teachers” he had earlier scolded about, despite his convictions to the contrary. This recognition would later form the basis for one of his signature techniques during one-on-one sessions with pupils which he called “PL’s”. (Vaughan 2006). Neill describes his first meeting with a young boy who was known to smoke:

““I took out my cigarette packet and offered it to him. “Thanks”, he stammered, “but I don't smoke, sir”. “Take one you damned liar”, I said with a smile, and he took one.” (Vaughan, ibid. p.28).

Summerhill was based in large part on the practical example of a contemporary of Neill's, Homer Lane, who had headed a reform school known as The Little Commonwealth, based entirely on the principle of non-coercion and strongly informed by the teachings of Freud and Pestalozzi (Darling 1984) Neill recalled an instance related to him by Lane where a boy had recently arrived and was rebellious, with a mind to smash plates and so forth. Lane apparently told him to do what he liked and even offered his (Lane's) gold watch for the boy to smash (Darling 1992).

Neill evidently took this advice completely to heart; the mess was commented on by visitors to the school who often noticed chaotic scenes and dilapidated, sometimes vandalized buildings (Vaughan 2006).

Although Neill lived through a time when physical coercion was an everyday fact of life, he was aware of other kinds of coercion. As early as 1921 during a trip to Holland he noticed with
disappointment a 'benevolent authority' at work in their schools which was producing a factory-like environment (Neill 1921). He later chose the noted psychologist Erich Fromm to write an introduction to his 1960 book, “Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing”, in which Fromm emphasises the way in which physical coercion has in the modern age given way to the anonymous authority of persuasion and suggestion (Neill 1960).

A strong interest in Freud and psychotherapy is evident in Neill's works. Neill had undergone three years of therapy with the celebrated therapist Wilhem Reich (who was later to end his career as an outcast and laughing stock) and Neill attracted a good deal of criticism for his sometimes incoherent views on psychology (Friedman, 1974, Erich Fromm, in Neill, 1960). That said, he seemed to have an intuitive grasp of the value of play:

“When a boy makes a snowball, he is interested; his whole soul is in the job, that is, his unconscious and his conscious are working together. For the moment he is an artist, a creator...making snowballs is closer to true education than the spoon-feeding we call education today”. (Neill 1916, p14)

In terms of educational method, Neill emphasised the importance of being practical and without ego. At almost the same time as Professor Dewey was sitting down to write Education and Democracy, Neill was writing (on being asked how to help a boy who had got his sums wrong):

“I should sit down and ask myself what was wrong with my teaching.” (Neill 1921, p.24).
6. Sudbury Valley School

6.1. Background

This K-12 (kindergarten to age 18) independent school was founded in 1968 in Massachusetts, USA, set in 4 hectares of rural countryside, by a group of parents and educators, the best known of which is Daniel Greenberg, a former college professor who, like AS Neill, has written many books about the practices and philosophy of his school and is described as the school's chief philosopher (Holzman 1997).

The school's website contains a number of readable articles describing the school (www.sudval.com). Its ethos and character are said to be based on the concepts of non-autocratic democracy, clear rules with a transparent and fair enforcement system, and respect for the rights of the individual. The educational model is described as 'post-industrial' in the sense that mass education has traditionally prepared children for an industrial working life by emphasising discipline and deference to authority; society has moved on but mass education has yet to catch up (Sadofsky & Greenberg 1994).

Sudbury Valley clearly has its own distinct flavour and is not a clone of Summerhill. Nonetheless it shares with Summerhill the features of non-compulsion, self-government by the students and age-mixing.

Pupil numbers have grown steadily from 50-90 per year to the 1980s (Gray & Chanoff 1986) to 165 in 2008 (National Center for Educational Statistics 2010). According to the school's website, around 20 other schools around the US and 13 more schools internationally (Germany, Denmark, Belgium, Holland, Japan and Israel) model themselves directly or associate themselves with the Sudbury model (Sudbury Valley website, list of schools).

Students are by and large local, from middle class working families. Turnover was initially high but by 1996 average stay was 3 years and a wide age range was represented. (Holzman 1997). Admission is widely described as open and unselective (Gray & Chanoff 1986, Gray & Feldman 2004), although there is nonetheless some suggestion that some form of screening is carried out:

“It's a very nonviolent environment and that's actually something that we try to screen for at enrollment time...so you want to be pretty careful you don't have people who hit...”

(Sudbury Valley website, FAQs)

Sudbury Valley is a day school; the school opens at 8am and closes at 5. Daily attendance is compulsory. What the children choose to do during the day is up to them. (Gray & Chanoff 1986).
Staff numbers are relatively high, many of whom are part time so as to provide a breadth of experience. Teachers make themselves available to respond to questions and will organise a program if there is sufficient interest or if they are asked to do so. (Gray & Chanoff, ibid.).

Democratic values are central to the school. More specifically, children are given the responsibility to make decisions for themselves about what to do with their time, and to judge their own progress (Gray & Chanoff, ibid.).

Graduation from the school is by thesis, presented and defended orally at an approximately two hour public assembly of school pupils, teachers, parents, trustees and elected members. There is no set theme to the thesis. Failure of a thesis is rare, as most students will not attempt to present one unless ready to do so (Gray & Chanoff, ibid.).

Age mixing, even within more formal instruction settings, is commonplace (Gray & Feldman 2004).

The school meetings, held once a week are formal and scripted, being invested with authority by the school's own byelaws, which were themselves drawn up for the school by legal counsel. All business is transacted here, including financial and hiring of staff. Once a year there is a meeting of the Assembly, which includes parents, trustees and all interested parties. All meetings are run in accordance with general parliamentary procedures as set out in Roberts' Rules of Order. (Sudbury Valley School Handbook).

The school shares Summerhill's commitment to one person one vote and full enfranchisement. Typically the younger students will watch rather than participate fully (Gray & Chanoff 1986).

The Judicial committee is a selection of students and staff drawn by lot and rotated each month. Difficult cases are referred to the full meeting. Complaints about rule breaking must be in writing, and must say what rule has been broken (Feldman 2001).

6.2. Studies of the School

A study by Peter Gray and David Chanoff (1986) considered the outcomes of Sudbury school leavers. The main findings can be summarised as follows:

- 83% degree educated parent(s)
- 60% from troubled backgrounds
- At least two thirds went on to further education of some description after school. Approximately one third completed a college degree.
ex-students were initially disadvantaged by having less substantive knowledge than normal school leavers, but did not see this as a great problem and were able to catch up. They often formed closer than usual relations with staff at college, perhaps stemming from the weaker adult/child boundaries they had grown used to.

The authors conclude that there is firm evidence to suggest that rebellious children can safely be allowed to rebel in this sort of environment without earning a label that will follow them forever.

The authors candidly admit that their sample size is small. There is a lack of comparative evidence to show how these kinds of students might otherwise have done, though following the reasoning of Stronach et al. (2000) in relation to Summerhill, with such a large proportion of students arriving with a background of disturbed behaviour it would perhaps be unfair to make a direct socioeconomic comparison.

The authors also note that the pupils and their parents who seek out the school are predisposed towards self-management and rejection of authority and are thus unrepresentative overall as a societal group (Gray & Chanoff 1986).

The authors are both marginally connected with the school and there is therefore some possibility of colouration, though they both candidly admit their association (Gray & Chanoff, ibid.).

Further field research was carried out in 1997, with a further qualitative treatment of the data in 2004, focusing on the age-mixing feature of the school and in particular the interaction of adolescents with children (Gray & Feldman 2004).

A further research paper concentrates on the school's political and judicial aspects (Feldman, 2001).

Dealing first with the judicial functions, in his 2001 research paper Jay Feldman adopts Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of the 'Just Community' as as his starting point for an analysis of the school as a formally democratic society, based on an observation of 52 meetings of the judicial committee (Feldman 2001). He notes that the policing of school rules was initially a function of the school committee, but due to time constraints a sub-committee was formed, comprising of one adult chair (changed daily), two student clerks (elected to 3 month terms) and five student jurors, chosen by lot and serving for one month. Complaints must be in writing, help is available with form filling for those that need it.

The complaint is investigated, witnesses are called, and the defendant is then asked to plead.
Only one not guilty plea was observed during the research. A trial will then take place at which the defendant and JC will select counsel to argue each side in front of a jury of 6 non-connected volunteers (Feldman, ibid.).

The rules which the JC enforces are set out in a school rule book which was originally drawn up by the founders with the help of legal counsel. It is published once a year and can be amended in any way by majority at school meetings.

Feldman singles out in particular the following, which he considers to be the defining rule regarding behaviour:

“No-one may knowingly infringe on another's right to engage peacably in activities at the school, free of verbal or physical harassment, so long as the activities are in accordance with School Meeting resolutions...”

Observable patterns in the use of the judicial process by the students were:

− boys were more likely to lodge a complaint and be complained about.
− Staff are also subject to jurisdiction; two complaints were made against staff and one was found guilty.
− There were a myriad of roles, witness, defendant, JC official, helper, which had a large effect on school life. Younger children were particularly involved in running errands, finding people and getting background information.
− Students were often asked to testify against their friends and seemed glad to do so.
  (Feldman, ibid.).

Feldman found that staff were able to model ways of thinking and add layers of depth and complexity that might otherwise have been missed, for example by suggesting interpretations of events which might not otherwise be obvious, typically in situations where there had been roughhousing with an element of provocation. These elements of complexity included:

− explicit recognition of the needs of others, especially where the norms of those others may differ widely.
− The limits of personal responsibility; often with younger children this involved distinguishing between accident and intention.
− The responsibility of the students to try to sort things out themselves where possible
− Responsibility entails fairness, impartiality and helping others.
− Responsible behaviours can be modelled by one student to another thereby creating a wider
ethos. Feldman gives the example of a girl who liked to play with younger children in a somewhat controlling way; although not breaking the rules herself, the children would cause trouble at her suggestion. Without knowing the technical term for this kind of behaviour (an inchoate offence which evidently was not covered by the rule book) an older girl was observed warning her that she shared some responsibility, having suggested the trouble in the first place.

(Feldman, ibid.).

Feldman concludes that what is particularly effective here is that moral learning is made a part of everyday life, rather than being decontextualised into a civics or personal responsibility class. There were roles for all ages to play, increasing in complexity as children grasped the process. Following Kohlberg's principle that every day happenings need to be the focus of discussion for moral learning, this would seem to provide an authentic learning mechanism (Feldman, ibid.).

Turning briefly to the question of age mixing, with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development and the concept of scaffolding as conceptual frame of reference, Peter Gray and Jay Feldman discuss the difficulties of implementing these concepts in a traditional classroom setting (Gray & Feldman 2004). Empirical studies within a traditional setting have generally found only marginal benefits from age-mixing, though those benefits were more profound when an older child took the role of tutor, showing gains in prosocial attitudes and empathy. The authors noted that there are almost no psychological studies of children interacting with adolescents, simply because these groups are not commonly mixed anywhere in traditional education (Gray & Feldman, ibid.)

Their findings as to the kinds of pupil attending the school are less precisely defined, but nonetheless broadly in line with the 1984 survey as they are outlined here, with perhaps closer to 50% of students with a previously troubled school history.

The study describes a series of interactions which the authors had broken down into categories of activity ranging from unstructured physical interaction to constructive play and projects. The quality of the interaction was also divided into categories of helpful, giving, approving, conflict, comedy, prosocial intervention (policing), and game variation (to make it harder / easier / more interesting).

In quantitative terms, the study concluded that interaction was most likely during active play and projects and least likely in casual conversation. Common interests such as arts and crafts would bring students in close contact with one another, leading naturally to interaction. Adolescents often took the opportunity to modify game rules either to to make the game suit all ages, or to improve their own skills by finding ways of handicapping their advantage (risky plays, speed moves etc).
When the adolescents assumed the role of teacher, the authors felt there were factors at work here not present in a more traditional setting:

“...keeping the learner's attention was almost never a problem. The advice and teaching that adolescents provided seemed to be effective in part because it was rarely too much. The adolescents were not in any formal sense responsible for the younger children's learning. Whatever help they provided was voluntary, and it occurred almost always in response to some immediate need or request of the child...unsolicited advice and instruction were rare and were commonly ignored when offered ...”(Gray & Feldman, ibid. p.134).

In the case of prosocial interventions, ranging from gentle chiding to breaking up a fight, these were somewhat rare, but generally effective when done. Not only was this an effective way for the older children to articulate their own moral code, they were not generally seen as authority figures and thus the intervention was more readily accepted. It was clear to the researchers that the children looked up to the adolescents and saw them as role models.

Conflict was most often provoked by children through lack of thought, empathy or understanding and was often resolved peacefully either by a request to stop.

Instances were observed of younger boys wanting to interact with older boys in structured physical games and being either rebuffed or, if they persisted, bullied and dominated; the authors noted that other studies indicate that this would appear to be a natural feature of male inter-age interaction.

The authors noted some instances of unkindness, teasing and so forth to younger children. Their opinion was that in a sense these negative encounters in a sense added worth and reality to the positive encounters, bearing in mind that adolescents did not have any formal responsibility for care of children and were not obliged to interact at all.

The authors concluded that the interactions were beneficial in a Vygotskian sense to all concerned; both groups got learning and experience from the encounters that they would not have got from their peer group. They take the view that these interactions are unlikely to take place in the same way without the additional framework factors peculiar to Sudbury Valley, namely that interaction is largely free of external structure; adults play a supportive but non-coercive role; the Judicial Committee is seen as a real and fair arbiter of interaction and that the entire ethos of the school is democratic (Gray & Feldman, ibid.).
6.3. The Philosophy of the School

The school itself publishes a good deal of literature which can be bought direct from their in-house publishing company. Much of it is clearly intended for the commercial market and authored in-house. These materials were not readily available for research purposes and have therefore not been considered for the purposes of this dissertation except insofar as they are referenced within the academic literature. I am conscious that I am probably being extremely unfair to Mr Greenberg in this respect, having read several of AS Neill's books. I mean no disrespect to Mr Greenberg; I have no reason to doubt that his books are excellent and I am aware that some have been reviewed favourably in the academic literature (see e.g. Holzman 1997); unfortunately it has been a question of availability.

The school's website (www.sudval.org) provides basic facts and background about the school together with a number of short anecdotal articles and book extracts explaining the various unique aspects of school life. I summarise here the gist of several articles regarding the theoretical basis for the school as follows:

The school is characterised as adopting a post-industrial approach. Mass education grew out of an era of mass production. Classes were modelled like factories. The idea of classes divided strictly into age groups is essentially a product of this thinking, not of humanitarian design or of intelligent pedagogic thought. The product is a mass-man, subservient, anxious, pliant, unimaginative.

Post-modern schools, like post-modern businesses, need to be able to cope in a society which is not highly structured and homogenised, in which the ability to adapt is likely to be more valuable than the ability to endure. The era of knowledge-based education is at an end; this is now the age of interpretation. Modern teaching methods continue to fail to make this leap into the future by continuing to use more sophisticated and subtle push-techniques to insert knowledge instead of taking a non-authoritarian position and enabling the child to do the pulling that it naturally wishes to do. The result of applying the Sudbury system, by contrast, is a young adult who is naturally inquisitive, creative, does not fear authority, is flexible, is able to work extremely hard when fully engaged, and who will have no difficulty in adapting to further or higher study.

From a democratic perspective, there is no better way to learn about democracy than to learn about it at first hand from the earliest possible age. The possibility of genuine participative democracy in society cannot properly be realised without this learning.

(Greenberg 1991, 2007, undated)
7. Analysis

7.1. Comparative Analysis
Several key elements together form the greater part of what both schools claim to be and it is these elements together which largely differentiate them from other schools. These are:

Common Elements by design

- **Collective self-government**: although there are differences of appearance between the governmental structures, in principle there is little to distinguish between them. Both schools claim to share an overriding commitment to participatory democracy; a commitment which overrides the interests of any individual and in particular any adult. The academic research carried out in both cases supports, or at least does not subtract from the view that there is genuine power sharing within the community, with some limitations, about which see below.

- **Freedom for the individual**: individuals are entirely free to organise their day in whatever way seems good to them. No responsibility is given to them at all other than the responsibility to live in a way which does not infringe on the rights of others to do the same. Again, the research indicates clearly that students are genuinely free to do what they please; indeed in the case of Summerhill it is this commitment more than any other that has led to repeated clashes with school inspectors and very nearly to the school's closure (Stronach & Piper 2008).

- **Free age mixing**: with the exception that Summerhill divides age groups for sleeping and living quarters (Vaughan 2006) there are no barriers to mixing. Detailed research at Sudbury shows that mixing does take place, is beneficial to all concerned in a variety of pedagogic ways, and benefits from a synergy created by the other unique factors (Gray and Feldman, 2004)

Other common elements
There are other close similarities which seem to be a by-product or outcome of the model rather than a design feature. Those are:

- **Self-contained setting**: both schools are set in a fairly large area of privately owned land and thus can be considered to be a closed community (less so in the case of Sudbury Valley, as the students do not board)
Homogenous socioeconomic background: students are almost exclusively from what could be termed 'comfortable' backgrounds, namely from which the parents have at least enough money to pay for the school fees, since no public funding is available for attendance at either school (Stronach et al 2000, Gray & Chanoff 1986).

Homogenous parent predisposition: parents tend to be well disposed to individual expression and child autonomy either because they naturally share the philosophy or because necessity has forced it upon them, having tried and failed with other educational alternatives (Stronach et al., ibid., Gray & Chanoff ibid.).

Acceptable educational outcomes: put at its broadest, both schools can fairly claim that at the least their pupils do not suffer any worse outcome than they would have suffered in mainstream education, without taking into account any of the non-curricular benefits which both schools claim are the true gold to be had from attending (Stronach et al., Gray & Chanoff ibid.).

Differences

Probably the most noticeable difference is in the structures which the school maintains in order to implement and maintain their stated vision of democracy.

1. At Summerhill, Student Meetings are chaired by a student who nominates a successor for the next meeting. They have no set procedure for the meeting, though there is clearly a culture which has evolved concerning how to speak at the meetings (Vaughan 2006, p.70). Interactions are individualised, with custom-made rules relating to just one pupil being commonplace (Stronach & Piper 2008). Students have the option to approach a volunteer Ombudsman, usually an adult or senior pupil, to resolve a grievance before bringing it before the Meeting. However, there are certain issues which are 'off limits' to the meeting; the allocation of bed space and the appointment / dismissal of teachers is reserved to the headmaster. The meetings are lively and participatory (Darling 1992)

Adult intervention in meetings during Neill's time was minimal. The current principal considers herself more vocal in meetings but has continued the tradition of not pressing any particular agenda. Rules are changed ad hoc and then pinned to a notice board (Vaughan 2006).

2. At Sudbury, Student Meetings and the Judicial committee are chaired by an adult; the Chief
Executive of the school in the former case, and an adult drawn by lot in the latter. Meeting agendas are published in advance. The school Rule Book is published in full once a year. Rules may be added, changed or deleted by a majority at the School Meeting. The principles of the school are drawn directly from those of the American Constitution. There appeared to be no mediation mechanism; students were encouraged to try to resolve matters for themselves where possible (Feldman 2001).

7.2. **Discussion**

The differences outlined above could be explained purely in terms of differences in culture between the two countries; the legal system of England and Wales is at its core libertarian and lacks a formal written constitution whereas the constitution of the USA is fully articulated. The Ombudsman is a Swedish invention and Neill speaks of having had a great deal of contact with Scandinavia (Vaughan 2006). But, I would suggest that this is only part of the explanation.

Daniel Greenberg makes it clear in his essay “With Liberty and Justice for All “ (Greenberg 1995) that the founding committee of Sudbury School had the advantage of the Summerhill experience to draw from and indeed they used Summerhill as a procedural model on the question of grievances in the early days of the school. Greenberg recalls that they found the process too time-consuming and so evolved their judicial committee system, which they found to be already structurally well-defined within their own culture. Summerhillians accept that their method is time-consuming, somewhat impractical and can seem tedious, but feel that the time and effort is repaid by the value of the learning experience; in particular it shapes a certain brusque attitude towards priggishness and timewasting. (Vaughan 2006).

Regarding the question of adults in key democratic positions, perhaps unsurprisingly, Neill speaks anecdotally of periods in the school's history where it became clear that stability was maintained at least in part by a 'brain trust' of more mature students who exercised a conservative influence on the school; this influence was made evident by its removal when a large number of these students left at the same time, leading to a period of greater anarchy and radical changing of the rules (Vaughan 2006). Neill's attitude appears to have been that this is simply a feature of his school's environment and one of the many prices, together with the ramshackle buildings and smashed windows, that have to be paid in order to operate such an atavistic system of government (Vaughan, ibid.), and he seems to have been unwilling to lay down a system of bureaucracy or to assume a position of authority in the Meetings. Indeed it is clear from his early writings that petty bureaucracy (particularly in the shape of school inspectors) was to be despised (Neill 1916). In this sort of environment it is perhaps surprising that some catastrophe did not befall the school in the
shape of a fatal or serious accident involving a pupil, or an unsurvivable scandal, as had happened to Homer Lane (Friedman 1974), and to the ill-fated 1960's British Risinghill experiment (Limond 2005). It may well be that the placement of adults in key positions adds a layer of stability to Sudbury Valley, perhaps at the cost of some amount of genuine control on the part of the students.

Another key difference appears to be the attitude of the school towards parents. Summerhill has a policy of not releasing information to parents without student consent (OFSTED 2005). Neil's philosophy is notably anti-parent (see e.g. Neil 1921). Sudbury builds parents into its governance model by including them in the wider yearly Assemblies, whose functions include voting on student theses (Gray & Chanoff 1986).

From a material perspective, the more 'successful' of the two models at the present time is undoubtedly the Sudbury model, in the sense that far more children today are being educated in that fashion than according to Summerhill principles. Why so? Summerhill was founded on the vision of a single person who has been dead for nearly 40 years. All attempts to clone his model have failed, which lends support to the view that the force of his convictions and personality may have been a vital ingredient in the original success of the school. Many of his views remain controversial and there is no doubt that the school's political model is more radical and unstable that many could live with.

That said, there is space for both models. Summerhill was original conceived in the image of a penal school and I suggest that this is where the model's true strength lies; in providing a space suited to re-examination of behaviours and beliefs which may already have been blown off course, where it may be necessary to take further conceptual steps backwards before taking concrete steps forwards; where students may need to wholly re-conceptualise themselves and their behaviour.

Sudbury's model on the other hand begins with a pre-written constitution which regulates the political and moral tone of the school. Although these structures are said not to be entrenched, it would require organisation and planning on the part of the student body to reduce the school to the states of near-anarchy experienced from time to time at Summerhill. It is arguable that there is effectively an entrenched bureaucracy which could be said to act in a manner not dissimilar to the kind of unspoken, persuasive authority that both Neill and Fromm spoke about (Neill 1960).

An Orwellian interpretation of Feldman's (2001) empirical findings (which are almost without exception framed in a positive light), could characterise the young children acting not just as informers and spies in the service of the JC (see e.g. Feldman, 2001, p.14) but also as a silent majority and counterweight to the more politically active students who might have a mind to try a radical agenda, or perhaps simply to rock the boat. That said, a contrasting and more positive analysis of the same point suggests that it might not be necessary for all members of a community
to experience the breakdown of the system in order to appreciate its value. In his talk of smashing windows and ramshackle buildings, Neill seems somewhat unsympathetic to the effects of these behaviours on other members of the community, other than to say that part of the therapy is for the individual to see the effect of his behaviour on others and also to experience how it feels when others cross the boundaries (Vaughan 2006).

Greenberg notes a recurring theme at Meetings, that there is seemingly always a group of students who suspect there is somewhere buried in the machinery:

“an inside power group that somehow rigs the vote in its favor every time, and against whom it is pointless to argue”

(Greenberg, undated))

Perhaps these students sense the fingers of bureaucracy extending from the initial meetings of the founders groups to exert a Weberian rational-legal dominance. Greenberg claims that these students simply have not yet learned to play the democratic game and that this is precisely the benefit that they will receive by attending the school meetings (Greenberg 1995). This seems to me to be a slightly glib explanation; perhaps a better suggestion might be for these particular students to enroll in Summerhill where there is a stronger emphasis on oral tradition, on individualisation of the legislation and so forth, and where they might feel more empowered, provided they are prepared to suffer the potential consequences of that empowerment. Neill was of the firm view that the students needed to work out the procedures for themselves instead of having a system of government imposed on them, otherwise they would not feel that they owned them and the system would degenerate into tell-tales and spying (Neill 1916). That said, the American radical educator John Holt is known to have criticised Neill for the artificial outer boundaries set on what the children could not do; for example they were not allowed free movement outside the school, and unlike Sudbury, they had no say in teacher tenure (Darling 1984)

But these contrasts are, in the scheme of things, easy to exaggerate. No matter how much both schools may attempt to de-emphasise authority, no matter how much they may both claim to be committed to erase every trace, there are still ultimately a number of unavoidable fundamentals that neither school can do away with. Firstly, attendance at a place of learning is of itself compulsory, thus driving students into the hands of educators. Secondly, the school's relations with the outside world, its ownership of itself and its physical structures are firmly and completely in the adult domain. Thirdly, adult norms and restrictions are imposed by the law of the land, including those legal duties and responsibilities that are placed on parents and guardians. To entirely remove
all adult structures in an age of unavoidable state regulation is unrealisable and in any case exists only in fantasy; it is Neverland, or its dark reflection, the island in Lord of the Flies.

Both schools therefore can be said to agree that there is such a thing as a healthy democratic relationship between adult and child. They disagree somewhat on exactly where its boundaries lie but that disagreement is slight in comparison to the difference between their positions and that of mainstream education.

7.3. Conclusions

It will hopefully have been apparent from the analysis of common features and differences between the two major school studies that it is not easy to distinguish one from the other, and that such differences as there are seem to be largely a question of degree and style. If there is a distinction to be drawn, I would characterise the Summerhill model as being somewhat more radical and therapeutic in emphasis, with the Sudbury Valley school taking a somewhat more cautious and conservative approach to procedure and bureaucracy.

Researchers have chosen to focus on different aspects of these two schools and have worked in isolation from each other; thus there is little overlap regarding the types of study and subject focus. In accordance with my method statement, I have sought what seem to be the best abductive explanations for these differences and similarities, which lead me to the working hypothesis that these two schools are in fact similar enough that the various field studies can reasonably be considered as a single reasonably coherent whole.

What are the consequences of that finding? Most significantly, we no longer need to exhume AS Neill in order to reproduce the environment he created; many contemporary commentators thought that the force of his personality was an essential part of the school; whilst they may have been right in thinking that a charismatic and articulate leader is an important ingredient, it seems that others can fill his shoes. Further, there is strong support for the view that we have passed Peirce’s test of economy, namely that the essential elements of the Summerhill model do seem to be reproducible elsewhere and that it is worthwhile to look more closely.

I now turn to an analysis of the mode of governance common to both schools, and ask to what extent PSG can be said to explain the results above, and to consider its use in other learning contexts outside of these two schools. Are these schools simply a quiet backwater for troubled children whose parents can afford the fees, or is there something fundamental in what they do that we are all missing?
8. Participatory Self-Government as a Pedagogic Tool

8.1. Theoretical underpinning for democracy in schools

Here I do not propose to recite the entire history of democratic development; suffice it to say that the vast majority of modern democracies have adopted representative systems of democracy as their starting point, based heavily on the conceptual writings of the English utilitarians of the 16th and 17th Centuries such as Bentham and JS Mill who emphasised that individual liberty should be paramount and that the role of government was primarily to leave people to their own lives, intervening only as a referee and policeman to protect individuals from each other (Carr & Hartnett 1996).

What role does education have in this conception of democracy? Plato's hierarchical scheme seems to provide a good explanation; according to Socrates, only a few had the innate capability to govern and the function of education was to identify those few and give them the education they needed (based on a systematic study of philosophy). For others in society it was only necessary for them to have a basic grounding in reading, writing, morals, military training and the fundamentals of science and maths. They would then be ready to take up their position in society (Carr & Hartnett, ibid.).

This elitist form of education has not gone unchallenged. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in his seminal work Emile, took a very different view. He acknowledged that Plato's Republic was “the finest treatise on education ever written” (Book 1) but nonetheless felt that it contained a fundamental misconception. Rousseau believed all men were created equal and thus:

“In the natural order since men are all equal their common vocation is that of man. And whoever is well-raised for that calling cannot badly fulfill anything that relates to it... Life is the trade I want to teach him. Leaving my hands I grant you he will be neither a magistrate, a soldier, nor a priest; he will be first of all a man” (Emile Book 1).

Rousseau emphasised the importance of learning by doing at every stage of the process; teaching by explanation should be a last resort. Further, he believed that it was futile to try to coerce and shape children; they should be allowed to grow according to nature:

“...the chief thing is to prevent anything being done” (Emile Book 1).

Rousseau's conception of education seems to emphasise a number of the core values contained in the type of education offered by Summerhill and Sudbury; in particular the emphases on learning
by doing, on allowing nature to guide the way, and on non-intervention.

It has been said that there are only two great educators, being Plato and Rousseau, and that all other comment takes its place within that framework; on the one extreme the conservative, elite view of education (Plato) and the progressive, democratic view (Rousseau) (Carr & Hartnett 1996, p.36). This basic division of views persists to this day, with those to the right on the political spectrum inclined to maintain an elite, pyramid conception of education, and those on the left inclined to flatten the structure (Carr & Hartnett, ibid.).

8.2. Theoretical underpinning for participatory democracy in particular

JS Mill took the view that, so far as education is concerned, individuals should learn by participating in democratic decisions, whilst at the same time maintaining the view that only a small elite should actually rule; real participatory democracy would lead to the dominance of a an ill-informed and mediocre body of public opinion, the thought. Unfortunately it became clear with the large extensions of the franchise during the 19th and 20th centuries that it was not enough simply to obtain a consent form if people were too ill-educated to understand the consequences of their vote, or too far away from the reach of government to benefit from it (Carr & Hartnett, ibid. p.49).

Around the turn of the 20th century, writers such as TH Green began to write about the concept of individualism, and in particular that individual wants and desires only make sense in the context of a community or society and that 'freedom' meant something positive, not simply the absence of restraint, but the ability to interact in the community (Carr & Hartnett, ibid.)

Others such as Robert Michels (1911) took the view that it was futile to attempt to spread power any more widely; that whatever label we chose to use, all societies were governed by the inevitable Iron Law of Oligarchy; the only 'scientific' solution to a wider power sharing seemed to him to be Marxism.

It is at this point that John Dewey enters the debate. In response to these attempts to redefine democracy more narrowly, Dewey understood the apathy and ignorance of the public as a criticism of democracy, not a description of it. He felt that discussion about innate intelligence and ability was missing the point; a more vigorous attempt to impart knowledge and to spark discussion, debate and awareness would raise the level of debate generally to the improvement of all; this, he thought, was far more important than worrying about whether there were any individuals within the group that could not keep up (Dewey 1927).

Dewey acknowledged that the early pioneers of liberal democracy such as JS Mill had been aware of the need for democracy within education, but thought that the subject had been treated superficially. What was key for him was that democracy was not merely a system of government, it
was a way of life (Dewey 1916).

In “My Pedagogic Creed” (1897) Dewey argued that social intelligence could only be developed through co-operative decision making and deliberation. The problem with much education was that it was a preparation for something else in the remote future. He thought that school should not be thought of as a preparation for life, but as a process of living (Carr & Hartnett, ibid.).

In their analysis of Dewey's impact on education, Carr & Hartnett (1996) emphasise that for Dewey's vision of a more advanced, a progressive form of democracy, there needed to be:

“..a society which has ceased to rely on the authoritative knowledge of a ruling elite and prefers instead to operate on the experience-based knowledge of ordinary men and women” (Carr & Hartnett, ibid. p.65)

Where did Dewey stand on the interplay between freedom and curriculum? In “The Child and the Curriculum” (1902) Dewey suggested that an unnecessary dichotomy had formed between child-centred and subject/knowledge centred approaches.

“There are those who see no alternative between forcing the child from without, or leaving entirely alone” (Dewey 1902, p.17).

Dewey went on to suggest that children need guidance, in order to avoid unnecessarily re-inventing the wheel, and the curriculum could be thought of as a map, not to be slavishly followed, but used to avoid lengthy, uninteresting and unnecessary detours. He again emphasises the need for learning to be rooted in experience, the absence of which is likely to mean a lack of motivation and for the educator to take responsibility for shaping the environment so as to make it conducive to proper learning (Dewey 1902).
8.3. **Democracy in Schools in practice**

Whatever the historical position may have been, for countries where there is a well-established democracy the question today is not whether democracy should feature in education, but in what form. During the course of the 1990s many new democracies were created in Europe and elsewhere, and there was a growing concern shared by most countries describing themselves as democratic, that there needed to be a better engagement of youth in the democratic process (Torney-Purta Schwille & Amadeo 1999).

The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement carried out the first concerted attempt to track international trends in civic education in 1971. A comprehensive comparative study undertaken in 1999 by of 14-year-olds in 28 countries (including Sweden, the UK and the USA) considered their knowledge of and attitudes to democracy and citizenship (Torney-Purta et al., ibid.).

The broad findings of that study relevant to this dissertation were that:

“Aside from voting, students are skeptical about traditional forms of political engagement. However, many are open to other types of involvement in civic life”.

“Students view participation in students’ government and other student-led activities to solve school problems positively”.

“Schools that model democratic practice are those schools most effective in promoting civic knowledge and engagement”. (IEA 1999 Executive summary)

In Britain, a study for the Department of Education looked at 16 schools identified as having above average levels of student 'participation and responsible action', based on the results of the IEA survey. The report noted a strong correlation between participation and generally improved levels of school performance (Hannam 2001). It is worth noting the study's working definition of participation:

“...learning to collaborate with others (peers and/or adults), in the identification of needs, tasks, problems within the school or the wider community, to ask appropriate questions and gather appropriate information, to discuss and negotiate possible courses of action, to share in planning and decision making, to share the responsibility for implementing the plan, to evaluate/review/reflect upon outcomes and to communicate these to others...” (Hannam 2001, p.12)
The study noted that the single most important factor in the success or failure of these types of participatory projects was the commitment of the head teacher and staff.

A study by Ellen Almgren (2006) of the Swedish data from the 1999 study produced some surprising results which give particular food for thought. She found that participatory options within schools - in the form of student councils, influence via elected student representatives, and in the possibilities to change class – all had no effect on civic performance in the survey, when considered at the school level, though positive effects were noted at the individual level. Further, whilst an open, deliberative classroom environment tended to have a positive effect on civic knowledge, direct participation by students in matters concerning scheduling, teaching material and the shaping of education actually had a negative effect on civic knowledge. She speculates that the reason for this may be that the mandate for student influence tends to be limited to a deliberative dialogue; there is little genuine power for the students. She is however, cautious about introducing any wider form of student power, because:

“(it)...may be counterproductive if students of this age have other goals than the professionals...(it)...may be difficult and time-consuming to organise, leaving teachers with less time for teaching” (Almgren 2006 p.214).

A comparatively recent study of citizenship classes in the USA indicated that much depended on the definition of a 'good citizen'; a participator was seen only as one kind of good citizen and programs that emphasised participation were in danger of doing so at the expense of other equally valid conceptions, such as the justice-orientated or personally responsible citizen (Westheimer & Kahne 2004).

Given the earlier mentioning in this dissertation of Switzerland as a bastion of direct democracy, it seems appropriate to give brief consideration. The 1999 IEA Phase 1 study in Switzerland (Reichenbach 1999) concluded, broadly, that despite the rich heritage of federalism, opportunities to participate in democratic structures seem to be as limited in Switzerland as anywhere else. The author of the report was advised by a panel of local education experts whose views were mixed regarding what 14 year olds were capable of; there seems to have been considerable doubt as to whether students of that age are mature enough to be able to participate properly.
8.4. **Other practical examples of self-government in schools**

1. **The Gary Plan**

   The educator and philosopher John Dewey founded what came to be known as the Laboratory School, based on his philosophy, in 1896. The school continues to operate to this day, as do a raft of other schools claiming to be based wholly or in part on his philosophy. (Harms & LaPencier 1996). It does not appear that self-government was ever a part of that school's workings, but the co-authors of “Schools of To-morrow” (John & Evelyn Dewey 1915) considered various progressive experiments then in place. A particularly promising example was the Gary Plan, described as having the following features:

   - This was a publicly funded school project.
   - The school was intended for a community of largely immigrant workers in an industrial town, based around a new steel mill.
   - Students made rules for their own conduct using a representative system of government.
   - Students made and maintained school buildings themselves.
   - Age-mixing was an important component. Work done by older children was frequently used as a starting point for younger children. At least one hour a day was spent at school hall seeing some presentation or show by another class.
   - Physical education was a valued part of the curriculum. It was noted that the formal exercises were seen as dull and unengaging by the students, but there was access to the facilities out of hours (the school doubled as an adult education centre) which the students made full use of. Thus the school was very much at the centre of the community.
   - There was no civics education as such. The making of rules was thought to be sufficient education in itself

   (Dewey & Dewey 1915)

Although not using the same participatory system of government as our two example schools, in other respects the model has some striking similarities and also some striking differences. Most interestingly, the school was publicly funded, and thus intended for everyone in the catchment area. Further, the catchment was largely working class families. This would seem to suggest that there is no reason in principle why a successful school cannot be run along democratic lines and yet be publicly funded (Dewey 1906, Scharf 1977, Lipping 2008)
In his discussion of the Gary Plan, Peter Scharf (1977) emphasises the role of the school in the community; with community issues being the focus of the curriculum. This is a particularly important point in the case of any school which is unable to recreate the sort of gated, closed community enjoyed by our two example schools. Scharf re-iterates Kohlberg's principles of the 'just community' and cites a large body of research in support of the view that social development tends to take place more rapidly in a democratic environment than in an authoritarian or obedience environment. He makes the point that this kind of genuine participation is rare even in schools which nominally have a student body because their agenda is typically limited to issues of insignificance, non-reflectiveness, and lack of social impact, such as dress codes for the Homecoming Ball.

In a more recent revisit of the Gary Plan, Alar Lipping (2008) recalls that it was this project that formed the underpinning for the realisation of what was termed in the early part of the 20th Century 'social efficiency', and in particular the 'work-study-play' model, which was rolled out in hundreds of schools across the USA during the 1920s in conjunction with massive industrial expansion.

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to consider the wider implementation of this model, but I would suggest that the term 'social efficiency' has a certain technological, efficiency-led flavour to it which does not seem particularly to emphasise the aspects of community and democracy that Dewey found so pleasing.

2. Brookline “school-within-a-school project”.

Favourably reported on in an ethnomethodological study during the 1980s (Gutmann 1987), this is a continuing project first begun in 1970. According to an essay on the school's website (Dunne 2009) the SWS is a separate entity on the 4th floor of a pre-existing, large publicly funded school in Boston, USA. Apparently many other similar projects started at the same time have fallen by the wayside, primarily because they attempted to change to privately funded status. Admission is by application from within the school; approximately 50% of applicants are placed in the group which is approximately 100 strong. It appeals to students for a variety of reasons. Students are expected to follow a curriculum but attendance is self-reporting. They hold a weekly “town meeting” which sets rules for the community and has the power to expel members back into the wider school. All aspects, including curriculum, lesson content and even staff appointments, are within the meeting's mandate. However, students are still expected to turn in homework assignments and come to classes on time (Dunne, ibid.)

The SWS model does not of itself entail self-government; the concept of a roped-off area
has been widely used group students by type, including either highly motivated students, or dropouts. Typically these types of models face resource and cultural difficulties in maintaining a separate identity within a larger school environment and have typically done better off-site. The Brookline project appears to be unique in offering P.S.G. within this model (Raywid 1985).

8.5. Obstacles to implementation of the model.

What is abundantly clear from all of the evidence is that the failure rate of these models is extremely high. In this final section I propose to consider briefly some of the practical issues which might cause their failure or prevent their implementation in practice.

As has already been noted, there may well be a theoretical political imperative that militates against the implementation of this model. That political imperative can manifest itself in the form of denial of public funding, unsympathetic regulation or legislation which conflicts with the model. Supporters of Summerhill, and the school's independent research advisers, successfully argued that this kind of imperative was at work in their case; an argument which could well have ended in the school's closure (Stronach et al. 2000).

A more recent example of what appears to be this imperative at work may be seen from the new policies of the recently installed coalition government in the UK. The current UK curriculum contains a broad mandate that schools shall inculcate values in society that promote a healthy and just democracy. Civics is mandated as a subject in public schools and emphasises a wide range of skills and knowledges, with a particular emphasis on civic engagement with the community. (QCDA website)

However, a coalition government was recently elected in the UK. The new Conservative minister for education Michael Gove has proposed radical reform. Having already abolished the agency responsible for the national curriculum, his current white paper makes it clear that the old curriculum will be scrapped and a new curriculum drafted by the government itself, which will primarily be a series of simple benchmark outlining the knowledge and concepts pupils will need to master. The new curriculum will be supported with more stringent and rigorous testing.

A clue to Mr Gove's intent may perhaps be found in the Centre for Policy Studies Direct-democracy initiative, of which Mr Gove is visibly a member. Their 2007 paper sets out an intention to make this very reform. The document explains that:

“The national curriculum – which was originally intended to stop wacky left-wing teachers
filling children’s heads with nonsense – has been captured by the very people it was supposed to frustrate. It is now a principal method by which the left-leaning educational establishment imposes its orthodoxies on schools....”. (Centre for Policy Studies 2007)

The paper goes on to explain its conception of direct democracy which advocates vesting power in the private rights of the individual and local communities as opposed to in the public bureaucracy of the state, in the form of a bloated curriculum. This manifesto should not be mistaken for a children's liberation movement; the paper makes it clear that parents will be making the decisions in this model.

For a full-self governmental model to work, the commitment of all of the staff involved is a pre-requisite. In order for a school to be democratic in any sense, there needs to be a democratic structure within the whole of the school hierarchy, not just those that directly come into contact with students (Tse 2009). Many schools modelled on the managerial style have a strong autocratic head teacher supported by a bureaucracy which is removed from day-to-day contact with students. In such an environment teachers have limited authority and burnout is a common problem. Teachers may feel that giving up authority to students is an encroachment into their professional area and be resistant to the idea. (Saha and Hill, 2003).

It is therefore easy to see that many schools would be constrained by their own management structure and culture from implementing even more minor democratic reforms, let alone the sort of root and branch change involved in PSG.

The problem of engaging parents with a model seen as radical is perhaps not as difficult as the Summerhill experience may suggest; the Sudbury evidence shows that an active closing out of parents does not seem to be an absolute prerequisite and a place can be found for the parents to have a voice within this model; such a notion is probably more in keeping with Deweyan concept of engaging with the community at all levels.
9. Analysis and Conclusions

9.1. Dissertation Aims Revisited

At the beginning of this dissertation I asked a series of research questions; I have the following answers, based on the content of this dissertation:

- What actually is self-government? What does the term mean in general and how has that concept been interpreted within an educational context?

- Is 'self-government' a fair description of what these two schools actually do? How does it compare to examples of self-government in the real world?

Generally, 'self-government' means that all members of a community decide all issues of relevance to that community by vote. Examples exist in New England and Switzerland. This can be contrasted with representative democracy, in which a representative is elected by popular vote. The representative then holds the interests of the electorate in trust, usually but not necessarily for a fixed term. Under both systems, children are excluded from the franchise, though the age limit may vary.

Within an educational context, both Summerhill and Sudbury Valley have extended the franchise to include children. Both schools have a deliberative assembly which meets frequently, and at which the business of the school is decided by popular vote. The approach to deliberation is different in both cases but this dissertation concludes that these differences do not seem to be particularly significant. In both cases boundaries exist regarding what the deliberative assembly can and cannot legislate upon. The exact position of those boundaries is different in each case, but in broad terms the school's relations with the outside world are excluded. Sudbury Valley pupils appear to have greater oversight of the management of the school but there is also considerably more bureaucracy which (quite possibly by design) is likely to place considerable limits on student control over these matters.

- Are the methods and environment of Sudbury Valley the same as or at least directly comparable to those of Summerhill school? Are we talking about two incommensurable experiments, or can they reasonably be conflated into a single, cohesive, reproducible concept?
This dissertation finds that there is no very significant distinction to be made between the two schools and that they can reasonably be conflated.

- **What theoretical support is there for this approach to education? What kinds of benefits and disadvantages might we expect to see when using self-government in schools?**

There is considerable theoretical support for the general notion that schools should be a democratic environment and that students should be given a say in how schools are run. The use of PSG to solve everyday affairs relevant to the lives of students is on the face of it an excellent fit with the teachings of Rousseau and Dewey and this dissertation concludes that participatory democracy can have the effect of broadening the democratic experience to include all students and not just selected representatives. However, such teachings lend just as much support, if not more so, to competing conceptions of democracy; in particular to the ideal of deliberative democracy and to the idea of a limited public sphere in which 'democratic participation' takes place largely in the civil domain. It should be noted that Platonic conceptions of education seem if anything to be antagonistic to the idea of participatory democracy.

It seems clear that the theoretical arguments in favour of democracy within education tend to favour integrative over aggregative forms because it is ultimately the treatment of democracy as a way of life (rather than a means to choose a leader) that is expected to provide the most benefit (Dewey 1902, 1916).

There is some controversy regarding the implementation of student empowerment and its effects on democratic competence, at least in Sweden (Almgren 2006), but these findings need to be interpreted with caution and I doubt whether they are of much assistance in analysing PSG. As Almgren herself concedes, the Swedish concept of *elevinflytande* or student empowerment does not extend to PSG as it is described in this dissertation; political activity is generally confined to *elevråd*, which is a representative body with a function similar to a trade union, yet taking part in this activity is classed as participatory democracy, of positive benefit to the representative, not to the electorate (Almgren 2006, pp 141-2). Student empowerment has in practice at least as much to do with the concept of individual freedom to negotiate the terms of the compulsory curriculum as it has with the concept of practical democracy in schools (Almgren 2006, p.214) and as such it cuts across the conceptual border I have delineated between these two concepts. I would suggest that her findings are not in any way an indictment of the PSG model, which is not in wide use in Sweden or indeed anywhere else within the IEA study area, but perhaps instead a criticism of student empowerment on an individualistic rather than relational level.
As to the separability of participatory from deliberative models of democracy, Almgren concedes that there is considerable doubt as to the worth of the deliberative model, which can quite fairly be characterised as an unrealistic idealism, lacking in any real authenticity (Almgren, ibid. p.116 et seq.). As we have previously defined it, the deliberative ideal provides only a template for a proper and fair compromise; it does not provide any means for an individual to press his or her own concerns in a deliberative assembly. Almgren makes the point (ibid. p.116) that participatory models will tend to favour the most able and resource-rich individuals. I would suggest that this is all the more reason to use a participative model in schools; this seems to be the very point made by Greenberg regarding those who claim that the system is stacked against them, namely that this is their opportunity to learn to 'beat the system' (Greenberg undated, above p.21).

None of these arguments tackle the potential criticism that, since virtually all democratic societies are based on representative and not participatory democracy, students would not be acquiring a skill that is in fact relevant to their future lives and thus one cannot properly pray in aid arguments concerning situated learning. The answer to this criticism may lie, I suggest, in the conception of PSG as it exists in New England; this can be regarded as a starter model from which representative politics may grow naturally as scale and specialism demand; as we have seen from the models that exist in New England, a good deal has been learned regarding the maximum effective size of such communities.

A persistent concern with PSG schools is that the lack of compulsion to go to lessons may result in poor overall educational outcomes. The case studies and other evidence considered in this dissertation supports the claims made by these schools that they do in fact produce democratically engaged citizens and that, whilst it may be true that graduates do not in the short term have particularly impressive educational achievements, they are not thereby handicapped in any way and they have the necessary learning skills to acquire quickly whatever qualifications they might need. In the long term, outcomes for these citizens in all respects are at least no worse than they would otherwise have been in the mainstream. However, the consequences of adopting the model are unlikely to be compatible with an increasingly goal-oriented and outcome-based educational system which values measurable achievement during and at the end point of the educational process above the rather nebulous concepts of emotional / democratic intelligence claimed on behalf of the ex-pupils of Summerhill and Sudbury Valley.
- How easy or difficult might it be to reproduce self-government in other educational contexts? What other conditions might need to be fulfilled? What other factors might need to be present?

As I observed in the introduction to this dissertation, reproducing AS Neill's school has proved a formidable challenge. Sudbury Valley school appears to be the only well-documented success story to buck the trend. Anyone seeking to take up the challenge faces problems not just with ensuring a very high level of engagement by the staff, but also funding problems should the school be reliant on public sector money, particularly in those countries where goal-oriented, tangible education is valued highly.

Such success stories as there are have established a proof of concept for a fairly wide spectrum of different interpretations; in principle PSG seems to be capable of working despite the presence of a variety of closed preconditions, including the restriction of participation to a small unit within a school and the imposition of a compulsory curriculum. Thus, today's adventurous educator can be encouraged by knowing firstly that there are off-the-shelf solutions available; so it is not necessary to pre-conceptualise an entire school;

Educators may well be able to preset the boundaries of self-government (either by making a decision beforehand or by negotiation with the student body) to a level that provides an adequate trade-off between authentic engagement of the students on the one hand, and the practical exigencies of running a school with whatever staff and resources happen to be available locally. Given the theoretical support for this type of model as a pedagogic device, there are strong reasons for educators to at least consider implementing PSG in some form outside of the restricted environment.

Setting up any radical endeavour is likely to be a high risk activity, especially for the early adopter. It is perhaps unsurprising, especially in the early days of Summerhill, that so many projects came to nothing. However, the evidence also suggests that the same or similar barriers are also hindering the success of more conventional democratic models and that this alone is probably not reason enough not to make the attempt. Implementing successful democratic systems of whatever shape is clearly a formidable challenge.
9.2. PSG vs other factors and concluding comments

Possibly the most remarkable aspect of both of the schools described in detail in this dissertation is that children as young as 4 are able to exist in this kind of educational environment without apparently suffering any ill effects. This aspect alone provides a powerful rebuttal of the presumption that children are incompetent to take part in a working democracy (see method statement at p6 above) and addresses the concerns cited in the Swiss IEA study (Reichenbach 1999) regarding the competence of children.

Turning to the question of the extent to which PSG can be disengaged from other unique factors in these schools, the concepts of self-government and freedom of the individual are clearly very closely connected, being fully present in both of these models, and to a lesser extent in the Brookline model. Research at Summerhill emphasises the benefits of non-coercion as especially contributive to 'emotional intelligence' (see p.6 above); evidence from Sudbury has focused on the work of the judicial committee as providing opportunities for articulation and modelling behaviours (p.12-13).

Can PSG exist outside of a non-compulsory curriculum? At first glance this seems a contradiction in terms. How can students have the power to determine their environment, and yet at the same time be compelled to follow a curriculum? The reality is that, however liberal and freethinking these institutions may appear, both Sudbury Valley and Summerhill do in fact set real limits to the amount of self-determination afforded to the students. In both cases, daily attendance at the school is compulsory (in the case of Summerhill this is a negative rule expressed as a restriction on leaving the grounds without permission (Darling 1984). Individual freedom is limited by the principle of non-interference with the freedom of others.

The research supports the view that students at these particular schools are likely to have had difficulty in fitting into mainstream school. One may reasonably infer that they have an unusually high propensity to distrust adults. It makes practical sense, I would suggest, to provide an environment to this particular student body where the value of interaction with adults is explicitly not taken for granted. It is important to remember that in neither Sudbury nor Summerhill models is adult interaction dispensed with; to the contrary, adults retain key positions as teachers, guides and committee chairs. From a theoretical standpoint, these models owe more to Rousseau than to Dewey, perhaps necessarily so in view of the extra work that is needed to build trust, but there is nothing here to suggest that the line needs to be drawn quite as close to the ground in all cases. It is worth bearing in mind that Dewey was certainly not in favour of a compulsory curriculum in
the sense of a prescriptive set of knowledges to be mastered by all students and that coercion as a pedagogic tool is not, as far as I am aware, viewed with particular favour by any respectable pedagogic school of thought.

Although not fully supported by independent research (or at least none that was readily available to this researcher) the Brookline School-within-a-school model seems to suggest that it is possible to take matters one step further; ie to maintain a compulsory curriculum, but to negotiate its implementation. If I could make a single suggestion for further research, it would be to investigate this model further, given that it also appears to be free of the constraints of private environment and private funding that appear to limit the application of the Sudbury / Summerhill models. Based on the findings of this dissertation I would be proceeding on the hypothesis that complete freedom of action as it is granted at Summerhill and Sudbury Valley is not a necessary pre-condition for successful PSG; an important further research question would be the extent to which there may be an identifiable trade-off between the breadth of the mandate granted to the deliberative assembly and the amount of benefit gained from it.

All of the models considered appeared to make beneficial use of age-mixing; what is particularly interesting here is the apparent synergy between a democratic school model and age-mixing which holds the promise of overcoming the rather indifferent results suggested by research in which age-mixing is treated as a fully independent variable (Gray & Feldman 2004).

Returning now to the overall aim of this dissertation, I said that I would examine the claim, made by both schools, that the methods they use result in graduates who are democratically engaged, and to consider whether these methods are capable of being used elsewhere. This dissertation concludes that there is sufficient abductive evidence to show that the claim is made out and can reasonably form the basis of a working hypothesis. Establishing whether the uniqueness is due wholly to PSG or to other unique variables, or to both and in what proportion, has proved difficult but not beyond resolution; in particular, the difficulty of separating freedom of action from the use of democratic competence to resolve everyday school problems could be resolved through further research into the Brookline method identified in this dissertation.

However, does PSG offer something unique which no other school method offers? It certainly does that, but the really significant question is whether that uniqueness can be translated into a unique skill or outcome that is distinguishable from a well-run school based on more traditional representational / deliberative lines. This dissertation concludes that there is good reason to think that it does, particularly in view of the synergy it appears to bring to other unique factors such as free choice and age mixing.
However, that finding has to be seen in its proper context. There appear to be other, more significant factors at work, most particularly teacher engagement and a structure which embraces democracy at all levels, which are common to all democratic models and which therefore are more likely overall to be prime factors in creating tomorrow's democratic citizens.

Finally, I doubt, even on the best possible view of this model, that it could hope to provide a prescription for all students. Firstly, I am mindful of the different, each perfectly arguable, conceptions of the democratic citizen which suggest that participation does not need to be top of every student's list of acquired skills (Westheimer & Kahn 2004), and secondly it would be wrong to characterise representative models as being entirely devoid of participative content; it needs to be remembered that the ideal of civic engagement can arguably fill the Deweyan concept of community participation, though the details of that analysis are well beyond the scope of this dissertation.
9. References


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