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RADICAL DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION

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Executive Summary

This essay is both about public education in ruins and the creation of a radical democratic alterative. Under neo-liberalism, education in England (and beyond) is withdrawing from a contracting public sphere and moving into an expanding market sphere. The dominant relationship in this emergent education is between autonomous parents and autonomous schools, with the state governing at a distance through systems of surveillance and audit. The dominant images are the child as knowledge reproducer, the parent as consumer, the teacher as technician, and the school as business competing in the market place through the application of human technologies to the attainment of predetermined and standardised outcomes. The dominant purpose is the production of autonomous subjects for an inescapable neo-liberal world: the calculating and risk-bearing consumer, the flexible and lifelong-learning worker, *homo economicus* incarnate, equipped for a life of perpetual competition and instant responsiveness to the flickering of market signals.

The ruination of public education and its replacement by markets and governing at a distance is catastrophic. It removes the idea that education is a subject of civic interest and a

responsibility of *all* citizens - the public in public education. It drains education of overt political content, recasting it as a predominantly technical exercise, consigned to experts, technicians and businesses whose task it is to define, assess and improve standards of performance. The emphasis on standardisation and technical practice impedes education's ability to work with new and important understandings of children, knowledge and learning, which emphasise diversity and complexity. Last, it removes one vital public resource for addressing the multiple crisis threatening our species and environment. When, more than ever before, we need to act collaboratively and with a strong sense of the public good, we are creating an education system incapable of meeting this need; indeed a system that, like its neo-liberal progenitor, makes matters worse, not better.

What then might we offer as an alternative? How might a public education be renewed and re-constructed? How might we develop a radical education with democracy as a fundamental value and the common school as a basic public institution in a truly democratic society? We understand democracy as a multi-dimensional concept, with many different forms and practices; formal and procedural democracy, democratic governance, is important, but so too is democracy as a way of thinking, being and acting, of relating and living together, as a quality of personal life and relationships. We understand the common school as a public space for all citizens living in its local catchment area: a truly 'comprehensive school' contesting the fragmenting, competitive and selective drive of neo-liberal education, with its proliferation of selective schools - academies, charter schools, faith schools. The common school is age integrated and multi-generational; human scale; a place of depth and connectedness over width of coverage, interdisciplinary, inquiry-based, experiential; project based, both in its pedagogical approach and in its relationship with its community; and organised around team working by educators with diverse perspectives and interests. It is a 'multi-purpose' institution providing education-in-its-broadest-sense and serving as a social and democratic resource to its local community

For full enactment, radical democratic education must be practiced through and in many institutions and settings. National and state governments need to espouse democracy, proclaiming it a fundamental value in education, practicing it in their approach to education, and supporting its practice in other institutions and settings. Democratically elected and accountable local bodies – such as local authorities or school boards – need to (re)assume public responsibility for education in their area and, like higher levels of government, proclaim and practice democracy in their approach to education and support its practice throughout the public education system.

But schools are at the heart of our utopian project, vital sites of radical democratic education. We identify and briefly elaborate ten key design features of a school in which democracy is enacted as participation, ‘a mode of associated living’ and a lived everyday experience, following Lawrence Kohlberg’s maxim that “the only way school can help graduating students become persons who can make society a just community is to let them try experimentally to make the school themselves”. These features are:

- A proclaimed democratic vitality;
- Radical structures and spaces;
- Radical roles and images;
- Radical relationships;
- Personal and communal narrative;
- Radical curriculum, radical pedagogy and enabling assessment;
- Insistent affirmation of possibility;
- Engaging the local;
- Accountability as shared responsibility;
- The common school.

Erik Olin Wright proposes three criteria to be applied to any consideration of institutional alternatives: desirability, viability and achievability. We focus on viability, “a scientifically grounded conception of viable alternative institutions” and also briefly explore three companion orientations:

- *democratic experimentalism*, Roberto Unger’s concept, an essential element of what he terms ‘high energy democracy’, releasing the creative powers of ordinary people by eradicating the distortions and subjugations of class, hierarchy and the myopic presumptions of prescribed role and, crucially, the support of ‘a collective experimental practice from below’ Unger, 2005b. p179).

- *prefigurative practice*, the anticipation of future modes of being through processes and relations, not just structures, that exemplify and embody the viability and desirability of radical alternatives. Because this concept can too easily be laid claim to, letting in the merely different rather than the genuinely transformative, we propose criteria with which to develop and evaluate a prefigurative practice that strives to enact a new way of being in the world.

- *Sustainability*, to confront the chastening history of much radical education, so many examples of which have collapsed after a few years. One lesson from more long-lived examples is the importance of regional, national and global solidarities.

These three concepts are important to the process of transformative change, complementing Wright's three criteria and his view of transformational change as a cumulative, step-by-step process. We need to construct, both from theoretical models and case studies, a better understanding not only of how transformative change can be set in motion - but of how to create the capacity to continue to experiment and to future build.

The penultimate section of our essay raises a number of contradictions and tensions in the real utopian project of a radical democratic education in a common school, including: tradeoffs between collective and individual choice, and issues arising from decentralisation; de-marketisation and de-privatisation; local catchment areas and socially differentiated neighbourhoods; and conflicting time demands.

Our concluding remarks return us to the centrality of human flourishing and the importance of democratic fellowship as at once the precursor to and hope, not just of democratic politics, but of education in and for democracy, which is both its agent and an important site of its prefigurative enactment.

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Radical Democratic Education

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We believe that the roots [of the converging crises of our times] lie in the stories we have been telling ourselves...We will reassert the role of story-telling as more than mere entertainment. It is through stories that we weave reality (Dark Mountain Project, 2009)

1. Public education in ruins

This essay is about a public education in ruins and about how a new public education might be re-constructed, on the basis of democracy and the common school. It tells a story very different to the one we have so often heard in recent years. It draws mainly on experience from England, though this may resonate in other English-speaking contexts, including the United States, and beyond. For the forces of destruction – the values, the rationality, the policies, the practices – are spreading to many places, undermining the foundations of public education and bringing ruin in their trail.

In speaking of public education in ruins, we do not wish simply to restore the ruins. Nonetheless, there are important principles and experiences from the past that can contribute to the construction of a new public education. We should learn from the successes and failures within radical democratic traditions in order to advance our Real Utopian project. We need to combine these legacies with new materials that speak to our contemporary conditions, needs and desires.

Under neo-liberalism and the alliance it has formed with neo-conservatism and certain fractions of the managerial and professional middle classes (Apple, 2004), education is withdrawing from a contracting public sphere – defined by David Marquand as "a space, protected from the adjacent market and private domains, where strangers encounter each other as equal partners in the common life of society" (Biesta, 2010, pp.98-9) – and moving into an expanding market sphere with its growing presence of private providers and

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contractors (Ball, 2012) . The dominant relationship in this emergent education is between parents and schools, both presumed autonomous, with the state governing at a distance through systems of surveillance and audit – what Biesta refers to as “the odd combination of marketized individualism and central control” (p.56). The dominant images, or social constructions, are the child as knowledge reproducer, the parent as consumer, the teacher as technician, and the school as business competing in the market place through the application of human technologies to produce predetermined outcomes – an ‘exam factory’ (Coffield and Williamson, 2011). The dominant values are cognition (above all other facets of human being), competition (between children, between teachers, between schools), calculation (of best returns on investment), commodification (in which everything can be costed, calculated and contracted), choice (of the individual consumer variety), and inequality (fuelling and fuelled by competition). The dominant rationality is instrumental performativity, with no time for thought, no room for uncertainty, provisionality, surprise or wonder, and no interest in other than technical questions enunciated and pursued through distortingly reductive approaches to research and practice (e.g. what works?). The dominant purpose is the production of autonomous subjects fit for a predetermined and inescapable neo-liberal world: the calculating and risk-bearing consumer, the flexible and lifelong-learning worker, an entrepreneurial self, a unit of human capital - *homo economicus* incarnate equipped for a life of perpetual competition, instant reaction to the flickering of market signals and short-term relationships. Underpinning everything are totalising systems of thought: positivism with its conflation of natural and social science, its belief in a knowable world and its assumption of one right answer to every question; and neo-liberalism with its blind self-confidence that market relationships provide an answer to everything.

The ruination of public education and its replacement by markets and governing at a distance is catastrophic, for a number of reasons. First, because it removes the public in public education, the idea that education is a common good, a responsibility of *all* citizens, an endeavour in which everyone has an interest. What should be a political relationship between *all* citizens (not only parents), schools, and democratically accountable bodies becomes an economic relationship between consumers, providers and funders.

Second, because the “the sphere of the political itself has been eroded” (Biesta, 2010, p. 54). Education has been drained of overt political content and re-cast as a predominantly technical exercise, consigned to a coterie of experts, technicians and businesses whose main task is to define, improve and assess correct standards of performance. Of course, the whole neo-liberal project is saturated with politics. But its status as a dominant discourse means that its values, assumptions and beliefs are rendered invisible, naturalised and

neutralised, the taken-for-granted currency of everyday education. What has been lost, when most needed, is vigorous and agonistic public debate about political questions. We return to these political questions shortly.

Third, because the emphasis on standardisation and technical practice obstructs our ability to work with new and important understandings of children, knowledge and learning. The more we seem to know about the complexity of learning, children's diverse strategies and multiple theories of knowledge, "the more we seek to impose learning strategies and curriculum goals that reduce the complexities of this learning and knowing" and "policy makers look for general structures and one-dimensional standards for practices" (Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p.8). Faced by the potentialities of complexity and uncertainty, diversity and perspectivism, the dominant approach holds fast to a representational view of knowledge, understood to be an objective, stable and accurate representation of a pre-existing reality; and to a pedagogy of transmission and reproduction that believes in the possibility of transferring knowledge of a real and stable world from one mind (the teacher) to another (the pupil) in a process that "is unambiguous and unmediated and results in unproblematic transference with full conservation of intent" (Roy, 2004, p.297).

Last, and in many ways most disturbing, because the ruination of public education and its privatised and marketised replacement removes one vital public resource for addressing the crisis facing our species and environment - or rather "this complex intersolidarity of problems, antagonisms, crises, uncontrolled processes, and the general crisis of the planet that constitutes the number one vital problem" (Morin, 1999, p.74). These "threats to our collective well-being" (Coffield and Williamson, 2011, p.27) include: an economic system that is unsustainable and inimical to human flourishing (Jackson, 2009); growing inequality and other injustices in a 'winner-takes-all' system; nuclear proliferation; and the cumulative 'perfect storm' of biodiversity loss, resource depletion, environmental degradation and global warming. At a time when, more than ever before, we need to act collaboratively and with a strong sense of the common good, we are creating an education system incapable of meeting this need; indeed a system that, like its neo-liberal progenitor, makes the 'one vital problem' worse, not better.

Rather than viewing education's role as fitting the young for an inevitable and predetermined future of more of the same, what futurist Riel Miller calls "the totalitarianism of inevitable futures", a future not only inimical to human flourishing but implausible, a public education is needed to provide

> a powerful democratic resource and public space that allows its young people and communities to contest the visions of the future that they are being presented with, and to work together through the spaces of traditional and emergent democratic practice, to fight for viable futures for all (Facer, 2011, p.15).

Not a 'future proofing' education, but a 'future building' education.

2. Democracy as a fundamental educational value

It is in this context that the two of us have been working on an alternative educational proposal, telling another story. Not 'the' but 'an' alternative, since the first stage in re-building a public education is to create a vibrant democratic politics of education, which values diverse perspectives and alternatives, and which places political questions back at the centre of education. Our starting point, the foundation for our real utopia proposal, is such political questions: "not mere technical issues to be solved by experts... [but questions that] always involve decisions which require us to make a choice between conflicting alternatives" (Mouffe, 2007, np). Some are ontological. What is our understanding, or image, of the child, the educator, the pre-school? How do we understand education? What, in the words of Mannheim, is the "diagnosis for our time"? Some are epistemological. What is knowledge? How do we learn? Some are axiological. What are the purposes of education? What should be its fundamental values? What ethics? And, perhaps most important of all, what kind of society do we want to build? What do we want for our children, here and now and in the future?

In our book – *Radical Education and the Common School: a Democratic Alternative* (Fielding and Moss, 2011) – we tell our story of a new public education, weaving our alternative reality from answers offered to such questions. Space precludes that here. Our focus now is on the question of fundamental values and on one value in particular, which we consider to be at the heart of our concept of a new public education: democracy. In doing so, we remember and take from many older stories, including those of the progressive education tradition; of Alex Bloom while working at St.George's-in-the-East secondary school in post-war London; of Loris Malaguzzi and his fellow educators in the municipal schools of Reggio Emilia; of John Dewey and Paolo Freire; and many more besides.

So central is democracy to our thinking that we label our alternative public education 'radical democratic education'. We say 'radical' to indicate that our alternative education is

transformational, but not what Foucault terms ‘superficial transformation’: “transformation that remains within the same mode of thought, a transformation that is only a way of adjusting the same thought more closely to the reality of things”. Real transformation for us, like Foucault (1988), is when “one can no longer think things as one formerly thought them”; or, as Roberto Unger (1998) describes, changing the basic arrangements, both the formative structures of institutions and enacted beliefs.

As we shall attempt to show, democratic education of the kind we propose is transformational in the sense Foucault and Unger understand the term. It is ‘radical’ change that forms part of a real utopian project. But before we turn to consider the design of a radical education project, we must first say what we mean by democracy. For like Alasdair McIntyre (1973) and Steven Lukes (1974) we are much persuaded by the elegant and incisive work of W.B.Gallie (1956), who argues that democracy is an essentially contested concept, that is to say, contestation about its meaning is part of the process of its conceptualisation and enactment.

We adopt a ‘thick’ understanding of democracy: democracy as a multi-dimensional concept, with different forms and practices linked to each dimension. An attempt to ground some of the key issues can be found in Skidmore and Bound’s ‘Everyday Democracy Index’ (2008) that covers six dimensions, ranging from ‘electoral and procedural democracy’ through ‘activism and civic participation’ and ‘aspiration and deliberation’ to democracy in the family, the workplace and public services. They argue that modern democracies must “be rooted in a culture in which democratic values and practices shape not just the formal sphere of politics, but the informal spheres of everyday life: families, communities, workplaces, and schools and other public services” (Skidmore and Bound, 2008, p.9). So while formal and procedural democracy, democratic governance, is vitally important, democracy has a more pervasive presence: as a way of thinking, being and acting, of relating and living together, as a quality of personal life and relationships.

This is democracy, in the words of John Dewey, as “a mode of associated living embedded in the culture and social relationships of everyday life” and as “a way of life controlled by a working faith in the possibilities of human nature…[and] faith in the capacity of human beings for intelligent judgement and action if proper conditions are furnished” (Dewey, 1939). This is democracy, as Hannah Arendt sees it, as a form of subjectivity expressed as a quality of human interaction (Biesta, 2007). This is democracy as a relational ethic that can and should pervade all aspects of everyday life, a way of “thinking of oneself in relation to others and the world” (Rinaldi, 2006, p.156), a relationship of solidarity and mutual affection and care for

one another, of democratic fellowship. A relationship, too, that recognises and welcomes plurality of values and perspectives, respecting the alterity of others, not trying to grasp it to make the Other into the Same. A democracy, in sum, of what John Gray (2009) calls *modus vivendi*, inscribed with a high degree of value pluralism, though premised on "a shared adhesion to ethico-political principles of democracy" (Mouffe, 1999, p.755) – and in contrast to a democracy of rational consensus, which presumes one right answer to any question.

We can also say what we don't understand democracy to be. It is not a process of aggregating individual preferences and the ensuing competition between different private interests, epitomised in systems of parental school choice. Democracy is certainly agonistic, recognising a "dimension of antagonism inherent in human relations" (Mouffe, 2000, p.101). But it enables people to reach negotiated compromises, through "public deliberation and contestation about the common good" (Biesta, 2010, p.54) and "the translation of private troubles into collective issues" (p.100). Nor is democratic education primarily about teaching courses on citizenship. Rather, it is about experiencing and living democracy in schools that are democratic, for "we become citizens when we are treated and valued as citizens" (Coffield and Williamson, 2011, p.60). Individuals, as Dewey believed, "learn to understand themselves as democratic individuals by becoming members of a community in which the problems of communal life are resolved through collective deliberation and a shared concern for the common good" (Carr and Hartnett, 1996, p.63).

We would make two further points about our understanding of democracy. It is intimately related to justice and equality. It is harder for democracy to take root and flourish in unjust and unequal societies. Lawrence Kohlberg, one of the most remarkable pioneers of moral education, insisted that "education for justice requires making schools more just and encouraging students to take an active role in making schools more just...a complete approach to moral education means full student participation in a school in which justice is a living matter" (Kohlberg, 1971, p.82). Michael Sandel, in his 2009 BBC Reith lectures, stated the same relationship in more general terms:

> [Democracy] is about much more than maximising GDP, or satisfying consumer preferences. It's also about seeking distributive justice; promoting the health of democratic institutions; and cultivating the solidarity, and sense of community that democracy requires. Market-mimicking governance – at its best – can satisfy us as consumers. But it can do nothing to make us democratic citizens (2009, p.4).

The issue is about putting markets in their place, drawing a line between what is the market sphere and what is the public sphere and ensuring markets do not become so dominant they erode the public sphere and undermine democracy. From our perspective, education is clearly in the public sphere, with democracy at its heart. We agree with Carr and Hartnett when they write that "[a]ny vision of education that takes democracy seriously cannot but be at odds with educational reforms which espouse the language and values of market forces and treat education as a commodity to be purchased and consumed" (1996, p.192).

Lastly, whilst acknowledging that the Arab spring and other contemporary instances of struggle provide strong evidence of democracy's continuing appeal, we must also acknowledge that democracy is in a sickly state. In those countries where it is well-established, representative democracy – the electoral and procedural –is often sclerotic and corrupted, increasingly in thrall to powerful vested interests, struggling to respond to the contemporary challenges of a complex and threatened world and to retain the engagement of citizens. Participatory democracy is eroded by consumerism, individualism and time poverty. Occupy and other social movements offer some hope that the democratic spirit can be renewed, yet they too struggle to develop broad programmes for radical change and convert them to doable politics Democracy, as Dewey said, needs to be reborn in each generation and education is its midwife; the need for renewal and for education's active role in that process has never been more pressing.

3. Designing a radical democratic education

For full enactment, radical democratic education needs to be practiced through and in many institutions and settings. Democratically elected and accountable national and state governments need to espouse democracy, proclaiming it a fundamental value in education, practicing it in their approach to education, and supporting its practice in other institutions and settings. Democratically elected and accountable local bodies – whether local authorities or school boards – need to (re)assume public responsibility for education in their area, representing the responsibility of all citizens for the education of children, and like higher levels of government, proclaim and practice democracy in their approach to education and support its practice elsewhere. The city of Reggio Emilia in Northern Italy provides a vivid example of the democratic 'educative commune' (Moss, 2011), both in its active support for democratic education in its network of municipal schools and in its strong statement of public responsibility and democratic purpose:

> Education is the right of all, of all children, and as such is a responsibility of the community. Education is an opportunity for the growth and emancipation of the individual and the collective; it is a resource for gaining knowledge and for learning to live together; it is a meeting place where freedom, democracy and solidarity are practiced and where the value of peace is promoted. Within the plurality of cultural, ideological, political, and religious conceptions, education lives by listening, dialogue, and participation; it is based on mutual respect, valuing the diversity of identities, competencies, and knowledge held by each individual and is therefore qualified as secular, open to exchange and cooperation (Regolamento Scuole e Nidi d'infanzia del Comune di Reggio Emilia, 2009).
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Elected local authorities can further their commitment to a democratic education by the creation of public spaces for the practice of a democratic politics of education. Richard Hatcher proposes one example, Local Education Forums: "a body open to all with an interest in education...to discuss and take positions on all key policy issues...and developing, perhaps in a two-year cycle, an Education Plan for the local system of schools and colleges". Hatcher further proposes Neighbourhood Education Forums, at a very local level, which "could bring local concerns to bear on the schools and ideally become a vehicle for participative governance" (Hatcher, 2012). Porto Alegre's School Constituent Assembly, a democratic, deliberative and participatory forum "to construct the principles that would guide the actions of the municipal educational system" (Gandin and Apple, forthcoming) provides an actual example of such a public space.

But at the heart of a radical democratic education is the school, in which we include institutions for young people below compulsory school age, of compulsory school age and prior to higher education. In saying this, we recognise that education is not confined to the school, but can and does occur in many settings, both formal and informal; the school cannot and should not claim to do everything itself. We recognise, too, that some question the case for a continuing role for the school, given the growing potential for distanced and networked learning, suggesting "that the school itself should simply be dissolved into the learning landscape and replaced by personalized learning environments" (Facer, 2011, p.27). We also recognise, and share, concerns about the potential destructive power of the school through its ability to govern, discipline and normalise child and teacher alike. For us, however, the school has a vital role to play not only in education, but especially in a radical democratic education, agreeing with Keri Facer when she argues for continuing investment in the school

> as a physical space and a local organization,...because I believe that it may be one of the most important institutions we have to help us build a democratic conversation about the future. A physical, local school where community members are encouraged to encounter each other and learn from each other is one of the last public spaces in which we can begin to build the intergenerational solidarity, respect for diversity and democratic capability needed to ensure fairness in the context of sociotechnical change. Moreover, the public educational institution may be the only resource we have to counter the inequalities and injustice of the informal learning landscape outside school...It is therefore the time both *to defend the idea of a school as a public resource and to radically re-imagine how it might evolve* if it is to equip communities to respond to and shape the socio-technical changes of the next few years (ibid., pp.28-29; emphasis added).

So the school retains our allegiance as a pivotal public institution, not in its often divisive and repressive unreconstructed form, but as a site of radical democratic education. Meaning what in practice? We identify and briefly elaborate ten key design features of a radical democratic school, in which democracy is enacted as participation, 'a mode of associated living' and a lived everyday experience, following Kohlberg's maxim that "the only way school can help graduating young people become persons who can make society a just community is to let them try experimentally to make the school themselves" (1980, p.35).

1 Proclaimed democratic vitality

A school for radical democratic education will wish to foreground its interdependent commitments to (a) education as the most important rationale for schooling, and (b) democracy as both end and means, purpose and practice of education. The key point here is that education in and for deep or 'high-energy' democracy has to be not just the starting point, but what Elsa Wasserman, in her reflections on the work of Kohlberg and the Just Community School movement in the USA, calls the "central educational goal" (Wasserman, 1980, p.268) of the school for which we are arguing. There has to be a proclaimed, not just an intended, democratic vitality, albeit one that bears in mind the vicissitudes of context and circumstance.

What this actually means will, of course, be something that those working in the school will need and wish to exemplify and share with their internal and external communities. But the narratives and exchanges that develop will be energised by a declared commitment to democracy that calls for profound change in how we live and work now as a bridge to more just and more creative futures. Witness, for example, Alex Bloom, the great, radical pioneer

London secondary school head teacher, and his proclaimed intention to create on 1st October 1945 a "consciously democratic community...without regimentation, without corporal punishment, without competition" (Bloom, 1948, p.121).

2 Radical structures and spaces

Our next three indicators comprise complementary aspects of the interpersonal and structural integrity of democratic living. They demonstrate the unity of means and ends, not only in matters of organisational structure, but also in the relational dimensions of daily engagement, which underscore the importance of care, respect and creative encounter as the foundational dispositions of democracy and social justice.

Structurally the radical democratic school will be mindful of what might be called 'positional restlessness', that is to say, a libertarian and egalitarian insistence on the openness of opportunity, and the need to unsettle patterns and dispositions of presumption and to open up much wider and more generous vistas of possibility for all members of a school community. Such a school will pursue a range of organisational articulations of participatory democracy at the heart of which lies an insistence on a permanent and proper provisionality. At both adult and young person levels this will include a permanent unease with hierarchy and a strong desire to create transparent structures that encourage ways of working that transcend boundaries and invite new combinations and possibilities. We need to look again at power, purpose and possibility, too often deceptively embellished with mercurial fashions of involvement and empowerment, full of sound and fury, signifying little of worth and nothing that changes the underlying presumptions and intentions of their host societies.

On the one hand, this will entail revisiting the few examples we have within publicly funded systems of education in which principals have effectively renounced or profoundly rearticulated their pyramidal positions and developed flatter organisational structures or more fluid conduits of power and structural forms that privilege communal responsibility and collective endeavour. Here, as elsewhere in the struggle for change, the importance of radical democratic traditions becomes apparent: in societies dominated by "the dictatorship of no alternative" (Unger, 2005a), the power of enacted, documented alternatives acquires an increasing rather than a decreasing significance. On the other hand, it will involve the continuing development of the small but growing corpus of literature that attends to these matters with genuinely emancipatory intent e.g. the recent work of scholars like John Smyth (Smyth 2006, 2009) and Philip Woods (Woods, 2005, 2011) on democratic leadership.

In addition to substantial engagement with past and present models of democratic leadership there will also be substantial emphasis on the spatiality of democracy, on interpersonal and architectural spaces that encourage a multiplicity of different forms of formal and informal engagement with a multiplicity of persons. These will include 'subaltern spaces' or spaces in which minority, marginalised or emergent groups can develop the confidence, capacity and dispositions that enable them to explore and name what is important to them and also gain the confidence and desire to engage with larger, different groups of people within and beyond the school community. Pre-eminent amongst these larger spaces is the General Meeting (see, e.g. Fielding 2010), the communal space within which the whole school community reflects on its shared life, achievements and aspirations. Here, young people and adults make meaning of their work together, returning tenaciously and regularly to the imperatives of purpose, not merely to the mechanics of accomplishment.

Lastly, the kinds of roles and relationships we see as central to a radical democratic project privilege organisational arrangements that enable encounters that transcend traditional role boundaries and develop more holistic, emergent forms of encounter. We thus argue either for small ('human scale') schools or for larger schools that are broken down into smaller interdependent units, variously termed sub-schools, mini-schools, or schools-within-schools.

3 Radical roles and images

Just as the structures and spaces within a common school practising a radical democratic education open up new possibilities, so too do the roles of those who work within them. But before considering some of these possibilities, it is necessary to remind ourselves that, whilst essential, roles tend to acquire a life of their own, exhibiting a propensity to imprison and diminish human capacities and capabilities in the interest of those in power. Thus, in developing our account of radical democratic education, and remembering our previous call for 'positional restlessness', we follow Roberto Unger in valorising the need for

> a cultural-revolutionary attack on rigid roles...a practice of role-defiance and role jumbling ... a loosened sense of what it means to occupy a role...(that) helps to disrupt frozen connections among social stations, life experiences, and stereotyped forms of insight and sensibility (Unger, 2004, pp.563, 564).

In addition to renewed interest in democratic forms of the leadership role, which entail the re-imagining and re-articulation of what it means to be a principal, there will also be a commensurate range of alternative roles and practices amongst staff. The radical democratic school will encourage this kind of fluidity and exploration, not only amongst

adults, but also between staff and young people. It will include, amongst other things, a delight and belief in radical collegiality (Fielding, 1999) and intergenerational reciprocity that reflects deep-seated faith in the encounter between adults and young people as a potential source of mutual learning, not just in an instrumental, technical sense, but eventually in a wider existential and more fully educational sense.

Some possible roles for young people are set out in a 'Patterns of Partnership' typology, inspired in part by the pioneering work of Roger Hart (1992) and Harry Shier (2001) in the wider field of youth participation. Each suggests a qualitatively different way of young people and teachers working together. This six-fold pattern is thus a prompt to possibility grounded in the realities of different approaches to daily work, which often co-exist within institutions, and in which Mode 6 is an aspirational approach to living and learning together, with the other five modes as staging posts in journeys in and for democracy.

In mode 1, *young people as data source,* staff utilise information about the progress and well-being of young people. Here, there is a real teacher commitment to pay attention to the voices of young people speaking through the practical realities of work done and targets agreed. It acknowledges that for teaching and learning to improve there is a need to take more explicit account of relevant data about individual and group or class achievement.

In mode 2, *young people as active respondents,* staff invite dialogue and discussion to deepen learning / professional decisions. Staff move beyond the accumulation of passive data and, in order to extend the learning of young people and enrich staff professional decisions, they feel a need to hear what young people have to say about their own experience in lessons or their active engagement in its development via, for example, assessment for learning approaches. Young people are discussants rather than recipients of current approaches and thereby contribute to the development of teaching and learning in their school.

In mode 3, *young people as co-enquirers,* staff take the lead role with high-profile, active support from young people. Here, we see an increase in the involvement of both young people and teachers and a greater degree of partnership than modes 1 and 2. Whilst the roles of young people and teachers are not equal, they are shifting strongly in an egalitarian direction. Young people move from being discussants to being co-enquirers into matters of agreed significance and importance. While teachers define the focus and boundaries of exploration, the commitment and agreement of young people is essential.

In mode 4, *young people as knowledge creators,* young people take the lead role with active staff support. This deepens and extends the egalitarian thrust of the co-enquiry approach. Partnership and dialogue remain the dominant ways of working, but now the voice of the young person comes to the fore in a leadership or initiating, not just a responsive, role. It is young people who identify the issues to be researched and young people who undertake the enquiry with the support of staff.

In mode 5, *young people as joint authors,* young people and staff decide on a joint course of action together. The joint enquiry model involves a genuinely shared, fully collaborative partnership between young people and staff. Leadership, planning and conduct of research and the subsequent commitment to responsive action are embraced as both a mutual responsibility and energising adventure.

Lastly, in mode 6, *intergenerational learning as participatory democracy,* the explicit commitment to participatory democracy extends the shared and collaborative partnership between young people and staff in ways which (a) emphasise a joint commitment to the common good, and (b) include occasions and opportunities for an equal sharing of power and responsibility.

Two final points. First, we recognise that 'partnership' can be and often is co-opted for neo-liberal purposes; we thus argue for the development of democratic fellowship as a presumptive nexus of values and intentions that gives very different readings and enacted realities to the calculus of consumption and acquisition that emerges from market driven approaches. Second, underpinning and indeed preceding roles is the social construction or image of the participants in the radical democratic school; radical roles emerge from how young people and adults are conceptualised. Thus 50 years of democratic experimentation in the municipal schools of Reggio Emilia is grounded in a political question – what is our image of the child? – and the answer that has been collectively forged. As Loris Malaguzzi, the first head of Reggio's schools, insisted:

> One of the strong points [of our schools] has always been that of starting from a very open, explicit declaration of our image of the child, where image is understood as a strong and optimistic interpretation of the child. A child born with many resources and extraordinary potentials that have never ceased to amaze us, with an autonomous capacity for constructing thoughts, ideas, questions and attempts at answers.

4 Radical relationships

When teachers and young people begin to work in these new ways, suggested by the egalitarian mutuality of the more complex modes in the Patterns of Partnership typology, they are not just redrawing the boundaries of what is permissible and extending a sense of what is possible. They are also giving each other the desire and the strength to do so through their mutual regard and care. Just as the roles are more fluid and more diverse, so, within radical democratic education, the relationships between young people and between adults and young people are not only less bounded and more exploratory, but also more openly informed by the dispositions, dynamics and ethics of care.

Such relationships enable us to 're-see' each other as persons rather than as role occupants, and in so doing nurture not only a new understanding, sense of possibility and felt respect between adults and young people, but also a joy in each other's being and a greater sense of shared delight and responsibility. An ethics and enactment of care are also more often than not dialogic in both form and intention and thus profoundly affect developments like giving voice to young people. Arguably, a dialogic approach in this case – a pedagogy of listening - implies a five-fold, multifaceted engagement between adults and young people: firstly, a genuine openness towards each other, a reciprocity that is interested and attentive, rather than a cursory and incurious consultation; secondly, what we have elsewhere called a 'permanent provisionality', an understanding that we are not talking about a one-off event with little or no feedback or future engagement, but rather a pattern of continuing dialogue in which understandings and meanings are always open to new perspectives and interpretations and "where you lose absolutely the possibility of controlling the final result" (Rinaldi, 2006, p.184); thirdly, a willingness to be surprised, to welcome the unanticipated as a mark of the partnership's potential to honour and deal with difference in ways that resist the silencing, homogenising tendencies of position and power; fourthly, a pervasive rather than a compartmentalised approach, in which all young people in the school have many opportunities during the day for the kinds of encounters we have mentioned above; lastly, whilst a dialogic approach to listening to young people is, as much as any other, concerned about getting things done and tackling real issues of current concern, its concrete accomplishments are achieved within a wider, more holistic frame of reference. It is also about how we make meaning together, how we understand the significance of our current work and our future aspirations.

These five elements of a dialogic approach all connect with a number of assumptions about education, including education being a relational field in which care, respect for and knowledge of persons are centrally important. Their pervasive reciprocity also nudge us

away from the individualistic preoccupations of personalisation and high performance schooling towards a person-centred approach that sees individual flourishing as intimately bound up with relations with others, not as a relational lubricant for a smoother running organisation; and towards a more communal orientation that sees democratic fellowship as both the means and the end of a broadly conceived, tenaciously intended radical education.

5 Personal and communal narrative

The notion of narrative is central to radical education in the democratic common school for at least two reasons. Firstly, it is important both personally and communally because it connects in a fundamental way with one of the core processes of education, namely with the making of meaning. Narrative learning is mindful of the fragility of human endeavour, the need for recognition and significance, not in any flashy or self-aggrandising sense, but rather in terms of the moral and educational legitimacy of one's endeavours. It is precisely because narrative is about making meaning that the needs it expresses and the aspirations it voices lie at the heart of anything that can properly be called an educational undertaking.

Education is firstly and finally about how we learn to lead good lives together, lives that enable us individually and collectively to survive and flourish. Without some means of recreating a constant link to those profound matters of purpose education becomes impossible and we have to make do with the thin and dispiriting substitutes of competitive schooling. As one secondary school principal remarked to us recently, in the context of ever-increasing pressures to boost school performance, "personal histories are tremendously important – giving yourself permission to have conversations with yourself. Keeping a handle on the past and what is right".

Within the radical democratic school there will be multiple spaces and opportunities for individuals, both young people and adults, to make meaning of their work, at a personal and a communal level. Indeed the two are connected. The anthropology of the self presumed by most radical traditions of education is communal rather than atomistic. The anthropology of an inclusive notion of community to which we are committed is one that honours difference and presumes the sanctity of the individual person. Moreover these multiple spaces and opportunities will recognise and support narrative as meaning making, using the full range of 'the hundred languages of childhood' (Rinaldi, 2006)

The second reason narrative is important has to do with the necessary connection with the radical traditions of education within which the work of the democratic school is located. Not only does history have much to teach its contemporary inheritors in a cautionary sense, it

also provides many examples of counter-hegemonic significance and power that remind us not only of what has been, but also that, in Terry Wrigley's resonant phrase, 'Another school is possible' (2006). Being able to tell a narrative of radical education, the story telling with which we began this essay, and to find a place for oneself and one's work in that narrative, plays an important part in building a rich, complex and confident identity.

One of the most corrosive accomplishments of neo-liberalism, particularly within the field of education and schooling, is the near-abandonment of historical scholarship and sensibilities as significant voices in contemporary debate and teacher education; obsessed with 'going forward', the production and consumption of novelty, and the process of 'creative destruction', neo-liberalism spurns the past and decries the virtues of continuity and sustained development . We cannot help but share E.P.Thompson's disquiet about "the enormous condescension of posterity" (1968, p.13) and Russell Jacoby's still pertinent judgement that our "society has lost its memory, and with it, its mind. The inability or refusal to think back takes its toll in the inability to think" (Jacoby, 1997, pp.3-4). Sadly, government (at least in England) suffers from this collective amnesia, constantly urging the dubious merits of evidence-based policy, whilst ignoring the wealth of historical evidence, evidence which cannot tell us what we must do but which can help us think about what we might do.

Notwithstanding these important cautionary caveats our resolve remains, in part because, as William Morris reminds us, we must remember

> How men fight and lose the battle, and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes turns out not to be what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name (Morris, 1968 [1886/87]: 53)

6 Radical curriculum, radical pedagogy and enabling assessment

At the heart of radical education's approach to the formal and informal curriculum must lie four imperatives. The first is a focus on the purposes of education, what John White and others would term an 'aims-based' rather than a 'subjects-based' curriculum. For us this means organising the curriculum around that which is required for a sustainable, flourishing and democratic way of life. For example, , in their 2005 manifesto *For a New Public Education*, Associació de Mestres Rosa Sensat (2005), a Catalan teachers' organisation, argues that the curriculum must be organised "on the basis of that which is absolutely necessary in order for a person to exercise their citizenship", that its content "must be taught in a way that brings with it emancipation", and for this very reason "it must not be presented

as eternal and immutable, but as a construction of humanity in its process of emancipation, of construction of one's own personality". Developing their theme, they propose that "knowledge can be grouped into six major types:

> 1. Education for gestural, oral, visual, written communication, etc. so that one can enter into a peaceful relationship with the Other.
> 2. Education on the major cultural works that have marked the ascendance of humanity.
> 3. Scientific and technological education that allows one to understand the contemporary world.
> 4. Education in health, the environment, and sustainable development so that the world will last beyond our presence.
> 5. Education for being a citizen and for discovering the history of the emergence of democracy.
> 6. Education in creativity, imagination, curiosity, etc., which will allow everyone to find their place in the world."

The second imperative has to do with the necessity of equipping young people and adults with the desire and capacity to seriously and critically interrogate what is given and co-construct a knowledge that assists us in leading good and joyful lives together.

The third argues that whilst knowledge must transcend the local, it must, nonetheless, start with the cultures, concerns and hopes of the communities that schools serve. A curriculum for a democratic and community-oriented education should include substantial scope for local input and design, what the Royal Society of Arts in London has termed an 'Area Based Curriculum', which uses "the local area to illustrate curriculum content, and [uses] local stakeholders (including young people) to co-design the curriculum...supporting schools to partner with organisations or groups from the local area to design aspects of the curriculum utilising the local area as a resource" (Thomas, 2011 p.298). Such thinking underlay the approach to curriculum in the municipal Citizen Schools in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre, where curriculum transformation was deemed "a crucial part of Porto Alegre's project to build 'thick democracy'" and where "the starting point for the construction of curricular knowledge is the culture(s) of the communities themselves, not only in terms of content, but in terms of perspective as well", with work built around thematic cores or complexes:

> The disciplines or areas of knowledge were not to be ignored...[but] rather than starting from the contribution of each discipline to the construction of knowledge, the

> thematic complex created a situation in which all teachers needed to step back and consider what the knowledge of their area could offer to better deal with the central issue elected to be the thematic complex. Because the thematic complex was closely related to social problems, the process created a situation in which teachers had to search for the relation of their discipline to social reality...In the process of democratizing both curricular content and organization, the traditional rigid disciplinary structure was broken down and general interdisciplinary areas were created (Gandin and Apple, forthcoming).

Lastly, a consequence of taking these first three desiderata seriously leads to a curriculum that emphasises connectedness: that is holistic in approach; organised around inter-connected and interdisciplinary themes and project work, rather than separate subjects; and that encourages integrated forms of exploration with young people and staff working in small communities of enquiry (see, for example, the Enquiring Minds (Morgan 2011) and Opening Minds (Candy 2011) projects and the Learning Futures initiative (Price 2011) in England). This is a curriculum that contests "a form of knowledge which divides, categorises, separates, and struggles to make connections (or maybe does not want to) between different disciplines" (Vecchi, 2004, p.18).

A radical curriculum in a radical democratic education needs a radical pedagogy, produced from answers to political questions about ontology – what is our image of the child? - and epistemology - what do we mean by knowledge and learning? Today's 'neo-liberal' schooling is based, as we have already noted, on two key assumptions: a representational view of knowledge and a transmissive pedagogy. But there are alternatives, more suited to a radical democratic education. Deborah Osberg and Gert Biesta, for example, propose a 'pedagogy of invention' as an alternative to the transmission model of pedagogy, where knowledge is

> *the creation of new properties*...a process whereby properties that have never existed before and, more importantly, are inconceivable from what has come before, are created or somehow *come into being* for the first time...We believe that a complexity inspired epistemology suggests a 'pedagogy of invention' (we borrow this phrase from Ulmer, 1985) for it brings into view the idea that knowledge does not bring us closer to what is *already* present but, rather, moves us into a *new* reality, which is incalculable from what came before. Because knowledge enables us to transcend what came before, this means it allows us to penetrate deeper in*to that which does not seem possible from the perspective of the present*. Knowledge, in other words, is

> not conservative, but radically inventionalistic (Biesta and Osberg, 2007, pp. 33, 46–47: original emphases).

A similar approach to learning pervades the municipal schools of Reggio Emilia, valuing new thinking, new ideas and new perspectives and desirous of the wonder and amazement of the unintended outcome. Vea Vecchi (2010) argues that it is important to society

> that schools and we as teachers are clearly aware how much space we leave children for original thinking, without rushing to restrict it with predetermined schemes that define what is correct according to a school culture. How much do we support children to have ideas different from those of other people and how do we accustom them to arguing and discussing their ideas with their classmates? (p.138).

Schools, she adds, need to consciously take a position on "*which knowledge* they intend to promote": in short, there are alternatives, and choices of a political and ethical nature must be made between them. Contesting an idea of teaching that chooses to "transmit circumscribed 'truths' in various 'disciplines'", her choice is clear: "to stand by children's sides together constructing contexts in which they can explore their own ideas and hypotheses individually or in groups and discuss them with friends or teachers" (ibid., p.28). She and her fellow educators work with what they term a 'pedagogy of listening and relationships', based on "understanding of problems through experiment, trial, error and testing", where the learner develops theories, shares them with others, then revises them in a pedagogy that emphasises the importance of relationships, listening ("one of the foundations of our work is the careful, respectful, tender 'listening' with solidarity to children's strategies and ways of thinking") and avoiding predetermined results.

When radical approaches to the curriculum and pedagogy have worked well they have invariably been enabled by forms of assessment at both local and national levels that have had the flexibility to respond to the particularities of context and significant professional involvement of teachers in the assessment, moderation and examination process. At classroom level they have incorporated high levels of peer and teacher involvement through assessment-for-learning approaches and additional community and family involvement through public, portfolio-based presentations. Once again, the compulsory education sector might have much to learn from the experience of early childhood education, in particular the latter's use of 'pedagogical documentation' as a participatory process of evaluation that keeps open the issue of outcome rather than confining evaluation to the standardised and predefined (Rinaldi, 2006).

7 Insistent affirmation of possibility

Energised both by rage against "the abandonment of ordinary humanity to perpetual belittlement" (Unger, 2005a, p.46) and by profound belief in "the powers of ordinary men and women" (ibid., p.63) to create new and better ways of being in the world, an insistent affirmation of possibility requires us to keep options open, to counter the confinement of customary or casual expectation. This means removing, for example, the corrosive practices of tracking or setting (Boaler, 2005, 2008) and exposing the false presumptions of this kind of labeling (see Hart et al., 2004, Swann et al., 2012). In their stead we celebrate views of human flourishing that see creativity and excellence as emulative rather than competitive in both genesis and accomplishment; that see curiosity and playfulness as more compelling initiators and more satisfying and productive enablers than the interminable treadmill of stickers, stars and prizes. In the words of Alex Bloom, "objective rewards and punishments are false stimuli, for, unless the right thing is done for the right reason one lives unethically ... Similarly, objective competition is wrong; it is not only unethical but it tends to destroy a communal spirit." Furthermore, in eradicating it, "because there are neither carrots nor goads, there will be no donkeys, for when children are treated as we would have them be, they tend to reach out accordingly" (Bloom, 1949, p.171).

In sum, commitment to an insistent affirmation of possibility denies the legitimacy of ability grouping, promotes emulation rather than competition, and prefers intrinsic motivation and communal recognition to the paraphernalia of marks and prizes. It espouses and enacts a view of the world in general, and the educational world in particular, that is inclusive, enabling and ennobling of all for the benefit of all.

8 Engaging the local

A radical democratic school will be no island unto itself, but seek to develop a vibrant reciprocity with its local community and to be an agent of democratic flourishing within that wider context. It will be

> a place for everyone, a meeting place in the physical and also the social, cultural and political sense of the word. A forum or site for meeting and relating, where children and adults meet and commit to something, where they can dialogue, listen, and discuss in order to share meanings: it is a place of infinite cultural, linguistic, social, aesthetic, ethical, political and economic possibilities. A place of ethical and political praxis, a space for democratic learning. A place for research and creativity,

> coexistence and pleasure, critical thought and emancipation (Associació de Mestres Rosa Sensat, 2005, p.10)

This means the common school operating as a 'multi-purpose' institution – a place of infinite possibilities - providing education-in-its-broadest-sense and acting as a social, cultural and democratic resource to its local community, responding to the needs, the ideas, and the desire to experiment of that community: a school that, as in the case of the 'Citizen School' in Porto Alegre, strives to serve "not only the students, but also the communities in which they are situated" (Gandin and Apple, forthcoming).. We are much taken by the persuasive, imaginative work of engaged scholars like Keri Facer who, as already noted, argue strongly for the importance of the local school as a place where "we can build intergenerational solidarity, respect for diversity and democratic capability" (Facer , 2011, p.28). Her argument, and ours, is for the role of schools as a powerful local democratic resource and public space for creating conversations that contest visions of future and work together for viable futures, a role strengthened, not undermined, by the potential of new technologies.

> *The development of a rich online education landscape, the increasing visibility and accessibility of folk educators, and the changing scripts for public services have the potential to open up new relationships between schools and their communities.* These new relationships would be premised upon a search to understand the roles that parents, young people, community and cultural organizations and online educators might play as co-educators (ibid., p.25, original emphasis).

Developing this theme of opening new relationships between schools and their communities, Facer adds that "the critical issue for me is to recognise that as informal learning becomes both more visible and amplified by digital technologies, this actually opens up space for the school to do something more than drill and kill...[Y]ou can start to engage the local differently when you have these technologies". She envisages, for example, the 'upside down' school day, with children "accessing lectures and chalk and talk type materials in their own time outside school" while seeing the school day "as the time for collaboration, debate, inquiry and all the things that actually benefit from people being together" (Facer, 2012, pc). Another voice speaks of the relationship in terms of getting children out more into the world: "let the kids attend the local council meeting, let them be apprenticed in workplaces, let them sit with a writer in a bookshop to discuss literature, let them play music in the local church. Let them help to reinvigorate our public spaces – which desperately need the young as the young desperately need them" (Charkin, 2012, pc). Still other voices encourage schools to "generate new forms of social organisation as a grounds for a community's economic, social

political and cultural vitality" (Schostak, 2012, pc), something that, at least potentially, the Co-operative Schools movement is well-placed to develop. The possibilities for engaging the local in a new relationship between a common school and its community are truly manifold and rich in potential.

9 Accountability as shared responsibility

A radical democratic education must be accountable, but to whom and how? Neither earlier forms of professional accountability nor today's neo-liberal corporate forms will do, for both are based on sub-contracting, to professionals or to managers and technicians, allowing citizens to slough off their responsibility for education. Located within participatory traditions of democracy, our understanding of accountability underscores the link between educational renewal and public responsibility; we cannot know what we are responsible for in anything other than a thin, box-ticking sense unless we return to shared educational purposes and from there co-author an account of core beliefs and the kinds of practices we believe will exemplify their realisation in an appropriately demanding and life-affirming way.

'High energy' notions of democratic accountability are better conceived and enacted as forms of 'shared responsibility', which will enable "different accounts of public purpose and practice to be deliberated in a democratic public sphere: constituted to include difference, enable participation, voice and dissent, through to collective judgement and decision" (Ransom, 2003). Because education is a shared concern and responsibility, for all citizens, then everyone potentially can and should be engaged in deliberation on 'different accounts' of public education, through dialogue, contestation, reflection and interpretation, taking responsibility for the process and the meanings arrived at. Understood in this democratic way, accountability is morally and politically situated, not merely technically and procedurally delivered (Fielding, 2001). It makes a claim on our ethical and civic responsibilities, which cannot be adequately understood or provided for by a delegated mandate which provides too convenient an absolution.

One important corollary of the democratic school is, thus, the requirement that we go beyond the distortions and derelictions of performative inquisition and develop new forms of accountability better suited to a more engaged understanding of democratic living (see Mongon and Leadbeater, 2012 for recent acknowledgment of this issue). We can glimpse some of the possibilities. Pedagogical documentation, as practised in early childhood education in Reggio Emilia (and many other places), gives "the possibility to discuss and dialogue 'everything with everyone'" (Hoyuelos, 2004, p.7), by making learning and learning processes visible and subject to deliberation, provides one example of how shared

responsibility is not only a form of democratic accountability, but also a means of collective learning. Young people can and should be involved in such processes, as well as adults – educators, parents, politicians, all citizens. Behind this practice "is the ideological and ethical concept of a transparent school and transparent education" (ibid.).

Another example of such participatory practice is Bishops Park College, an 11-16 school in England where a Research Forum was developed towards the end of its radical phase, comprising a core group of young people, parents, governors, school staff and a small university research and development team, from which emerged a framework of aspirations and practices that formed the basis of the College's accountability framework (Fielding et al., 2006). While more generally, Bent Flyvbgerg's 'phronetic model of social science' offers further insight into the possible meaning of democratic accountability, premised on

> the Aristotelian maxim that social issues are best decided by means of the public sphere, not by science. Though imperfect, no better device than public deliberation following the rules of constitutional democracy has been arrived at for settling social issues...The phronetic model sees social scientists and social science professionals as analysts who produce food for thought for the ongoing process of public deliberation, participation, and decision making (2006, p.39).

Democratic accountability in education is not some form of balance sheet presented to investors. It is the exercise of mutual responsibility – of schools to their citizens, and of citizens to their schools – which must involve public participation, deliberation and decision making, on the basis of various forms of documentation supplied by various documenters, and conducted in the context of democratic answers to political questions.

10 The common school

This final feature is, in many ways, a summation of much that has gone before. It is a design for the basic structure of a school that embodies and enables a radical democratic education and is compatible with, expressive of and conducive to the preceding features. This 'common' school contests the fragmenting, competitive and selective drive of neo-liberal education, with its proliferation of selective schools, publicly-funded 'academies', 'charter schools', 'free schools' and 'faith schools', not to mention private fee-paying schools – whose sole intent is to serve the autonomous consumer (see Brighouse, 2006).

The common school practicing radical democratic education is, instead, a public space for all citizens living in its local catchment area, children, young people and adults, without

admission criteria except residence and without specialisms that enforce selective attendance - a truly ‘comprehensive school’. It is age integrated (e.g. 0-11; 1-16; 6-16) and, because open to all citizens, multi-generational; human scale in size, either one small school or small schools-within-schools; a place of depth and connectedness over width of coverage – interdisciplinary, inquiry-based, experiential; project based, both in its pedagogical approach and in its relationship with its community; and based on team working, involving educators and other workers with diverse perspectives and interests.

Such common schools have structures that support democratic governance in particular and democratic practice more generally, for example General Meetings, elected governing bodies and non-tokenistic student councils. They work in close relationship with the community they serve, they participate in local or neighbourhood educational forums and, rather than competing, they cooperate with other schools within networks. Some common schools are provided as co-operatives or by non-profit organisations, others by the elected local authority itself – as municipal schools – since it is not possible for democratically elected and accountable bodies to be responsible for public education without being directly involved in its practice.

All schools, whoever provides them, are in a relationship of democratic accountability with that elected local authority, as well as with the local community they serve. All schools contribute, with others, to creating and implementing the principles, policies and goals of the municipal educational system, a local educational project: “a shared and democratic exploration of the meaning and practice of education and the potential of the school...[providing] an educational context and ethos, as well as a forum for exchange, confrontation, dialogue and learning between schools” (Fielding and Moss, 2011, p.125). And all schools benefit from an infrastructure provided by the local authority for supporting the implementation and evaluation of the local educational project, including teams of *pedagogistas*, experienced educators each working with a few human scale schools, offering their staff opportunities for exchange, reflection and discussion, introducing them to new thinking and practices, and facilitating contact between local authority, local communities and schools.

4. Reflections on democratic experimentalism, prefigurative practice and sustainability

Erik Olin Wright proposes three criteria to be applied to any consideration of institutional alternatives: desirability, viability and achievability. Following our brief, we have focused in this essay on viability, "a scientifically grounded conception of viable alternative institutions". But we want to end by introducing three further concepts into the conversation: democratic experimentalism, prefigurative practice and sustainability. We see these as important parts of the process of transformative change that many of us are committed to; but also as being complementary to Wright's three criteria and his view of transformational change as a cumulative, step-by-step process involving **"**utopian ideals that are grounded in the real potentials of humanity, utopian destinations that have accessible waystations, utopian designs of institutions that can inform our practical tasks of navigating a world of imperfect conditions for social change".

Democratic experimentalism

The Brazilian social theorist Roberto Unger has coined the term 'democratic experimentalism' to capture an important means for bringing about transformative institutional change:

> The provision of public services must be an innovative collective practice, moving forward the qualitative provision of the services themselves. That can no longer happen in our current understanding of efficiency and production by the mechanical transmission of innovation from the top. It can only happen through the organisation of a collective experimental practice from below...Democracy is not just one more terrain for the institutional innovation that I advocate. It is the most important terrain (Unger, 2005b, pp.179, 182).

He views democratic experimentalism as an essential element of what he terms 'high energy democracy', which is about releasing the creative powers of ordinary people by eradicating the distortions and subjugations of class, gender, hierarchy and the myopic presumptions of prescribed role. For Unger, like Dewey, the essential doctrine of democracy is "faith in the constructive powers of ordinary men and women" (ibid., p.63) and "recognition of the genius of ordinary men and women" (Unger, 2004, p.lxxii). High energy democracy encourages a high level of organised civic engagement and "seeks to strengthen our experimental

capacities – our ability to try out alternative arrangements among ourselves"; and this assumes, finds and nourishes "greatness in ordinary humanity" (ibid.).

Unger insists that democratic experimentalism is more than just *ad hoc* local projects that occasionally and by their own exertions break free from the constraints of orthodoxy, examples of which are always around us. He envisages the possibility of a state that actively encourages experimentation, in short an emancipatory state at ease with diversity. The state can act in various ways to achieve this end, including "producing new social agents" that can create innovative services; monitoring and helping "to propagate the most successful practices, accelerating the process of experimental winnowing out of what does not work"; and last, and perhaps most surprising in the current climate, by providing services directly but only "those services which are too innovative, too difficult or to unrewarded by the market to be provided directly" (Unger, 2005b, p.179) – government itself as a social agent of experimentation.

Such democratic experimentation, it seems to us, contributes to Wright's criterion of viability, providing "*empirical studies of cases*, both historical and contemporary, where at least some aspects of (our) proposal have been tried" and so helping to develop "systemic *theoretical models* of how particular social structures and institutions would work". But such experimentation can also impel the process of transformative change in another way, by offering "small-scale, fragmentary versions of future society...kinds of experimental anticipations". As such, democratic experimentation has much in common with our second concept, *prefigurative practice*.

Prefigurative practice

One of the key texts of the mid-twentieth century New Left in North America and the UK was a paper on prefigurative practice by the Gramscian scholar, Carl Boggs. His account describes it as "the embodiment within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision making, culture and human experience that are the ultimate goal" (Boggs, 1977/78, p.100). Similar kinds of arguments were also being made and lived out in internal socialist struggles within the ascendant feminist movement. Shelia Rowbotham insisted that the prefigurative practices of the women's movement recognise the importance of "making something which might become the means to making something more" (ibid., 140). In arguing that "(w)e need to make the creation of prefigurative forms an explicit part of our movement against capitalism" (ibid., 147), she was not arguing for a utopian project that would bring everyone to their knees, but rather that "some changes have

to start now else there is no beginning for us". We need to "release the imagination of what could be. The effort to go beyond what we know now has to be part of our experience of what we might know" (ibid.).

This insistence that we "release the imagination of what could be"; and this anticipation of future modes of being through processes and relations, not just structures, that exemplify and embody the viability and desirability of radical alternatives – these are some of the most important contributions of progressive traditions of public education to the furtherance of democracy. Thus, Roger Dale argued that:

> [R]ather than waiting until all the necessary social engineering has been done, and the planned widespread social change brought about, this approach to social change suggests that education through its processes, the experiences it offers, and the expectations it makes, should prefigure, in microcosm, the more equal, just and fulfilling society that the originations of comprehensivism aimed to bring about. *Schools should not merely reflect the world of which they are a part, but be critical of it, and show in their own processes that its shortcomings are not inevitable, but can be changed*. They aim to show that society can be characterized by communal as well as individual values, that all people merit equal treatment and equal dignity, that academic ability is not the only measure of a person, that racism and sexism are neither inevitable not acceptable (Dale, 1988, p.17, emphasis added).

Returning to this theme recently, Keri Facer has written of the 'future-building schools' as "a school that recognizes its role as *a prefigurative space* for building socio-technical futures. In other words, it sees itself as a place in which young people, teachers and the wider community can come together to understand how to live well and wisely with our emergent technological capabilities" (2011, p.127; emphasis added).

The concept of prefigurative practice can too easily be laid claim to, letting in the merely different rather than the genuinely transformative. In our book, therefore, we have proposed criteria with which to develop and evaluate a prefigurative practice that strives to enact a new way of being in the world. These criteria cluster around three themes, the first of which is praxis:

1 Profound change	5 Transgressive holism

2 Education and radical social change	6 Transformed community
3 Positional restlessness	7 Celebrating and contesting history
4 Permanent provisionality	8 The persistent pull of personalism

These insist, firstly, that the kinds of change with which we are concerned are profoundly challenging of the *status quo*, not palliative responses to whatever crisis happens to be pre-occupying dominant regimes of truth. Secondly, we argue for the necessity of education's involvement in the processes of radical social change. Thirdly, within such processes the practices that characterise their daily realities need to exemplify a commitment both to an abiding suspicion of hierarchy and, fourthly, to an active embrace of provisionality that permanently strives for a fuller realisation of a more just, creative and human fulfilling future.

That holistic emphasis is underscored by the fifth of our criteria, which argues that the role jumbling and expansive sense of possibility that energise the daily dynamic of prefigurative work is enhanced, not only by a resistance to pigeon-holing or circumscribing our work, but by an enacted commitment to a lived, expansive unity of being. If this holistic way of working is to be sustained and sustaining it also needs an overarching form of public space that draws on and encourages a range of subaltern spaces within which individuals and groups can develop multiple identities and practices. Our sixth criterion thus argues for the necessity of transformed and transformative practices of community that resist the totalising imperatives of collectivism and the atomising fragmentation of the market. If we are to develop our practice in these ways, our seventh criterion of prefigurative practice insists on the need to break free from the ahistorical presumptions of neo-liberalism's self-proclaimed triumph and choose alternative histories which celebrate and contest a quite different view of human flourishing. At the heart of that contested history must lie an unswerving commitment to our eighth criteria, which we call the persistent pull of personalism: not just to Unger's 'specialness of ordinary men and women' to which we have referred before, but also to resisting their betrayal and belittlement by so many regimes and ways of life.

Our second theme, *strategy,* underscores the importance of prefigurative practice addressing issues of social and political change at a strategic level.

9 Radical incrementalism	10 Strategic engagement

Contrary to much of the socialist and Marxist traditions, our ninth criterion argues for the possibility of a deep break with the hegemonic dominance of capitalism through anticipatory

enactments of fundamentally different ways of being in the world. The claims, not only of prefigurative practice but also of democratic experimentalism, to radical credentials, rest on their cumulative and transgressive persistence, on their achievement of changed understandings of "interests, ideas and identities" (Unger, 1998, p.19), and ultimately on their contribution to the possibility of 'non-reformist reforms'.

It is important to recognise that the ambitions of radical incrementalism operate as much at a horizontal as a vertical level, "to increase popular participation and bring people together in problem-solving deliberations" (Wright, 2007, p.38). This catalytic power goes beyond the generation of transgressional energy and its cumulative incorporation in radical incremental change. It thus underscores the importance of our tenth criterion' which has to do with the necessity for strategic circumspection.

Our third theme attends to matters of *motivational engagement*, which provide the necessary bridge from macro-ideals to the meso-realities of the daily contexts of enactment.

11 Institutional transformation	12 Narrative engagement

In order to fulfil its emancipatory potential, prefigurative practice must provide "an anticipatory image of broader transformations" (Unger, 2004, p.412). It must, in Erik Wright's terms, be viable and, above all, achievable. Transformative alternatives must thus illustrate, albeit in small, ongoing ways, our eleventh criterion, i.e. the grounded possibility of doing things significantly differently. Insofar as they do this they are likely to have pride of place in any radical strategy because they have the power of presence, the irrefutability of contemporary reality, that gives the lie to the familiar fabrications of 'there is no alternative'.

Our last criterion, narrative engagement, picks up on the psychological necessity of not merely describing an alternative set of practices, but doing so in a way that is emotionally and intellectually compelling, in a way which excites our narrative sensibilities.

Sustainability

If democratic experimentalism and prefigurative practice contribute to the process of transformative change, our third concept might be considered post-transformative. After desirability, viability and achievability, sustainability confronts the chastening history of much radical education, so many examples of which fail to last the course,

collapsing after a few years. In what might be termed the radical democratic camp, there are a few exceptions, most notably the network of municipal schools for young children in Reggio Emilia in Italy, whose democratic experimentation has survived for nearly 50 years. In what might be termed the radical neo-liberal camp, the experiment in marketisation has been running and indeed increasingly mainstreamed since the 1980s.

What we can learn, *inter alia*, from both examples is the importance of regional, national and global solidarities. Radical neo-liberal reforms have been sustained and accelerated by dense networks of academic, philanthropic, business and political connections, mutually reinforcing action and building belief and morale (for an analysis of the global scale of such connections, see Ball, 2012). Education in and for a radical democracy must learn from such experience, as well as from the lessons of its own histories, and the prior failures to connect and ally on a broad scale as a source of sustenance and inspiration. Regional, national and global solidarities need to be made real and telling by building reciprocal ideological, material and interpersonal support through values-driven networks and alliances, which draw on and contribute to the dynamic of radical social movements. In order to sustain and extend radical democratic approaches to education in, at least initially, a largely unsympathetic or uncomprehending climate, the importance not just of networks but of particular kinds of networks becomes apparent. The support provided by emancipatory alliances are of special importance because they offer a values-driven solidarity and a commonality of orientation so essential to those who work against the grain. The Coalition of Essential Schools in the USA and Human Scale Education in England provide two such examples.

But such solidarities are just one building block in a larger process of sustainability. What we need to construct, both from theoretical models and case studies, is a better understanding not only of how transformative change can be set in motion, but of how to create the capacity to continue movement and to build momentum. How can projects and experiments become sustainable institutions, without becoming static and reproductive? How can a dynamic democratic politics and provision of education not only be achieved but sustained, deliberating political questions and exercising participatory evaluation? How can citizen participation in the politics and the practice of education, with all its attendant demands, be nurtured and sustained?

5. Contradictions and tensions

We have contested the story of education reduced to economics, a means of realising human capital through institutions 'specialising in the production of training' (Becker, 1962, p.25) and competing on the market for the custom of parent-consumers, in a world where everything must and can continue in the same way as today. We have told, instead, another story, of a renewed public education with a broad political and social role, a public good and responsibility working (in part) through institutions with a potential for many purposes, projects and possibilities, an education actively engaged in shaping a different and better world, one that permits people, society and environment to renew and flourish. We have tried to give detail to our story by describing the institutional design of a radical democratic education, including:

- All levels of government committed to the value and enactment of democracy in education;
- A networked system of cooperating common schools – provided by public and (non profit) private actors, including municipalities, cooperatives and other non-governmental organisations – in a relationship of democratic accountability with democratically elected local bodies, contributing to a shared local education project, and cooperating in the implementation of this project with support from a local infrastructure;
- Democratic access to these common schools, opening them to all people (children, young people, adults) living within their catchment area;
- Common schools whose features include:
    - Being human scale, age-integrated and multi-generational;
    - Project-based pedagogy of invention and listening;
    - Team working by educators with groups of children neither tracked nor streamed;
    - Democratic way of life and relationshios;
    - Participatory forms of democratic governance and assessment;
    - Being multi-purpose institutions, serving the needs not only of children and young people, but of their local communities;
- An aims-based or thematic curriculum with substantial scope for local interpretation and input.

Naturally, such a real utopian project cannot avoid contradictions and tensions, including necessary trade-offs between values and goals. Six examples spring to mind. First, the issue

of choice. Radical democratic education values choices animated by commitment to the common good – "where decisions are taken not just in the interest of the individual but for the collective as a whole" (Power Inquiry, 2006, p. 169) – over the individual choice of consumers. Some parents will lose choice of school for their children, but many citizens, including children, will gain opportunities to participate in shaping the form, content and direction of public education. Both kinds of orientation – the self-interested acquisitiveness of consumers and the other-regarding predilections of more communally and collectively inclined persons – have value: but, given the prospect of increasing social fragmentation, the desirability of more open deliberation on these matters becomes crucial in helping decide the relative value we attach to each kind of choice in any given context.

Second, the downgrade of individual choice and the upgrade of collective choice are but symptoms of a radical democratic education that values the public sphere, participation and cooperation over the market sphere, profit and competition. Our real utopia retains a place for the private in genuine partnership with the public, but the private that is compatible with democratic governance, relationships and ways of life – which precludes, in our view, a role for private business in the provision of education and schools. In countries where marketisation and (for profit) privatisation have already begun to occupy the education system, this means addressing the issue of *de*-marketisation and *de*-privatisation. This runs counter to the *zeitgeist*, indeed the very terms may seem unnatural. But this reversal of recent trends will need to be attempted if the neo-liberal juggernaut is to be confronted and reversed. Just as the rise of neo-liberalism involved saying the unsayable and working out how to marketise and privatise the apparently permanently public, so too must we now say the unsayable again and work out in some detail how to revert the marketised and privatised to democratic control and the public sphere. Whilst we are heartened by recent developments in our own country where schools committed to public value approaches are beginning to develop a plausible counter-narrative of inclusive aspiration (Mongon and Leadbeater 2012), the challenge remains substantial.

Third, the issue of decentralisation. Both centralised statist systems and fragmented market systems assume, whether rightly or wrongly, a general mechanism for governing schools, to ensure they meet certain standards, a mechanism that in theory can be applied equally to every institution. But a radical democratic education decentralises much to local endeavours, premised, in Dewey's words, on "a working faith in the possibilities of human nature . . . [and] faith in the capacity of human beings for intelligent judgement and action if proper conditions are furnished" (Dewey, 1939). This act of faith, some might say, is a high risk move, replacing state or market discipline with the combination of a looser national framework of

shared values and goals and more localised responsibility: the risk being that some communities and schools will thrive in this decentralised arrangement, while others (perhaps especially those that are most vulnerable) may struggle.

Decentralisation, however, does not mean 'laissez-faire'. It calls instead for paying serious and sustained attention to identifying and implementing 'proper conditions' – a rigorous decentralisation. It means, too, recognising the inevitable tension between the commonality of the national and the diversity of the local and working it creatively, between what we hold in common and what we differ over. Which means in turn accepting that there may not be one right answer to most, if not all, questions. How interesting it might be in these circumstances of significant diversity to partner its evolution with (a) the development of local deliberative forums and (b) a national resource – at one time envisaged by the action research movement – with an ever-growing repository of rich case studies acting both as provocateur and affirmative agent of aspiration.

Fourth, mention of 'decentralisation' is a reminder of the capacity of neo-liberalism to co-opt emancipatory language and visions and use them for its own purposes, a case of extreme 'plus ça change'. Apparent decentralisation is accompanied by the application of a new repertoire of management techniques, more effective than direct disciplinary controls, producing what Foucault has termed 'governmentality', whereby 'autonomous' individuals and institutions constantly observe and govern themselves to achieve prescribed ends, 'the will to quality' as Simons puts it (2002, p.619). The process of co-option goes far wider than *faux* decentralisation. Concepts important in democratic education, such as 'listening' or 'dialogue', may be put to other use to improve market functioning and to better 'govern the soul' (Rose, 1989). In the high performance school,

> the personal is used for the sake of the functional: relationships are important; the voices of students are elicited and acknowledged; community is valued, but all primarily for instrumental purposes within the context of the marketplace...'having relationships' moves subtly towards 'doing relationships', towards relationship management (Fielding and Moss, 2011, p.55).

Pedagogies that appear to offer more freedom instead involve a shift from external to internalised regulation: "reform pedagogy as 'soft' discipline" (Pongratz, 2011, p.161) or, as Fendler (2001) puts it describing three common pedagogical discourses, "educational practices that may appear to be exercises of freedom but, on closer examination, turn out to be repetitions and reiterations of the status quo" (p.121) Similar possibilities – of the neo-

liberal wolf in democratic sheep's clothing - exist in almost every part of our narrative of radical democratic education.

Fifth, the notion of the common school implies enhanced social differentiation of intake between schools in societies and communities with strong social differentiation in housing and neighbourhoods. For with the removal of parental choice of schools, the common school reduces the theoretical possibility of diluting social differentiation by some parents from poor areas finding places for their children in schools serving richer areas. Theoretical, because under present circumstances such differentiation is not abated and some would argue is made worse as marketisation spreads, to the advantage of middle-class parents who are better able to use the market to increase their advantages. However such pleas in mitigation do not lessen the need to confront this issue for the common school, which may mean, *inter alia*, ensuring that schools serving poor areas have the very best educators and resources.

It may also require us to take seriously the image of the 'rich' child, The materially poor child is so often understood as also the ontologically poor child, the child of deficit, the child in need, the child who is a burden to others and to their school. We need to be reminded that children from even the most disadvantaged backgrounds are, in the words of Malaguzzi, born with a hundred languages and "rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent and, most of all, connected to adults and other children" (1993, p. 10).

Sixth, there is a tension between the demands and possibilities of a radical democratic education and the limited and often diminishing time (and energy) that many citizens have to participate, as the demands of employment and consumption intensify while the demands of family life get no less. Participation in democracy, of whatever kind, and in others forms of 'public work', what might be labelled 'civic or community engagement', requires time and, for those in the labour market, the decommodification of time. The active citizen needs time to participate, dialogue, contest, reflect, and preferably without risk of stress and exhaustion from trying to make time in an over-crowded schedule. In such circumstances, the concern expressed by Stuart White is easy to understand:

> When thinking about the limits of the market we usually think about the appropriateness of allowing specific goods and services to be produced on a market basis...I want to consider a second issue. This is more to do with the aggregate amount of social energy and time that is devoted to market activity as opposed to non-market activity. My thought is that one way in which the market can be 'invasive' (to borrow a term from Steven Lukes) is that market activity – by which I primarily

> mean paid employment – can come to command an excessive share of people's overall energy and time...My worry simply stated is that there is some level of engagement with the market which crowds out the time and energy needed to develop, maintain and exercise the capacities of competent democratic citizenship (White, 2008, pp.124-125).

The trade-off to be contemplated is between democratic participation and market participation, and finding ways in which the latter expects a lesser share of time and energy.

6. Concluding the story for now

Many stories are, and have been, told about education. Many represent education as a dismal subject. Today, under the baleful influence of the dismal science, we have been telling ourselves such a story encompassing kindergarten, school and university – a Gradgrindean narrative of facts and numbers, 'high stakes' testing and endless exams, competition and consumerism, human capital and return on investment. This is a dismal story about a dismal education, run through with anxiety, fear and selfishness.

But there are other stories we can, and have, told ourselves about education, stories that are hopeful about education as an emancipatory project, for flourishing individuals, communities and societies – a narrative of education in its broadest sense. We have told just such a story, of a radical public education in which we have highlighted the value and practice of a 'thick' democracy running like a thread from the level of the national to the level of the classroom. But this is also a story of other values and practices: of cooperation and care; of fun and joy; of wonder and amazement; of the physical and the aesthetic; of the emotions and the senses. For these, as a colleague reminded us on reading an earlier draft of this essay, though not divorced from the intellectual and the political, are what make life worth living (Petrie, 2012 pc).

We would wholeheartedly agree. Indeed, they provide the point of both and mould the means of their fuller realisation in the multiple realities of our daily lives. They return us to human flourishing as the animating dynamic of democratic education (Brighouse, 2006; Nussbaum 2010); they help us to see existentially, to, in the words of the blinded Gloucester in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, 'see … feelingly'. Hence our recurring insistence in our recent work (Fielding and Moss, 2011) on democratic fellowship. Just as the great Scottish philosopher, John Macmurray, argues that politics "has significance only through the human

fellowship which it makes possible; and by this its validity and its success must be judged" (Macmurray, 1950, pp.69–70), so we are arguing that in the field of education the systems we develop and the practical arrangements we make are most appropriately judged by the same criteria. Democratic fellowship is at once the precursor to and hope, not just of democratic politics, but of education in and for democracy, which is both its agent and an important site of its prefigurative enactment.

> The democratic slogan - liberty, equality, fraternity - embodies correctly the principles of human fellowship. To achieve freedom and equality is to create friendship, to constitute community between men' (Macmurray, 1950, pp.74-5).

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