

## Learning through culture

Grosvenor, Ian; Pataki, G

DOI:

[10.1080/00309230.2016.1264981](https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2016.1264981)

License:

None: All rights reserved

*Document Version*

Peer reviewed version

*Citation for published version (Harvard):*

Grosvenor, I & Pataki, G 2017, 'Learning through culture: seeking "critical case studies of possibilities" in the history of education', *Paedagogica Historica*, vol. 53, no. 3, pp. 246-267.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2016.1264981>

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

### **Publisher Rights Statement:**

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Paedagogica Historica* on 10th February 2017, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/00309230.2016.1264981>

Checked 23/2/2017

### **General rights**

Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

- Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
- Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
- User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
- Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

### **Take down policy**

While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact [UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk](mailto:UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk) providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.

## Learning through culture: seeking “critical case studies of possibilities” in history of education<sup>1</sup>

Ian Grosvenor (University of Birmingham) and Gyöngyvér Pataki (University of Debrecan)

Writing in 2005 Michael Fielding observed that ‘our capacity to interrogate the present with any degree of wisdom or any likelihood of creating a more fulfilling future rests significantly on our knowledge and engagement with the past and with the establishment of continuities that contemporary culture denies.’<sup>2</sup> He returned to this theme in *Radical Education and the Common School* (2011) co-authored with Peter Moss and argued for a radical alternative to the ‘failed and dysfunctional’ contemporary discourse about education and the school with its focus on markets, competition, instrumentality, standardisation and managerialism. In their argument, though grounded in the UK experience, they drew for inspiration on ‘people and places’ beyond the UK’s borders. They also argued that it is necessary, if we are to progress ‘social alternatives’ in education, to construct micro-histories of schools that have, for short periods of time and usually under the guiding influence of an enlightened leading figure, developed as ‘real utopias’ through radically revising their practice. They call these micro-histories ‘critical case studies of possibilities.’<sup>3</sup> Fielding again returned to his theme in 2014 when he noted that Left-wing teachers in the 1960s and 1970s were:

often distressingly ignorant of their own, often more radical, forebears in mainstream education (e.g. Teddy O’Neill and Alex Bloom) and special education (e.g. Homer Lane, David Wills, Howard Case and Tony Weaver) and their radical counterparts in mainland Europe (e.g. Kees Boeke, Célestin Freinet, and Oskar Spiel).

He concluded with a challenge to historians ‘to *find* our genealogies, not merely inherit them ... we must be active, not merely receptive in our conversations with the past.’<sup>4</sup>

### Herbert Read and Education through Art

---

<sup>1</sup>The authors would like to thank Inés Dussel, Michael Fielding and Frank Simon for their critical reading of the text.

<sup>2</sup>Michael Fielding, ‘Putting Hands Around the Flame: reclaiming the radical tradition in state education’, *Forum*, 47, 2&3 (2005), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Field and Peter Moss, *Radical Education and the Common School* (London: Routledge, 2011)

<sup>4</sup>Michael Fielding, ‘Afterword. Anarchism, texts and children: active conversations with the past’, *Paedagogica Historica*, 50, 4 (2014), 460-64.

In 1943 the public intellectual, poet, art educator, literary critic and anarchist Herbert Read addressed the purpose of education in *Education through Art*. Read's book was written against the backdrop of an international war and Read offered an alternative to the dominant discourse about education under capitalism and the iniquitous social relations it produced in the 1930s and 40s. Read believed in the redemptive power of education. Education was about children learning:

... how to make sounds, images, movements, tools and utensils ... All faculties, of thought, logic, memory, sensibility and intellect, are involved in such processes, and no aspect of education is excluded in such processes. And they are all processes which involve art, for art is nothing but the good making of sounds, images, etc. The aim of education is therefore the creation of artists — of people efficient in the various modes of expression.

This 'integral approach to reality' Read termed 'aesthetic education' — the education of those senses upon which consciousness, and ultimately the intelligence and judgment of the human individual are based.<sup>5</sup> Aesthetic education mirrored the organic harmony of nature and Read believed it could stimulate the emergence of a new set of non-hierarchical social relationships. The productive role of the teacher with the 'individuals in his [sic] care' was to be a 'person not a pedagogue, a friend rather than a master or mistress, an infinitely patient co-operator' so as to help the development of 'the uniqueness, the social consciousness or reciprocity of the individual ... within the organic wholeness of the community.'<sup>6</sup> It was also a relationship which would liberate the child from the 'fear of freedom,' and thereby address the 'secret of our collective ills ... the suppression of spontaneous creative ability in the individual.'<sup>7</sup> In sum, as Woodcock concluded, Read substituted 'the education of the senses for the education of the mind.'<sup>8</sup> The book was translated into over thirty languages.<sup>9</sup>

*Education through Art* was written between 1940 and 1942 while Read held a Fellowship at the University of London and in the 'Preface' Read made special mention of the support received

---

<sup>5</sup> Herbert Read, *Education through Art* (London: Faber and Faber, 1943) 7, 11. See also Herbert Read, *Art and Industry* (London: Faber and Faber, 1934) Part IV.

<sup>6</sup> Read, *Education through Art*, 4-5, 23; Herbert Read, 'Children's Drawings: Are they really good?' *Picture Post*, April 1 (1944), 17.

<sup>7</sup> Read, *Education through Art*, 202.

<sup>8</sup> George Woodcock, *Anarchism. A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1986), 383.

<sup>9</sup> David Thistlewood, 'Herbert Read (1893-1968)', *PROSPECTS: the quarterly review of comparative education*, 24, 1/2, 1994, 389.

from Fred Clarke of the Institute of Education and that of various school teachers who gave practical help during the preparation of the book by conducting experiments related to children's learning, including Ruth Scrivenor of Bedales. Thistlewood has also pointed to the influence on Read's ideas of his encounter with art produced by very young children when he was invited by the British Council to advise on a collection of children's art for wartime exhibitions overseas.<sup>10</sup> The book also drew on an impressive literature relating to children and education – the physiological and psychological research of Kretschmer, Jaensch, Mönz and Löewenfeld, Worringer and Margaret Lowenfeld; the educational writings of Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori, Edmund Holmes and Marion Richardson; the psychoanalytical texts of Freud, Ferenczi, Jung, Melanie Klein and Susan Issacs; and the teaching texts of Caldwell Cook, Dewey, Ferrière, Piaget, Homer Lane and A. S. Neill to whom he collectively chose to 'defer and refer'.<sup>11</sup> Read was aware of the work of the New Education Fellowship and cited articles from its journal *New Era* and he was connected into a network of educational innovators in the 1930s, writing at length in *Education through Art* about the work of Henry Morris and Impington Village College, Cambridgeshire, England.<sup>12</sup> However, Read also concluded that his form of education was one '... of which only rudimentary traces are found in the educational systems of the past', and 'which appears only in a most haphazard and arbitrary fashion in the educational practice of the present day.'<sup>13</sup>

The present article represents an attempt to follow Fielding's challenge 'to find our genealogies' and to see if there are 'critical case studies of possibilities' that can be drawn from the past or from Read's contemporary present which in any way reflect the fundamental connection between children's learning, 'collective consciousness', art and culture articulated by him in 1943 and thereby constituting elements in a genealogy of radical alternatives.

Of course, this immediately raised the issue of where to look for such case studies. Read's preoccupation with the transformative power of education through art was integral to his anarchist politics and the anarchist movement offered one line of inquiry, especially as there is evidence in the 1940s of the practical involvement of anarchists in English free schools.<sup>14</sup> A

---

<sup>10</sup>Thistlewood 382-83. See also Read, *Education through Art* 187; Read, 'Children's Drawings'; Read, *The Cult of Sincerity* (London: Faber, 1968, 44-45).

<sup>11</sup>Read, *Education through Art*, 227.

<sup>12</sup> See Ian Grosvenor (2005) 'The Art of Seeing: Promoting Design in Education in 1930s England' *Paedagogica Historica* 41, 4&5(2005), 507-534

<sup>13</sup>Read, *Education through Art*, 7.

<sup>14</sup>Woodcock, *Anarchism* 383. See, also Matthew S. Adams, 'Art, Education, and Revolution: Herbert Read and the Reorientation of British Anarchism', *History of European Ideas*, 39, 5, (2013), 719.

second line of inquiry, again derived from reflecting on Read's anarchism, was the connection between anarchism and community formation and the emergence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century of communities motivated by anarchist beliefs.<sup>15</sup> Related to this phenomenon of community formation, but not necessarily connected with anarchism was the parallel emergence of artist colonies across Europe and America that were committed to the importance of learning through creativity.<sup>16</sup> Finally, Read cited in *Education through Art* the advocates and networked groups who promoted the 'new education movement' and the literature around educational progressivism offered another source 'of possibilities'. This is especially the case surrounding the activities of the NEF. The development of new types of school and alternative forms of education in existing schools was one of the aims of the NEF.<sup>17</sup> Susan Isaacs was Head of the Child Development Department at the Institute of Education when Read was writing his book and she was active in the NEF attending the 1937 NEF conference in Australia. At the same conference was the art educator Arthur Lismer who gave a paper interestingly entitled 'Education through Art' and whose biographer has suggested Read met while on a lecture tour in Canada.<sup>18</sup>

From these varied lines of inquiry four possible case studies were identified which appeared on the surface to reflect Read's *aesthetic* vision of education and the experience of learning through and about culture. The exploration of these 'critical case studies of possibilities' were then structured around three dimensions. First, how the notion of the innately creative child was conceived and articulated, secondly, how the particularities of place shaped the aesthetic learning experiences of children, and lastly, the extent to which each of the case studies involved transnational and/or international entanglements. The four case studies are presented chronologically.

## Four Cases in a Genealogy of Alternatives

### *Gödöllő arts and craft colony (1901-1920)*

---

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Dennis Hardy, *Utopian England. Community Experiments 1900-1945* (London: E & FN Spon, 2000) and Michael P. Smith, *The Libertarians and Education* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983).

<sup>16</sup> See Michael Jacobs, *The Good and Simple Life. Artist Colonies in Europe and America* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1985).

<sup>17</sup> Kevin Brehony 'A New Education for a New Era: The Contribution of the Conferences of the New Education Fellowship to the Disciplinary Field of Education 1921-1938', *Paedagogica Historica*, 40, 5&6 (2014), 743.

<sup>18</sup> Angela Nairne Grigor, *Arthur Lismer. Visionary Art Educator* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 324.

The arts and craft colony was established in Gödöllő, near Budapest, when the artist Aladár Körösfői-Kriesch settled with his family in 1901. In a period of rapid industrialisation, mass manufacture, urbanisation and growing social and moral problems associated with capitalism Körösfői-Kriesch sought ‘common ground with the past’ in order to recover a sense of national belonging by re-connecting work, family and community with the spiritual and the rural.<sup>19</sup> Körösfői-Kriesch articulated a vision of the future that would overcome the ‘mechanistic competition which kills human souls’, a vision where the aesthetic development and education of the child was central. Like-minded artists engaged in the applied arts, such as Leo Belmonte (1902) and Sándor Nagy (1907), moved to the colony with their families and through their artistic practice and writings further developed Körösfői-Kriesch’s utopian vision.<sup>20</sup> It was a vision which was also influenced by Tolstoy’s idealised vision of peasant life, the English arts and craft movement led by William Morris, John Ruskin and Charles Ashbee, Nazarene religiosity, Gnosticism and the Theosophists.<sup>21</sup>

At the centre of the Gödöllő colony was a belief in the redeeming power of art, the education of the senses and the interconnected development of the individual and the community. The colony was conceived not as an isolated social entity or experiment, but as a growing circle of communality emanating spatially outwards from the artist families into the rural, the urban, the national and the international. In this community the children were to be surrounded by artistically designed everyday objects:

We educate our children in the love of beauty. Therefore we publish books with artistic illustrations for them, we paint paintings with artistic values, design houses, draw furniture, weave carpets. We beautify all our belongings in order to force ourselves and others to act, think and feel beautifully. The aim is to facilitate that anybody could become a creator<sup>22</sup>

Art was to be integrated into everyday life so that the colony would be transformed into a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a collaborative artistic production in which every member of the colony would

---

<sup>19</sup> Katalin Geller, *The Art Colony of Gödöllő (1901-1920)* (Gödöllő: Gödöllő Municipal Museum, 2001), 11.

<sup>20</sup> Aladár Körösfői-Kriesch, ‘A magyarnépművészetjövője’, *Népművelés*, 1–2 (1906), 159–165.

<sup>21</sup> Geller, *The Art Colony*, 5-6

<sup>22</sup> Ervin Szabó, ‘Walter Crane: Egyszocialistaművész’, *Népszava*, 20<sup>th</sup> Oktober (1900), 3.

creatively contribute.<sup>23</sup> Art and craft were to be used to facilitate the practical growth of the senses as opposed to the promotion of abstract thoughts.<sup>24</sup> As Körösfői-Kriesch observed, 'We should not teach culture but provide humans with an ability to create culture around them.'<sup>25</sup> Education was to be orientated in 'accordance with the rules and development of the human mind' and the 'unconscious darkness of the infants' mind' was '... a divine photo-machine waiting for impressions of the eyes with myriads of light (knowledge) sensitive lamellas ... Radii of light cross each other in accordance with the rules of perspectives and construct a visual image.'<sup>26</sup> Such visual images and the knowledge they carried came from connecting the individual child with their natural environment, 'the aim of education in the colony was to preserve the existing contact to life and nature.'<sup>27</sup> Children were encouraged to 'experiment with [artistic] forms, get impressed by them, connect them to the existing cultural heritage and find a new expression in whatever way thoughts can be delivered.' Particular importance was placed on the creative act of drawing. In their writings Körösfői-Kriesch and Nagy regularly emphasized the biophysical, spiritual and moral relevance of drawing rather than writing in generating social change, and the development of human abilities rather than the 'commitment to the dreary school expectations' in everyday educational practice.<sup>28</sup>

Sándor Nagy, speaking at the Hungarian Association of Social Sciences and Humanities in 1905 characterised the educational process as a personal and collective development which can be symbolized with the four seasons of a year.<sup>29</sup> Spring would be a time to gather and organize visual impressions; summer the time for getting familiar with these impressions. In autumn, the individually acquired knowledge of the world would be contrasted with the historically accumulated knowledge. Finally, in winter time knowledge is translated into different kinds of expression. The role of adults in this developmental process was to 'fundamentally forget teaching, educating or preparing children for their life', while 'the concept that should lead ... practice is facilitation' and the creation of spaces for open-ended interaction between adults and

---

<sup>23</sup>Kinchin and O' Connor, *Century of the Child*, 50.

<sup>24</sup>Sándor Nagy, 'Művészi ipar és Iparművészet,' *Művészi Ipar*, 1 (1905),1.

<sup>25</sup> Körösfői-Kriesch, 'A magyarnépművészetjövője,'159–165.

<sup>26</sup>Sándor Nagy 'A jövőközoktatása', *Husadik Század*, 11(1905), 29; Sándor Nagy, 'Rajztanítás', *Rajzoktatás*, 3(1906), 90-97.

<sup>27</sup>Sándor Nagy quoted by Katalin Geller and Katalin Keserű, *A gödöllői művésztelep* (Budapest: Corvina, 1987), 31.

<sup>28</sup>See, for example Sándor Nagy, 'A jövőközoktatása,' *Husadik Század*, 5 (1905) 29–41; Sándor Nagy, 'Rajztanítás', *Rajzoktatás* 9, 3 (1906), 90-97, and 4 (1906), 145-152; and Aladár Körösfői-Kriesch, 'Összefoglalás (A művészineveléskérdéséhez),'*Műcsarnok*, 5 (1901), 93-96.

<sup>29</sup> Geller et al, *A gödöllői művésztelep*, 31.

children where learning could flow in a continuous series of spontaneous activities.<sup>30</sup> For children in the colony the outside was a classroom without walls. The home was a site of learning, of 'collective work, collective art, collective social life, collective meals.' Older children taught younger ones at a summer school and children generally stayed away from public education at least till the age of fourteen being educated instead by mothers, relatives and professionally trained private teachers.<sup>31</sup>

The central position of children in Gödöllő's utopian vision distinguished it from other such artist's colonies, but there were also other fundamental differences. The colony at Gödöllő became socially, politically, and culturally embedded into the society they intended to reform. The vision of the colony connected with a wider view that public reform of education should be shaped by a cultural perspective and Gödöllő, with its concern to establish a rural idyll where traditional crafts were celebrated, was financially supported by the Hungarian Ministry of Education and Culture when a Weaving School was established in 1904 as part of a large programme to bring together folk culture, training in art and design alongside technological innovation.<sup>32</sup> The Weaving School which generated income and reputation for the colony became the National Applied Art School training centre in 1907 and Körösfői-Kriesch was appointed to a senior position. Members of the colony built and sustained a broad national and international network of artistic collaborations, but also actively participated in mainstream education and educational policymaking.<sup>33</sup> Artists living in Gödöllő were also appointed to prominent positions in the Hungarian higher educational and cultural sectors, founded or took part in many subject associations and received prestigious state awards. They also participated in other educational projects. Bárczy István, the Mayor of Budapest (1906-1919) embarked on an ambitious programme of school building between 1907 and 1913 and some of these schools were decorated with mosaics, murals, ceramics, sculpture and stained glass designed Gödöllő artists.<sup>34</sup>

Fig. 1 Children Weaving c 1910, Gödöllői Városi Múzeum

---

<sup>30</sup> Sándor Nagy, 'A jövő közoktatása', *Huszadik Század*, 11 (1905), 40-41.

<sup>31</sup> Anna Krisztina Szabó, 'Nagy Laura visszaemlékezései' *Várucca* 17 (1999/2)  
<http://www.c3.hu/~varucca17/ns/index.htm>

<sup>32</sup> Kinchin and O' Connor, *Century of the Child* 53. See also Sándor Nagy, *Részlet Körösfői Kirsh Aladár életrajzából. A mintarajziskola* (Budapest: Nemzeti Szalon, 1934).

<sup>33</sup> Gödöllő artists successfully took part in world exhibitions including Torino 1902, St. Louis 1904, and Milan 1906. Artists from Germany and Finland visited the colony and life in the colony was reported in international journals such as the British journal *Studio*.

<sup>34</sup> Kinchin and O' Connor, *Century of the Child*, 53.



Fig. 2Puppet tapestry c 1913, Gödöllői Városi Múzeum. The tapestry was based on a design by Körösfői-Kriesch's daughter and was made by children and workers in the Weaving School.

The Gödöllő colony looked both back and forward, there was a utopian view of the future in which the child was central, but it was view that at the same time was rooted in a commitment to pre-capitalist ways of rural life: family, custom, faith and craft. The colony flourished until the early 1920s and the death of Körösfői-Kriesch.

### *The Ferrer School in New York*

The Ferrer or Modern School in New York opened in 1911. The school was modelled after the *Escuela Moderna* in Barcelona of Francisco Ferrer y Guàrdia, the Catalan educator and anarchist who was executed in 1909. Ferrer's pedagogical ideas stressed the process of learning over that of instruction, of learning through experience over rote learning and memorisation, of education as life itself rather than as a preparation for life, and of informality, individual development and freedom over the formality, rigidity and regulation of the traditional classroom. Reason, observation, science, physical and mental development, and creativity through arts and craft were emphasised alongside the dignity and rights of the child.<sup>35</sup> Influenced by Ferrer's ideas and outraged by his execution anarchists, educators and artists across Europe and the Americas were involved in opening Ferrer Modern Schools and over 20 appeared in the United States within a few years after Ferrer's death.<sup>36</sup> The Modern School in New York was one of the first and its director, Bayard Boyeson, summarised in a pamphlet, *The Modern School in New York*, the school's philosophy and the influence of the *Escuela Moderna* is readily apparent. Education was to combine 'the training of the senses and of the mind, skill of hand and skill of brain' and foster the independence and self-development of children:

We take the centre of gravity, which has lain hitherto in the teacher, and put it firmly in the child itself, for it is our aim not to lead, but to follow the activities of the child, using

---

<sup>35</sup>See Francisco Ferrer y Guàrdia, *The Origins and Ideals of the Modern School* (London: Watts, 1913); Paul Avrich, *The Modern School Movement. Anarchism and Education in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); Smith, *The Libertarians and Education* chapter 4; John Shotton, *No Master High or Low. Libertarian Education and Schooling in Britain 1890-1900* (Bristol: Libertarian Education, 1993, 43-47, 49-56); Judith Suissa, *Anarchism and Education. A Philosophical Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2006); Matthew Thomas, *Anarchist Ideas and Counter-Cultures in Britain, 1880-1914*. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005 chapter 3). See also, Bruno Vanobbergen, Frank Simon and Marc Depaepe (eds.) 'Anarchism, Texts and Children' a special issue of *Paedagogica Historica*, 50, 4 (2014).

<sup>36</sup>Avrich *The Modern School Movement*, 50-51.

its natural interests as points upon which it can be allowed to fasten knowledge and aiding the child always to draw out and develop its native qualities.<sup>37</sup>

Academic study of arithmetic, geography and history, literature and music was accompanied by arts and craft lessons, games and storytelling, nature study, and instruction in hygiene.<sup>38</sup> The artists Robert Henri and George Bellows conducted an evening art class (painting, charcoal drawing, sculpture, clay modelling, and woodcuts) at the school which was open to both adults and children. Amy Londoner, Adolf Wolff and William Zorach provided daytime art classes for children.<sup>39</sup> Henri lent the school reproductions of famous paintings to hang on the walls in order to cultivate aesthetic appreciation<sup>40</sup>, but also promoted children's art work organising an exhibition at the Macdowell Gallery in 1915.<sup>41</sup> Children put on plays and operettas. The children studied Esperanto, learning to write, sing and read it. They corresponded with children in other countries and attended Esperanto conventions.<sup>42</sup> There were also outings to museums, zoos, parks and artist studios and a Summer School at an open-air camp.<sup>43</sup> The school and its associated Ferrer Centre attracted from the immediate neighbourhood and further afield 'young and old ... for classes, lectures, and conversation' and functioned as 'a laboratory of artistic innovation.'<sup>44</sup> The educational experiment also attracted the interest of international visitors from the University of Jena, the University of Zurich, and the Pedagogical Institute of Frankfurt and locally public school teachers and settlement house workers.<sup>45</sup>

The Modern School moved from New York to Stelton, New Jersey in 1915. The school's new location was in the countryside and it became the centre of an anarchist colony. Outdoor education became a more prominent feature of the school, but a concern with the creative arts remained fundamental to the philosophy of the school as Harry Kelly, the first editor of *The Modern School* journal, wrote in 1917:

---

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 101-103 112.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>40</sup> For a discussion of the educational and 'civilizing' impact of placing reproductions in school, see Ian Grosvenor, '“To act on the minds of children”: Paintings into Schools and English Education' in *The Black Box of Schooling*, eds. S. Braster, I. Grosvenor and M. del Pozo (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2011), 39-58.

<sup>41</sup> Avrich, *The Modern School Movement* Ibid., 161

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 110, 113.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 121, 149.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 113.

We want more men [sic] like Thoreau, Kropotkin, and William Morris, men who can weave carpets, write poetry or prose, cut type, print books and do a hundred other things; have a knowledge of science and a love of nature, an individuality that refuses to be crushed to the dead level of its surroundings, with a love of mankind so strong that their talents and time are devoted to making a larger and freer life for all.<sup>46</sup>

There was no formal curriculum, no discipline, and no punishment. The school continued to accept the dictum that ‘the impulse for genuine culture must come from within’, from ‘the interest of each individual child’.<sup>47</sup> Carl Zigrosser, who taught at the New York school and later edited *The Modern Journal* summarised the philosophy of the Modern School as ‘Unanimism’: the promotion of a self governing and flexible collective ‘while leaving their [the child’s] individuality intact’.<sup>48</sup> The journal regularly listed recommended works on education (including Tolstoy, Neill and Dewey) and excerpts from such texts were published under the heading ‘Readings in Libertarian Education’.<sup>49</sup> Stelton eventually became the longest-lived Modern School in America closing in 1953. During this period, it was directed by amongst others, Jim and Nellie Dick who had previously been involved in the Ferrer Modern School in London between 1912 and 1916. Jim Dick corresponded regularly with A. S. Neill in the late 1920s and early 1930s and also followed the education debates in the New Education Fellowship journal, *The New Era*.<sup>50</sup>

#### *Koorngong and the New Education Fellowship*

Koorngong day school was opened by Clive and Janet Nield at Warrandyte, a small bush settlement northeast of Melbourne, Victoria in 1939 with the aim of ‘train[ing] happy and alert citizens of the modern world’ through a curriculum and environment which would promote ‘physical and mental fitness’, and where the arts (drama, music, painting and drawing) were a ‘part of the ordinary work of the school, not as extras.’ Clive Nield observed the creative activities of the children and later commented:

---

<sup>46</sup> Harry Kelly, ‘The Modern School’ 1917 quoted in Avrich *The Modern School Movement*, 251.

<sup>47</sup> Carl Zigrosser, ‘The Modern School’, 1917 quoted in Avrich *The Modern School Movement*, 250.

<sup>48</sup> Carl Zigrosser, ‘The Modern School’ quoted in Allan Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism. Art, Politics, and the First American Avant-Garde* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001), 172. For a more detailed discussion of Anarchist Unanimism see Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism*, chapter eight.

<sup>49</sup> Avrich, *The Modern School Movement* 172; Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism*, 154-62.

<sup>50</sup> Shotton, *No Master High or Low*, 43-56; Avrich, *The Modern School Movement*, 323-4, 341-2. Jim Dick before joining the London Ferrer School had been involved with the International Modern School in Liverpool between 1909 and 1912.

... there is nothing, no art, no aptitude, to which they [our pupils] cannot apprentice themselves. Children can write, act and create as exciting artists wherever there is sympathy and scope. They are not overwhelmed by a rich curriculum; they select easily and are stimulated by generous treatment.<sup>51</sup>

Further, through self-expression, cooperation and self-government the Nields believed children would achieve 'balance', which was so 'necessary' when 'international society is so tragically unbalanced,'<sup>52</sup> and the experience of making decisions would give them an understanding of society from the inside as they built up their own society and made their own social rules.<sup>53</sup>

Clive Nield had studied education at Sydney Teachers' College where he developed an interest in progressive education and psychoanalysis through the guidance of his tutor, Professor Alexander Mackie. In the early 1930s he was in England and visited many experimental schools including Abbotsholme, Bedales, Frensham Heights, St Christopher's and Finchden Manor. He also spent a term with A. S. Neill at Summerhill. Nield met his wife to be, Janet Blake while attending an education conference at Geelong Grammar School, Victoria, where Nield taught from 1935 to 1938. Both Blake and Nield attended the New Education Fellowship Conference organised by the Australian Council for Education Research in Melbourne in 1937.<sup>54</sup> The theme of the conference was *Education for Complete Living: the Challenge Today* and one of the key speakers was Susan Isaacs, Head of Department of Child Development, University of London and a leading child psychoanalyst.<sup>55</sup> Blake had studied at the University of Melbourne and while completing her MA there in 1936 had become interested in psychoanalysis and particularly its relationship with child psychology and education. The NEF conference further developed her interest and after her marriage she worked for a short time in 1939 at Quest Haven, a small private experimental school to the north of Sydney, run by Mary Sheridan and offering a curriculum shaped by

---

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in R. C. Petersen, 'Australian Progressive Schools 111. Quest Haven and Koornong', *The Australian Journal of Education*, 14, 2 (1970) 184-85.

<sup>52</sup> 'Koornong School: Provisional Prospectus of a New School at Warrandyte, Victoria', quoted by Philip Goad, "'A chrome yellow blackboard with blue chalk": New Education and the new architecture: modernism at Koornong School', *History of Education*, 39, 6 (2010), 743-4.

<sup>53</sup> Janet Nield, 'Koornong School, Australia', *The New Era*, February (1947), 28.

<sup>54</sup> Anne Sanders, 'Nield, Janet Blake (1911-1992)'. Obituaries Australia, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://oa.edu.au/obituary/nield-janet-blake-13943/text24840>, accessed 9 April 2015.

<sup>55</sup> Yvonne Larsson, 'The World Education Fellowship: its origins and development with particular emphasis on New South Wales, the first Australian section', Australian Studies Centre, Working Paper No 16 (1987), 8-9. See also Margaret H. White, 'Traversing Personal and Public Boundaries: Discourses of Engagement in New Education 1930s-1980s', *Paedagogica Historica*, 43, 1 (2007) 154-56.

psychoanalytical concepts.<sup>56</sup> Once Koornong opened Blake Nield was between 1941 and 1946 trained in psychoanalysis by the Hungarian born Dr Clara Lazar Geroe. Teachers were encouraged to read psychoanalytic literature and there were regular lectures on aspects of child development.<sup>57</sup> According to Blake Nield's biographer, Koornong became 'a kind of laboratory' in which the underpinning philosophy was commitment to 'new educational techniques that made use of the ideas embedded in psychoanalysis'. Geroe acted as an adviser to the school and sent her own son George to be educated there.<sup>58</sup>

Prior to the opening of Koornong the Nields had undertaken a nine-month study tour to gather up-to-date information on progressive teaching techniques visiting England, Scotland, France, Holland, Belgium, Finland, Sweden, Russia, Canada and the United States. In England they visited both Summerhill and the state funded Prestolee School, of which more later, while in Finland they visited Tölö Svenska Samskolan an experimental co-educational school in Helsinki. The Nields had met the founder and head teacher of the school, Lavrin Zilliacus, at the Melbourne conference.<sup>59</sup> Zilliacus, was the NEF World Chairman and his school was founded on similar principles to Bedales, the English progressive, co-education school, where he had been a pupil and later a science teacher and which Clive Nield had visited in the early 1930s.<sup>60</sup> The Nields had also been introduced at the NEF conference to the English born art educator and children's art specialist, Arthur Lismar.<sup>61</sup> He gave a series of talks and lectures in Melbourne where he stressed the importance of focusing on the process rather than the content of children's art work, emphasising Dewey's argument about the vital importance of community culture and environment to a child's aesthetic development, and of children needing the arts in order to express themselves and to gain self-knowledge.<sup>62</sup> While in Canada the Nields visited Lismar at

---

<sup>56</sup>Goad, "A chrome yellow blackboard with blue chalk," 736

<sup>57</sup>Petersen, 'Australian Progressive Schools 111', 184.

<sup>58</sup>Sanders 'Nield, Janet Blake.'

<sup>59</sup>Zilliacus' NEF lecture was entitled 'The Race between Education and Catastrophe', and focused on the importance of schools at a time of political uncertainty in 'fostering the *will to citizenship*: it should not only *charge* the mind, it should *touch* the mind – and the heart – of the growing generation', in *Education for Living. The Challenge of Today*, in K. S. Cunningham (Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Research, 1938), 11.

<sup>60</sup> Martin Lawn, 'From Zilliacus to Husen: Northern ambitions for comparative education 1930 -1960' paper presented at the Nordic Comparative Education Society, University of Turku, 21<sup>st</sup> May 2013, <http://www.nocies.org> accessed 12 April 2015.

<sup>61</sup>Anne Sanders, 'Nield, Joseph Clive (1908-1977)'. Obituaries Australia, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://oa.edu.au/obituary/nield-janet-blake-13943/text24840>, accessed 9 April 2015.

<sup>62</sup>Grigor, Arthur Lismar, 142-45. Two of Lismar's lectures 'Education through Art' and 'The Teaching of Art' were published in the NEF conference proceedings where he wrote 'Unless there is beauty in every constructive purpose and use of tools there is no educational value', *Education for Living* 389. Lismar was as concerned with beauty as was Stone the headteacher at Steward Street School, see below.

Toronto Art Gallery where he worked and obtained through him a collection of children's paintings which they later displayed in the school.<sup>63</sup>

Warrandyte had attracted a small artist's colony in the 1930s<sup>64</sup> and the potter Kate Janeba and the textile artist Betty Smith both taught at the school.<sup>65</sup> The painter and sculptor Danila Ivanovich Vassilieff was invited to be the foundational art teacher at Koornong in 1939 and although he lacked formal training, his approach to art education suited the school's emphasis on education through experience well. Children were encouraged by him to paint murals on exterior walls, while drawing was done on classroom floors. Pupils were also actively involved in the construction of an art studio out of local stone. Vassilieff's own work during the early 1940s reflected the school's ethos and he painted school children at work and play including in 1942 the *Schoolroom at Koornong* and *Koornong children*<sup>66</sup> For Blake Nield 'artists were more in touch with their unconscious, as well as having a unique ability to give social direction.'<sup>67</sup>

Life at Koornong was captured in a British Pathé documentary film, *Australia's Most Remarkable School* produced when the school faced imminent closure due to a lack of funds in 1947. Children are seen modelling clay, weaving, dancing, reading, swimming, and collaborating in joint acts of learning. They are also filmed discussing strategies for keeping the school open. The narration over these images speaks of Koornong as a school 'built in our time' by people who were 'not interested in quiz kids but making citizens'. The philosophy of the school was captured in its motto 'a child cannot learn if it is unhappy' and the belief that 'every child' was possessed of a 'natural creative ability' and should have 'the freedom to express' themselves in 'a variety of ways.' 'Happiness' lay 'in achievement in creating things' with 'informality' characterising the classroom. The school glorified 'the healthy body' and when needed the child psychiatrist Janet Nield gave individual guidance to 'iron out' problems that prevented the children 'from being

---

<sup>63</sup>Goad, "A chrome yellow blackboard with blue chalk," 735.

<sup>64</sup> Victoria Hammond and Juliet Peers, *Completing the Picture: Women Artists and the Heidelberg Era*. (Hawthorn East, Vic: Artmoves, 1992), 26.

<sup>65</sup> Alan Marshall, *Pioneers and Painters. One hundred years of Eltham and Its Shire* (Melbourne: Thomas Nelson, 1971), 101.

<sup>66</sup> Felicity St John Moore, *Vassilieff and his art* (London Oxford University Press, 1982), 55-56. See also, Felicity St John Moore, *Vassilieff: A retrospective exhibition of paintings, sculptures and watercolours*, exh. cat., Heide Park & Art Gallery, 1985; Felicity St John Moore, 'Vassilieff Danila Ivanovich (Daniel) (1897-1958)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/vassilieff-danila-ivanovich-daniel-11916/text21347>, accessed online 9 April 2015.

<sup>67</sup> Quoted in Sanders, 'Nield, Janet Blake'

useful members of school'. The film ends with the commentator hoping that the experimental school at Koornong did not pass 'into the limbo of forgotten projects.'<sup>68</sup>

Despite the film's praise for Koornong as 'the school of tomorrow' and the actions of the children it closed the same year. Looking back Blake Nield later observed:

A small community beside a flowing ... river had gathered to face a new kind of living at the exact month and day, September 3, 1939, that the aggressive, psychotic, destructive instincts of man broke their defences to destroy civilised values, and human life and the diversity of man, in the Second World War. We lived in defiance of war trying to preserve our values. The war ended and so did the experiment. War and education are expensive experiments.<sup>69</sup>

For Petersen, the first historian of Koornong, 'it was a remarkable school, and of more than Australian significance' as it brought together four 'disparate traditions' in progressive education: 'self government ...;Freudian psychoanalysis; the Fourierist tradition of productive work; and Dewey's social reform through intelligence.'<sup>70</sup>

Certainly, for Joseph Lauwerys, the Deputy Chair of the NEF, who visited Koornong the year before it closed it was the only school 'where the *total* school environment was planned and set up in the light of modern psychology and pedagogy so as to provide optimum conditions for the wholesome development of children.'<sup>71</sup>

*Steward Street School, Birmingham.*

Steward Street Junior School opened in 1873 in a poor heavily industrialised area of Birmingham to educate 1036 boys, girls and infant; the building still stands, but it is empty of children having been closed in the late 1960s. However, the story of the education 'experiment' which happened

---

<sup>68</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kg7TJ2WRndM> : British PathéAustralia's Most Remarkable School, 1947. A second film was also made in the same year. *In my beginning* was a 20 minute black and white film written by J. C. Nield and pupil's at the school including Mavourneen Box, Souzka Frankel, Jenepher Potts and David Potts, see Beverley Symons, Andrew Wells, Stuart Macintyre, *Communism in Australia: A Resource Bibliography* (Sydney: National Library of Australia, 1994), 223

<sup>69</sup> Quoted in Sanders 'Nield, Janet Blake.'

<sup>70</sup> Petersen, 'Australian Progressive Schools 111', 183

<sup>71</sup> J.A. Lauwerys, 'Educational Pioneering in Centralized Systems' *The New Era*, February (1947), 28-29.

in a Victorian school in the 1940s has a central place in the history of progressive education in England<sup>72</sup>. It has been told in a pamphlet<sup>73</sup>, preserved in an archive<sup>74</sup>, captured on film<sup>75</sup>, referenced in professional journals<sup>76</sup>, reported in newspapers<sup>77</sup>, remembered in teaching materials<sup>78</sup> and analysed in academic papers<sup>79</sup>. It is the pamphlet published in 1949 and distributed to every school throughout England and Wales and the papers in the archives which best capture the ideas and learning experiences that became a national model of good practice, a counter current to dominant pedagogies and a site of international interest.

Written by the headmaster Arthur Stone for fellow professionals *Story of a School* is a personal account of a pedagogical experiment where the creative arts were placed at the centre of education. Stone took this decision as he believed that ‘the children ... had within them, as their birthright, an ability to create true beauty within all the media of the arts,’ that it was ‘in the creation of beauty’ that the ‘true development’ of the individual emerged and that ‘the desire to create came because we ... were trying to give the children ... the freedom which would enable them to go ahead and do those things which would be best for their own development.’ Central to achieving this freedom was ‘movement’, as the child’s body had to be freed from constraints and inhibitions already developed, and ‘the common beginning’ in all art forms came from the same source:

... children moved and sang; children made big movements; they expressed movements in their art. With a big piece of clay, movement in modelling ... and in drama itself movement became the basis of the whole art.

---

<sup>72</sup>See, Peter Cunningham, *Curriculum Change in the Primary School since 1945*. (Lewes: Falmer Press, 1988), 150-52.

<sup>73</sup>*Story of a School. A headmaster’s experiences with children aged seven to eleven*, Ministry of Education Pamphlet No. 14 London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1949.

<sup>74</sup> Birmingham City Archives [BCA], Miscellaneous Education Files, *Story of a School*

<sup>75</sup> BCA, Miscellaneous Education Files, *Story of a School*: J. Robins to CEO Russell, 12 November 1948. The letter refers to ‘Education for Democracy’ part of J. Arthur Rank’s monthly film review *This Modern Age*; Toby Weaver, Ministry of Education to AEO Cousins, 23 December 1948. This letter refers to a second film for the Central Office of Information, *This is Britain*

<sup>76</sup> Alec Clegg, ‘Team Work and Beauty’ *The Times Educational Supplement* 20 September (1974); Alec Clegg, ‘A subtler and more telling power’ *The Times Educational Supplement* 27 September (1974).

<sup>77</sup>*The Daily Mirror* 20 July (1949); Alison Prince, ‘Think Forward to the 1940s’ *The Guardian*, 2<sup>nd</sup> March (2004).

<sup>78</sup> In 1975 the UK Open University produced for course E203 Curriculum Design and Development a case study on *The West Riding: Changes in Primary Education* which includes material relating to Steward Street and Arthur Stone. Thanks to Martin Lawn for this reference. He was involved in writing the case study materials.

<sup>79</sup> Catherine Burke and Ian Grosvenor ‘The progressive image in the history of education: stories of two schools’, *Visual Studies*, 22, 2 (2007) 155-168; Catherine Burke and Ian Grosvenor, ‘The Steward Street School Experiment: a critical case study of possibilities’, *British Educational Research Journal*, 39, 1 (2013), 148-65.



As children's 'interest and imagination began to flow' their 'self-discipline' and 'freedom from fear' grew 'enlivening the contact between the self and the world.' Stone commented that as the experiment progressed the staff observed that 'the children were moving more easily, more confidently, throughout the school day.'

At the end of the pamphlet Stone addressed the connection between the arts and the growing child and identified three developmental stages: 'repetitive', 'expressive' and 'communicative.' Each of these stages required different skills from the teacher, but at the core the teacher 'must see with the eyes of the child' and exercise 'the power to observe what is happening to the children.'<sup>80</sup> The text is illustrated with six photographs which capture the movement and creativity of the children.

Fig 3. Steward Street: art making in all corners of the classroom, Institute of Education, University of London

Fig 4. Steward Street: performance in school hall, Institute of Education, University of London

Reading the text it is clear that Stone's motivation and desire to experiment with learning was in part a consequence of both time and the distinctiveness of place. The children inhabited an environment of 'stark ugliness' where they had little experience or sight of beauty. Poverty and the deprivations and disruptions of war shaped their lives. It is also clear from references in his text that Stone's educational ideas and practices were influenced by the dancer, choreographer and dance / movement theoretician Rudolf Laban<sup>81</sup> and the art educator Marion Richardson.<sup>82</sup> Stone had previously been a senior teacher at Tinkers Farm School under the leadership of Amy Waite. Tinkers Farm was built in the 1930s and was a school where co-operation, liberating the self-conscious body through movement and dance and pupil activism was encouraged.<sup>83</sup> Stone left Steward Street in 1945 and the experiment was continued by his successor Ken Scott for another five years. Scott, who had previously worked with Stone in a drama project, further developed the 'experiment' by abolishing 'all forms of punishment' in the school and 'all

<sup>80</sup> *Story of a School* 8, 11, 15, 17, 21-22.

<sup>81</sup> Laban (1879-1958) fled Nazi Germany in 1938 and found refuge among progressive educators, first at Dartington Hall in Devon. For a discussion of motion as a technology of subjectivity which uses the Steward Street experiment as a case study see Roy Kozlovsky, 'The architecture of *educare*: motion and emotion in postwar educational spaces,' *History of Education*, 39, 6 (2010), 695-712.

<sup>82</sup> See Ian Grosvenor 'The Art of Seeing: Promoting Design in Education in 1930s England,' *Paedagogica Historica* 41, 4&5 (2005), 507-534

<sup>83</sup> See Ian Grosvenor, 'El profesorado y Escuela Renovadora: vida de una profesora en imágenes' in *Investigar La Història de L'Educació amb Imatges*. Eulalia Collell demont (Vic: MUVIP Universitat de Vic, 2014), 21-33.

comparisons of individuals by class lists of examination results and the like, were done away with, since they encouraged feelings of superiority in some and inferiority in others.’ He noted that these changes saw younger children in particular studying more determinedly and a rise in academic attainment. Children began ‘to write booklets of stories - to produce their own Magazine – to conduct debates – to give lectures and to practice some form of self government through their Class Councils.’<sup>84</sup> Scott wrote an article about drama at Steward Street and opened his account with a reference to the work of Herbert Read, the art educators Franz Cisek and Wilhelm Viola, the educator and drama therapist Peter Slade and Rudolf Laban.<sup>85</sup>

Steward Street attracted visits from local, national and international educators’ intent on witnessing for themselves the Birmingham ‘experiment’ in education.<sup>86</sup> What is interesting is that the majority of these visits occurred before *Story of a School* was published. The publication of *Story of a School* was accompanied by two documentary films featuring the school,<sup>87</sup> but only one has been identified and located to date, ‘*Education for Living*’ (1949). This film includes several unaccredited film sequences: a shot of the playground; children in a drama session; and children dancing barefoot in the hall. Stone is glimpsed in the last two sequences which were filmed on one of his return visits.

The Steward Street experiment became a point of reference for those who believed in the transformative power of the arts in education. While the publicity for the School was not popular with the Local Education Authority and some local councillors complained about ‘fancy teaching methods’ it was falling pupil numbers as families moved from the inner city to the suburbs that signalled the end of the Steward Street experiment.<sup>88</sup> *Story of a School* was reprinted in 1961.<sup>89</sup>

---

<sup>84</sup> BCA Miscellaneous Education Files, *Story of a School: ‘A Brief Account of the Stewardship of Mr K. R. Scott, as Head Teacher of Steward Street Junior School, January 1949’*

<sup>85</sup> K.R. Scott, ‘An Arts Approach to Education with Special Reference to Drama in the primary School’, *Educational Review*, 1, 2 (1949), 99-106

<sup>86</sup> They included researchers from the USA, New Zealand, India, Germany Malaya, Sweden, Switzerland, South Africa and Pakistan, future educational innovators in the UK (most notably Alec Clegg), Dr Wilhelm Viola and the filmmaker Paul Read (Herbert’s son). In addition, others came to participate in the actual experiment including Laban, his pianist Ada Keynsen, Terence Morgan, the principal dance instructor from Dartington Hall and Peter Slade: see BCA Steward Street School Log Book, *passim* and Peter Slade (1912-2004) Obituary <http://www.theguardian.com/news/2004/aug/20/guardianobituaries.artsobituaries1>

<sup>87</sup> BCA Miscellaneous Education Files, *Story of a School: J. Robins to CEO Russell*, 12 November 1948. The letter refers to ‘Education for Democracy’ part of J. Arthur Rank’s monthly film review *This Modern Age*; Toby Weaver, Ministry of Education to AEO Cousins, 23 December 1948. This letter refers to a second film for the Central Office of Information, *This is Britain*.

<sup>88</sup> BCA Miscellaneous Education Files, *Story of a School: Chief Education Officer Russell to Scott*, 31 December 1948; Scott to AEO Cousins, 6 January, 1950 *Birmingham Gazette*, 11 July 1950.

<sup>89</sup> The 1961 reprint includes a prefatory note: ‘This pamphlet was written in 1949, and describes the work of a school in Birmingham in the period from 1940 to 1948. It should not be assumed therefore that the

## Towards a Genealogy of Alternatives

Each of the case studies presented here has their own individual history, associated sources and related literatures. Each of them was also a product both of a specific set of temporal circumstances and particularities of place. It follows, therefore, that in seeking to produce micro-histories of ‘possibilities’ there is an implicit danger that a level of oversimplification will emerge as certain common threads are emphasised at the expense of differences which in turn will impoverish the unique complexity of each of the cases. Nevertheless, the common threads linking these four case studies are just too strong to ignore. They all stand as examples of experiments in education where the value of the imagination and creativity which were inherent in childhood was recognised, and where creativity and self-expression were encouraged. Each of these experiments in education was shaped by a view of the present which was translated into a desire for children, and implicitly society as a whole, to have a better future. To realise this desire spaces for learning were created which were the opposite of striated being open, allowing for transformation to occur and social consciousness to be fostered.<sup>90</sup> They were spaces where creative artists played an active role in children’s education.

It is also clear across the case studies that a particular view of the child was held and promoted: the child as innately creative, but also responsive to encouragement. Children were respected as individuals, as active agents in their own learning and the aim of education was to equip them with the attitudes, skills and knowledge to help deliver a new social future by releasing the body of the individual child from the constraints of submission. The teacher was a facilitator in this process drawing on their awareness of the different development stages of the child’s body and mind. Ogata has documented how the figure of the innately creative child was ‘consciously’ constructed ‘visually, materially, spatially, and scientifically’ by adults.<sup>91</sup> In each of these experiments in education the child was the centre of gravity, an ongoing point of reference in shaping learning experiences; an ‘authentic figure of hopefulness’ in an idealised future.<sup>92</sup> It is

---

pamphlet presents an accurate picture of the school as it is today’. It is certainly the case that after Scott left as headmaster in 1950 the new headmaster began to change the ethos of the school with the reinstatement of the system of punishment.

<sup>90</sup>For a discussion of striated and smooth spaces drawing on the work of Deleuze and Guattari see Maria Tamboukou, ‘Machinic assemblages: women, art education and space’, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 29, 3 (2008), 359-75.

<sup>91</sup>Amy F. Ogata, *Designing the Creative Child. Playthings and Places in Midcentury America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013) xiii-xvii. Thanks to Noah Sobe for this reference.

<sup>92</sup>Ogata, *Designing the Creative Child*, xv.

also possible to hear the ‘voices’ of those children who experienced these experiments in education first hand. Children’s views can be read in the magazines that they produced and in the memoirs written later in life<sup>93</sup>. Their voices can be heard in interviews conducted by later researchers and, in the case of Steward Street, the remembered experiences of schooling were transformed into a popular play in the 1960s.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, the children of Steward Street and Koorngong can be observed as well as heard as their experiences were captured on film.

While the overriding impression is of children enjoying their schooling the experiments in education did not translate into longevity: Gödöllő lasted twenty years until the death of Körösfői-Kriesch, the Modern School, New York just over ten years, Koorngong less than ten years and Steward Street a decade. Various explanations can be offered for their relative short existence. In their account of other adventures in education van der Eyken and Turner noted:

... innovators [are] a particularly hardy band ... Sometimes their particular contributions, so relevant in their own day, have faded away with time. Ideas must not merely be new; they must have stamina. Their backers need courage and energy. They have to call upon a good deal of ingenuity. And if their ideas are to survive and influence the course of events, they need the luck of good timing.<sup>95</sup>

Lauwerys writing about Koorngong School in 1947, the year it closed, offered a gloomy picture of the future of experimentation:

I am far from certain that it will prove possible to carry out experiments of a truly radical character, involving a total school environment ... in education, so much the conservator of tradition and the servant of social order, every innovating pioneer appears an unorthodox crank to his contemporaries.<sup>96</sup>

It may also be that, as with utopian communities, experiments in education were always unfinished, always in the process of evolving or having eventually to compromise with the social

---

<sup>93</sup> See Á. Remsey Nagyobb mozdulat. Városi Múzeum, Gödöllő, 1992; Sándor Nagy, ‘Életrajzunk’, *Ars Hungarica*, 1996, 1, 103-110; Avrich, *The Modern School Movement* passim.

<sup>94</sup> *Heads or Tails*, a play by Peter Wynne-Willson toured Birmingham schools and community venues, see [www.pwynne.hostinguk.com/steward\\_street\\_school1.htm](http://www.pwynne.hostinguk.com/steward_street_school1.htm)

<sup>95</sup> Willem van der Eyken and Barry Turner, *Adventures in Education* (London: Viking Books, 1969), 8. Petersen made the same observation about Koorngong, Petersen, ‘Australian Progressive Schools 111’, 185.

<sup>96</sup> Lauwerys, ‘Educational Pioneering,’ 29.

processes and systems that originally led to their materialization.<sup>97</sup> Shotton makes the point (admittedly he is commenting on English libertarian working class schools, but the point nevertheless holds) that these experiments in education were all community based and consequently ‘served the immediate interests and concerns of their respective communities’ and did not reach out to other radical and progressive initiatives, but existed in isolation.<sup>98</sup> Rose has observed that childhood is the ‘most intensely governed sector of personal existence’<sup>99</sup> and it maybe that while these school based experiments in education are reflective of the limitations of school itself, it was still after all an institution and as such could be perceived as ‘an affront’ to a child’s autonomy.<sup>100</sup>

The common threads which underpin this genealogy of alternatives raises a further issue about the ideas and practices associated with each of these experiments in education. Each experiment was in part a product of the ‘imaginative universe’ of the local, as ‘ideas are produced in, and shaped by, settings.’ They must ‘resonate with their environments or they could not find expression, secure agreement, or mobilize followers.’ Each experiment reflected concerns, demands, and aspirations that were place specific and in turn produced new conditions, relations and ways of being and thinking. At the same time the local was not insulated from ‘the vicissitudes of international exchange’ as commodity flows and circuits of information persistently shape[d] and reshape[d] the local.<sup>101</sup> Such processes pose difficulties for the historian of education wanting to define and create a consistent narrative of a subject that will not stay within spatial boundaries. For each of these ‘critical case studies of possibilities’ it is not just a problem of locating relevant sources, of mapping the multiple networks of interconnections, interrelationships, transfers, exchange and borrowings, of identifying the complex entanglements of actors, devices, discourses and practices, but of demonstrating through archival research that historical actors were explicitly ‘aware’ of ‘being affected by’ such transnational connections and relationships<sup>102</sup>, and, indeed, knowingly appropriating ideas and practices. That said, as Smith writing about Libertarian education has observed, while an educational philosophy ‘may be distinguished by exactly the same characteristics there is no

---

<sup>97</sup>See David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*(Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000) especially chapter 8.

<sup>98</sup>Shotton, *No Master High or Low* ,62

<sup>99</sup> N. Rose, *Governing the Soul: Shaping of the Private Self*(London: Routledge,New Edition, 1999),123

<sup>100</sup> Thomas *Anarchist Ideas and Counter-Cultures*, 89.

<sup>101</sup>David N. Livingstone, *Putting Science in its Place. Geographies of Scientific Knowledge*(Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003), 7-8.

<sup>102</sup> Noah W. Sobe, ‘Entanglements and Transnationalism in the History of American Education’ in Popkewitz, *Rethinking the History of Education* , 104-105.

question, of course, of direct influence ... rather ... that the libertarian position (as opposed to the libertarian movement) tends to crop up independently in each generation.<sup>103</sup>

Further detailed research is needed to document the linkages, connections and interactions of each of our 'critical case studies of possibilities', but one of the consequences of trying to map the entanglements associated with these experiments is that they have surfaced other potential 'cases of possibilities' where there is an apparent interplay in education discourse and practice between children, psychology, art and creativity. There were links between Gödöllő arts and craft colony and the colony at Nagybánya, north-west of Budapest, where a Free School had been established at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>104</sup> Other artist colonies were at Broadway in the English Cotswolds and, of course, Dartington in Devon, England where Leonard and Dorothy Elmhirst established in the 1920s a progressive school with roots in a utopian tradition.<sup>105</sup> Petersen identified links between Koornong and educational experiments at George Junior Republic, the Little Commonwealth, Summerhill, and Kees Boeke's De Werkplaats.<sup>106</sup> Modern Schools bearing Ferrer's name appeared in Britain, France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Argentina, Brazil, China and Japan in the three decades after his death.<sup>107</sup> There are also schools which experimented with the arts that are associated with individual innovative educators such as Francesco Randone's La Scoula d'Arte Educatric in Rome<sup>108</sup> and John Dewey's Laboratory School in Chicago in the 1890s<sup>109</sup> and others attached to progressive networks and counter-cultural movements such as the New Education Fellowship schools in Argentina in the 1920s-1940s and those associated with the avant garde movements in Mexico during the same period.<sup>110</sup> Tolstoy and Morris are both referenced in *Education through Art* and were influential in shaping the philosophy and practices of the Gödöllő colony. Morris, in turn, had been deeply affected in his thinking by the educational experiments of the Paris Commune in 1871 where Joseph Jacotot's 'pedagogical vision of politics' set an agenda where education was to be unitary and integrally composed, with 'composed' indicating

---

<sup>103</sup>Smith *Libertarians and Education*, 64-65

<sup>104</sup> Jacobs, *The Good and Simple Life*, 140-41

<sup>105</sup>Hardy, *Utopian England*, 144-160; Fiona MacCarthy, *Anarchy and Beauty. William Morris and His Legacy 1860-1960* (London: National Portrait Gallery), 105-07; Brendan Walsh and John Lalor, 'New languages of possibility: early experiments in education as dissent,' *History of Education*, 44, 5 (2015) 595-617.

<sup>106</sup>Petersen, 'Australian Progressive Schools 111', 183

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>108</sup> See Kinchin and O' Connor, *Century of the Child*, 47-49.

<sup>109</sup> See John Dewey, 'My Pedagogic Creed' (1897) reprinted in *The Collected Works of John Dewey: The Early Works*, vol 5 ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972), 93-95.

<sup>110</sup> See Sandra Carli, *The New School Movement in Argentina*, *Paedagogica Historica*, 42, 1 (2006), 383-404; Maria Esther Aguirre Lora, 'Artistic Education: A Laboratory to the Fashioning of Mexican Identity (ca. 1920-1940) in Popkewitz, *Rethinking the History of Education*, 179-200.

‘the simultaneous development of mind and body’ and ‘integral’ emphasising ‘anything that enriched the relationship of mind and body’ to promote the harmonious development of the child. Both elements received support from the Commune’s Artists’ Federation.<sup>111</sup> Read himself was associated in the 1940s with an educational experiment at Burgess Hill, an independent co-educational school, which hosted the first summer school of the anarchist federation of Great Britain in 1946,<sup>112</sup> and Balby Street Junior School, Denaby Main, South Yorkshire, England appears in the 1970s to have continued the educational experiment begun in Steward Street.<sup>113</sup> While in Australia, Julie McLeod has explored educational experiments of the 1970s associated with radical and progressive ideas, and has drawn attention to Brinsley Road School in Victoria state, an annexe of Camberwell High School, which had ‘an arty, self discovery ethos’.<sup>114</sup> Finally, in attempting to construct and extend such a genealogy of alternatives account also needs to be taken of Peter Cunningham’s observation regarding the need for more archival and oral research to focus on ‘the “anonymous” practitioners’, on the everyday work of teachers as distinct from pioneers and policy makers.<sup>115</sup> Cunningham called for a prosopographical approach, focussing on the networks and structures through which individual practitioners operated.<sup>116</sup> To Cunningham’s ‘ordinary’ innovators in ‘quiet schools’ can also possibly be added a number of contemporary schools where anarchist ideals continue to shape children’s learning experiences: Sudbury Valley School, Massachusetts; the School of Self-Determination, Moscow; Tokyo Shure, Japan; la Fundación Educativa Pestalozzi, Quito, Ecuador; Krätzä, Berlin; and the Sands School, Ashburton, England.<sup>117</sup> Each would need further research to ascertain the extent to which they reflect earlier anarchist experiments which placed arts and creativity as the centre of learning?

---

<sup>111</sup>Kristin Ross, *Communal Luxury. The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune* (London: Verso, 2015), 42-43.

<sup>112</sup>Antony Weaver, ‘Introduction and the “Education of Free Men”’ *The New Era*, 53, 1, 1972, 4. This was a special number on Herbert Read. Thanks to Michael Fielding for sharing this information.

<sup>113</sup> See *The West Riding: Changes in Primary Education*

<sup>114</sup>Julie McLeod, ‘Experimenting with education: spaces of freedom and alternative schooling in the 1970s’, *History of Education Review*, 43, 2 (2014) 178.

<sup>115</sup> Peter Cunningham, ‘Innovators, networks and structures: towards a prosography of progressivism’, *History of Education*, 30, 5 (2001), 436-37.

<sup>116</sup> See also, Trine Oland, ‘The diversity of ‘progressive school pedagogues’ 1929-1960: A space of opposites making society making the child’, *praktiske grunde*, 4 (2014), 5-21. Oland uses a social space approach and a Bourdieusian notion of prosopography to explore the emergence of a ‘collective ideology’ in Denmark. In correspondence she also identified progressive schools in Denmark which placed the arts and creativity at the centre of the curriculum: Emdrupborg experimental school, established after World War 11, in the northern part of Copenhagen; Bernadotteskolen, a private international school in Copenhagen, also established just after World War II; Kroggårdsskolen, a public school established in 1960 near Odense; Værebroskolen, a public school established in 1968 in the municipality of Gladsaxe; and Østregsgades skole – a public school in Copenhagen.

<sup>117</sup>David Gribble, ‘Good news for Francisco Ferrer– how anarchist ideals in education have survived around the world’ in *Changing Anarchism: Anarchist Theory and Practice in a Global Age* eds. Jonathan Purkis and James Bowen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 181-198.

What is certain is, that by bringing together in this study the four ‘critical case studies of possibilities,’ each with their own associated particularities of place and circumstance, but nevertheless sharing a common purpose, this exploratory excursion into the past has pointed to the both the possibility and the need for transnational research into arts based educational experimentation which can produce a spatially and temporally extended genealogy of radical alternatives. Finally it should, however, be remembered that a desire to place the arts at the centre of the curriculum did not always translate into an education which Herbert Read would have necessarily applauded. Radicalism is not always left wing. The Escuela Serena School in the province of Santa Fe, Argentina established by the sisters Olga and Leticia Cossettini promoted the arts in education in the 1930s, but they were influenced by the inter-war arts education movement of Lombardo Radice and Giovanni Gentili who had ties to Fascism.<sup>118</sup>

What of Read? He continued to return with passion to the theme of the purpose of education and the transformative power of education through art in his subsequent publishing history.<sup>119</sup> He also promoted his vision through talks, lecture tours and practical advice, for example, in 1948 he advised the Australian state of Victoria on the school curriculum.<sup>120</sup> He would also have been aware of the Steward Street ‘experiment’ as his son was involved in making a film about it. Read’s vision of education through art remained constant, but it remained a vision without reported ‘case studies of possibilities’. While he celebrated the Village College at Impington in Cambridgeshire as a model design where ‘the child’s senses’ could ‘be educated in action,’<sup>121</sup> he also recognised that the education of the senses required a ‘sympathetic atmosphere’ and this could be found ‘in a village school, or in a dingy barracks in some industrial city ’ because it was dependent not on the designed space but on the teacher: ‘the atmosphere is the creation of the teacher, and to create an atmosphere of spontaneity, of happy childish industry, is the main and perhaps only secret of successful teaching.’<sup>122</sup>

## Conclusion

David Marquand in *Mammon’s Kingdom* (2013) an essay about Britain today wrote:

---

<sup>118</sup>Thanks to Inés Dussel and Pablo Pineau for this information.

<sup>119</sup>See, for example, *The Education of Free Men*, (London: Freedom Press, 1944); *Education for Peace* (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1949); *Anarchy and Order* (London: Faber, 1954); *The Grass Roots of Art*, (London: Faber, 1955); *To Hell with Culture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963); *The Redemption of the Robot* (New York: Trident Press, 1966). Read’s extensive journalism still needs to be explored, especially his writings for the weekly journal *The Listener*.

<sup>120</sup>Sianan Healy and Kate Darian-Smith, ‘Educational Spaces and the “Whole” Child’: A Spatial History of School Design, Pedagogy and the Modern Australian Nation’, *History Compass*, 13, 6 (2015), 280.

<sup>121</sup>Read, *Education through Art*, 292-93

<sup>122</sup>Read *Education Through Art*, 288



... the past is not just a foreign country, but an inconceivably distant one ... Everywhere the hunt is on for a mysterious entity known as ‘relevance’ – a meaningless concept, better rendered as ‘fashionable’. An incurious ‘presentism’ – combining a lack of historical sense, a pervasive contempt for the wisdom of the past, a fascination with novelty simply because it is new and a propensity to over-react to every ephemeral focus-group finding or tabloid whim – saturates public debate and shapes policy-making. History no longer counts; life started yesterday, or at the very most the day before yesterday.<sup>123</sup>

Such historical amnesia is not just a British phenomenon, but is present amongst other western democracies.<sup>124</sup> It is such amnesia that has provoked the present inquiry, a product of present concerns, of a preoccupation with seeking out and connecting across time radical educational alternatives which, to use Kristin Ross’s phrase, can ‘enter vividly into the figurability of the present.’<sup>125</sup>

The search for ‘critical case studies of possibilities’ that embodied a belief in the transformative power of education through art and the education of the senses has shown how extensive the traces are of radical arts based experiments in the educational landscape of the past. Each of these experiments in education had an afterlife in archives and memory. ‘Traces’, as John Berger has written, ‘are not only what is left when something has gone, they can also be marks for a project, of something to come.’<sup>126</sup> Berger, consciously or not, was echoing Walter Benjamin’s theses on the nature of history where he wrote:

The true image of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the moment of its recognisability, and is never seen again ... For it is an irretrievable image of the past which threatens to disappear in any present that does not recognize

---

<sup>123</sup>David Marquand. *Mammon’s Kingdom. An Essay on Britain Now* (London: Allen Lane, 2013), 65-66.

<sup>124</sup> See for example, Lluís Duch, ‘El context actual del mite’ in *La substància de l’efímer. Assaigs d’antropologia* (Barcelona: Abadia de Montserrat, 2002) 11-44; F. Hartog *Régimes d’historicité: Présentisme et expériences du temps*. (Seuil : Paris, 2003); Elsie Rockwell ‘La complejidad del trabajo docente y los retos de su evaluación: resultados internacionales y procesos nacionales de reforma educativa’ in *La Reforma Constitucional en Materia Educativa : Alcances y Desafíos*. 2003; Antonio Vinaso, *Sistemas educativos, culturas escolares y reformas. Continuidades y cambios* (Madrid: Ediciones Morata, 2002). Thanks to Eulàlia Colledemont, Elsie Rockwell and Frank Simon for these references. Further, it should be noted that such historical amnesia is not new: see R. Jacoby, *Social Amnesia: A Critique of Conformist Psychology from Adler to Laing* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1977).

<sup>125</sup>Ross, *Communal Luxury*. 2.

<sup>126</sup> John Berger, ‘Giorgio Morandi’ in *The Shape of the Pocket* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001), 144.

itself as intended in that image ... Every age must strive anew to wrest tradition away from conformism that is working to overpower it.

For Benjamin, to be an historian was to engage in the active process of remembering, to use the traces of the past that remain in the present as the raw material for producing stories about the past that might be overlooked and lost. History existed to be redeemed. To be an historian was to be partial and to 'brush history against the grain.'<sup>127</sup> Recently Keri Facer has argued that the future 'is not some place "out there" beyond our reach,' but rather, 'it is an imaginative, material and political set of processes already in development' in which it is 'both possible and ethical' for educators to intervene.<sup>128</sup> Indeed, with 'a recognition of agency', as she argues, 'comes responsibility.' The future is indeed now and as historians we should follow Benjamin and be active critics of visions for the future and work to present alternative visions; visions which should draw on the productive possibilities that can be uncovered in the 'treasure trove of experience and wisdom' which is the past.<sup>129</sup> If we are to progress 'social alternatives' to the market led vision and practice that characterises neo-liberal educational discourse we need to seek out sources of inspirational energy such as the education experiments presented here. If we are to plan for the future we need to understand the thinking and the practice, the imagination and the reality of past experiments in education.

---

<sup>127</sup>Walter Benjamin 'On the Concept of History' in *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings Volume 4 1938-1940* eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press, 2003) 390-392.

<sup>128</sup>Keri Facer, *Learning Futures* (London: Routledge, 2011), 104.

<sup>129</sup> Fielding and Moss *Radical Education and the Common School*. 66.