



Group of Children Lying in a Circle

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Being Creative in Troubled Times

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While science may lead you towards truth, only the imagination can lead you to meaning. C.S Lewis

In a time of challenging financial and economic circumstances a realignment of priorities is unavoidable. When many are rightfully concerned about the security of their pensions, others with the loss of their jobs and livelihood and young people with a situation that seems to offer them little hope of a fulfilling future, the interests of our children can easily get lost in the clamour. As the streets and the media resound with the voices of anxiety and demands for change from most sectors of society, who is going to speak for the children who do not have access to such vehicles of protest or debate? As we survey the actions of European governments over the last few months it is clear that children are bearing the brunt of cuts in public funding and many face the increasing likelihood of child poverty looming over their lives, with all the negative long-term consequences that brings. It would be unfair to single out one country for their short sighted and damaging policies in this regard as the policies and effects are ubiquitous across Europe.

Of course society is faced with dilemmas when such cutbacks prove necessary, but, if we think of our societies in the long term, protecting the health, well-being and potential future of our children should not be a matter of stealthy cut-backs. These might be tangentially mentioned in the press but hardly cause a murmur as the flood of what is immediately newsworthy drowns the voices of those who wish to look further ahead. The damage we do to our children is very difficult to reverse and all the research points to the extraordinary formative powers in each child in the very first years of their lives. We hope that the volumes in this series of books will provide those advocates of the quality of childhood with a stronger say as our and our children's social future is being determined.

Let us make sure we are heard when we state that the economy is only one side of our society and only one way in which we relate to each other and should not be the measure of all things. *In today's competitive global economy, there is a tendency for policy makers' to focus primary on economic and employment policy. It is therefore critical that the health and the social sectors work together to highlight the importance of investing in health and well-being.* We are in danger of paying for the financial deficit of the present with a social deficit in the future. The sustainability of our cultures is becoming more and more at stake

and it is our children who hold that key, yet their future is being mortgaged for the sake of remedying a recession caused by skewed priorities in the banking and financial sectors. The economisation of education is not the answer.

"Lifelong learning is a necessity for all citizens in a world ruled by uncertainty."ⁱⁱ

The seeds of lifelong learning are sown in the first years and even, as has become increasingly apparent, in the months preceding birth. Vaclav Havel calls for *"our conscience to catch up with our reason"* and that *"I always return to the theme of human responsibility, which seems incapable of keeping pace with civilisation and preventing it from turning against the human race. It is as though the world has become too much for us to deal with."ⁱⁱⁱ*

This statement is symptomatic of our present consciousness and applied to previous times of tumultuous change, going back to the early modern age and Leonardo da Vinci and is yet as relevant today as it was then.

Dis-ease is infectious and Howard Gardner's hope that *"We must relate to each one another, whenever possible; equally we need to help students proceed from recognition to admiration, and from admiration to the enduring desire to pursue truth, beauty and goodness in their own lives"*^{iv} comes up in many instances against governmental recourse to turn to traditional and failed models, that seem to provide a sanctuary from the fundamental changes that are actually needed and which many young people are demanding across the world. The word 'spring' is used in headlines everywhere as a metaphor for potential, freshness, blossoming and hope and yet, because of its inherent fragility, each societal spring can so easily fall back into ossified tradition, cynicism, despair and destructiveness.

To abort the hopes of the young, to deprive children of their life chances, to condemn very young children to an economized and pointless educational experience, and to cease supporting families who take a loving responsibility for the early years of our future citizens is shirking our social responsibility and shows a dire lack of creativity and foresight. Or alternatively seeking a homogenising model that everybody can fit into, which may appear economically efficient and effective at the time, belies the image that there are many ways of being human. All educational enterprises of any worth should at least respect this principle of cultural and individual diversity.

Einstein believed that the attributes of childhood need to be reinvented in adulthood for personal success and fulfilment – the zest for life, a sense of discovery, a sense of wonder, hope for the future, spontaneity, openness *"It is, in fact, nothing short of a miracle that the modern methods of instruction have not yet entirely strangled the holy curiosity of enquiry; for this delicate little plant, aside from stimulation, stands mostly in need of freedom; without this it goes to wrack and ruin without fail."* Ready answers to pedagogical questions that fail to respect the fundamental need for freedom of enquiry only propagate the mistakes of the past.

Being socially creative is not such an enormous challenge as it might appear. At one point Gandhi was about to hurriedly board a train and in so doing one of his sandals fell off his foot onto the tracks. He responded in a split second by throwing his second sandal to join the first, rather than scrabbling around trying to recover it. Somebody else would benefit by having a pair of sandals rather than just one. *"It seems that he immediately reframed the situation from being one of personal loss to being one of someone else's gain and was therefore in a position to act effectively."^{vi}* This is a creative mind in action, spontaneous, wise and socially aware, and being the natural teacher he was Gandhi illuminates the fact that *"Every good teacher is a catalyst to creativity. Every bad teacher creates cages."^{vii}*

Extraordinarily it is the arts that are being decimated in schools and increasingly in higher education, yet studies show that students who take arts subjects have a higher rate of employability, and those from low income families who participate in arts activities at school are three times more likely to get a degree^{viii}. Children's cognitive abilities could be increased by 16% and 19% on average if they take part in arts activities^{ix}. Across the world there is a plethora of research being done along the same lines and which has come to similar conclusions and yet little is being done to implement these findings in schools or national curriculum policies. In many places this research is not only disregarded but policies contrary to these findings are implemented. This is one example of an area where much could be done to help the next generation of adults learn to deal creatively with the social and environmental problems that will beset them. Financial cuts are sweeping away en masse many other facets of children's welfare that have supported their wellbeing and health and which have had proven beneficial results.

The readers of this book are not very likely to bivouac in the protest camp in La Puerta del Sol in Madrid or camp in front of St Paul's cathedral in London, but when it is matter of the rights of children to have a childhood that is properly respected and supported we can take heart from one of the slogans of the protesters *"We are going slowly because we are going far."* All those concerned with quality of childhood should, in their own way, be *indignados* now.

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- ⁱ Promoting Social Inclusion and Tackling Health Inequalities in Europe. EuroHealth net 2011. http://www.epha.org/IMG/pdf/Good_Practices.pdf
- ⁱⁱ Ernesto Villalba. Creativity and Innovation in Education. the Magazine. No. 31 2009. EU Brussels P. 45
- ⁱⁱⁱ Vaclav Havel. Commencement address. Harvard University. June 15, 1995
- ^{iv} Howard Gardner. The Disciplined Mind. Simon and Schuster. New York 1999. P. 250
- ^v Albert Einstein in Brierley, D. To Read the Unwritten. Parsival. Ljubljana 2009. P. 158
- ^{vi} Jonathan Rowson. How are we Disposed to be Creative in Craft, A. Gardner, H. Claxton, C. Creativity, Wisdom and Trusteeship. Corwin Press. California. 2008. P.90
- ^{vii} Tim Smit in Craft, A. Creativity in Schools. Routledge. London 2005. P. xiv
- ^{viii} James Catterall, Doing Well and Doing Good by Doing Art. I-Group Books. Los Angeles 2009. P. 60.
- ^{ix} Understanding the impact of engagement in culture and sport. A systematic review of the learning impacts for young people. July 2010. EPPI Centre. London

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