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KALEVANKANGAS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL & CONFERENCE HOUSE MIKKELI

I went to the land of the Moomins in Finland as part of IDEC@EUDEC2016. One of my favourite authors, Tove Jansson wrote about the magically real world of the Moomintrolls. Snufkin is a key person in the tales. He is the wandering musician and philosopher on life.

SNUFKIN'S SONG



I meander through the forests in the early spring when Nature is putting on her greatest show. Under limpid blue skies and clouds so white and striking, the earth breathes and emerges from beneath the snow. I wander where I will and I will be the one to choose. I'll play my harp all night and day, or not if it feels wrong.

Nothing do I own, so there's nothing I can lose.
I need to have the freedom to find my own song.
I sing a beautiful ode to a babbling brook and the moon will hear the language of quietness.
The strings of my harp will snare birds with their honeyed hook and my harmonies will cure a mind of loneliness.
But the evening shadows lengthen and the moment has fled and the most beautiful song of all escapes me.
Spring's melancholy melody plays within my head, and thoughts are all that's left for the traveler who is free.

I think this is a wondrous description of how we would like our co learners in democratic education to be.

SCHOOL VISITS - HELSINKI, FINLAND May 29th – June 5th 2016

There were about 74 in our group for the School Visits Week in Helsinki. We stayed together at the Euro Hostel and met on the first evening and made plans for the week.



We spent each morning visiting the schools all over Helsinki then had a debriefing and sharing sessions after lunch.





Each evening we had a social and cultural experience such as Nordic walking through the market and city, a Helsinki City walk, a visit to the sauna, a wonderful kayaking paddle on the Baltic Sea with magic rainbows above us. It was a great week.

As you know the education system in Finland gets a lot of mention in the press and you probably already have some general notions of the key elements. Doing well in Pisa is well documented but is not an overt priority and in fact concentration on the things which I think we hope are more important in education, seems to matter much more. Some of the general key points are

School and Education is free for all, including tertiary education.

Children start school when they are 7 though a large percentage do attend preschools or before school programs.

Play and outdoor activity are given time and value.

Teachers are highly educated and it is very hard to get accepted into teacher Education Courses.

Students have access to a range of support programs and Carers for those who need them

A free meal is provided for all in the school community every day – though there is some debate about the quality of the food!

Homework is minimal

Standardized and High stakes testing does not happen. Teachers and students create evaluating processes.

Teachers have more freedom in curriculum areas and with the new National Curriculum about to start as I write, the children will consciously be encouraged to have more control and say over their own learning.

The people are highly taxed in order to provide this quality of education (and other services) and it is accepted, as it is valued.

Our group visited 20 + schools and learning places. I visited 5 different schools, 2 primary schools and three high schools. It became clear to us that this was the last week of the term and the school year so it was amazing that the schools accepted us visiting during this time. We were also naturally asked to be careful about photographs and not take identifying pictures of the children so I tended not to take too many during the visits.

The first Primary school was Seppo. This was in the suburbs and as we approached the area, the apartments gave way to individual houses in well-kept gardens, so it was obviously a well off area. We learnt later that the school was in an area where many who worked in the IT Industry lived.

They had about 330 students from 7yrs – 13 yrs old in 16 classes, with 3 special classes, 21 teachers and 4 assistants. The students were mainly from Finland with very few migrants (which fitted the stereotype I held). About 60-90% of the student had attended preschool. The students told us about their school and appeared confident and relaxed and in an easy relationship with the adults. They have 1/2 class trips every year.

At the beginning of the new school year in August the introduction of the new national curriculum would happen and this was expected to bring big changes. This became a theme at all the places we visited and I gradually gleaned a picture of how this might be for the school communities. At Seppo they spoke of the change in the role of the teacher from being dominating to

being more of a guide to help the students learn.

They told us of the 7 main 21st Century Skills which they believe are essential.

Thinking – Learning to learn

Cultural competencies

Communication skills and self-expression

Taking care of oneself and everyday life skills

Multiple Literacies

ICT Competencies

Worklife skills and Entrepreneurship

Playing a role in creating sustainable school and communities is crucial.

IT is part of every day and new technology is always being added. There is a student association where students vote for a representative and classes meet to take issues to the reps. They organize special activities. Older kids organise games for younger children. When students need support the principal and a special teacher will do this. This can be more intensive or special according to the needs. There are 3 classes of special support. There is co-operation between home and school and they use the electronic system Wilma to communicate. They have parent teacher evenings 3 times a year and three performances per year.

English is studied from Class 6 which is about equivalent to our Grade 3, Swedish from 4th Class as well as Finnish all the way through. Some schools also have German and Russian. Most students and many adults in Finland are at least trilingual or more.

The second primary School I visited was a Freinet- based school. This is a form of progressive education originating in France, based on co-operative learning by doing and enquiry, making and producing products, using the children's interests and natural curiosity, learning naturally through real experiences and including aspects of democratic education such as taking responsibility for their own work and for the community through democratic processes. Freinet Pedagogy has had a presence in the general Finnish Curriculum since the 80s. In fact the Principal said that the Finnish system is very Freinet and it is commonsense.

If this was a school in Australia it would be most likely be independent school but in Finland it is fully funded and part of the public system. There are two in Helsinki and there has been a Freinet Association in Finland for 30 years. It debunked all the stereotypes mentioned earlier. In this school there are children from 29 different cultures and it is also a fully integrated school for children who are differently-abled, many in wheelchairs. Each of them has a carer with them at the school. They describe themselves as moving from a multicultural school to an intercultural school. All learn Finnish, English from Grade 3 and French from Grade 4. There was the most wonderful atmosphere at this school from the moment we first shared a singing and music session with them all including all the kids in wheelchairs with carers and supporters, to the special cake and coffee stall one of the groups had prepared for us and the visits to many classrooms. They are very supportive of the changes to the

National Curriculum because in theory it brings it even more in line with Freinet. There will be more concentration on students' thinking and co-operation, new skills and more democratic elements and phenomenon learning. (More on this later) They have changed the classroom structure and include a morning meeting.

These are the flags of all the kids in the school



The school is a reconstructed building from an industrial area. Close by and connected to the school was another aspect of Finnish support for children and their families. There is a park with lots of playing space and some equipment and indoor spaces for when the weather requires it, for arts and crafts and music and cooking etc. Children can come and go pre and after school. It is staffed by three adults and has a great flow with the school.



I also visited two related high schools, Kallio Performing Arts High and Helsinki Senior Secondary school of Visual Arts. They are sister schools and share some aspects of campus and facilities some of which were being upgraded and changed. We also had a special connection as our guide Paullina used to be an art teacher at the school. There are 180 students from 360 applicants. There is an entrance exam process which focuses on their art as well as academic aspects and again it is free, no fees. The students were doing some amazing art work and at the performing arts school we were invited to see the end of year performance of the oral skills course. The students could base their presentation on a work by another author or create their own. This was all in Finnish but from body language and student responses, we could tell that there was a great variety of material and some that was full of intensity and emotion. When Pauliina was able to translate for us later, sure enough the topics ranged from Winnie the Pooh to stories of harrowing physical, sexual and psychological abuse. The students and the teacher were very supportive of each other.

To enable the students to concentrate on their creative interests they are able to opt out of some of the compulsory parts of the curriculum and they have lots of choice. Compulsory courses include Finnish, Maths, Swedish, Religion/Religious, Foreign Language. Maths and Swedish are often the opt out options.

The other high school was Etu-Toolo Senior High School. This is an old school trying to be in a new modern environment. There are 610 students and 35 teachers. The principal of this school was very supportive of the national curriculum changes and has obviously been very involved with the minister and board of education. The school has been a pilot school for the program. She filled us in on the consultation process that has taken place over the last two years. She was enthusiastic about the philosophy that all students are active learners and they construct their own learning and work best if they can

move into authentic learning environments. She was the closest in philosophy and practice of Democratic Education that I met. When Lisa, the principal, was showing us around the school she commented that she may not find any people in classroom and this was the case. They were out and about all over the school and surrounding area of the city. She was telling us about how a student who may be working on their music and guitar playing in the park will take a selfie and send it back to their teacher/mentor with the date and time and this was a way of using technology to enable a more flexible approach.



This school is a pioneer in the core idea of the new National Curriculum which is having the most impact on the high schools. This is being called Phenomenon Learning. For high schools, that have been individual subject oriented, this is a change to a more interdisciplinary approach. (Primary teaching has championed this forever!) The more important aspect of this change is that students are making decisions and choices about their courses and learning and working with the teachers in a more equal and collaborative way rather than passively receiving what the adults decide. They will also be involved in deciding their assessment process. Integration of technology is also an important part of this approach. These are not totally new ideas to Finland but they are going about making them more the norm. Depending on how supportive the adults are of these changes, there are different interpretations of what it will all mean in practice and how much the subject based learning still plays its part. Inevitably there are some teachers who are very enthusiastic and others more skeptical and set in their ways. Teachers are being required to be co-operative, flexible, innovative, creative, independent and entrepreneurial, and students all of those and more in charge of their own learning.

As Finnish educator Pasi Sahlberg states in [The Conversation](#):

You may wonder why Finland's education authorities now insist that all schools must spend time on integration and phenomenon-based teaching when Finnish students' test scores have been declining in the most recent international tests. The answer is that educators in Finland think, quite correctly, that schools should teach what young people need in their lives rather than try to bring national test scores back to where they were.

As it was the end of the school year the students from the high schools had organized an arts and music festival in a local park and we were invited to join them and see some of the process of this collaboration between schools and community totally directed by the students.

We became aware that there were very few Finnish teachers who were intending to participate in IDEC. As we visited the schools we encouraged them to join us but two main factors I think were a barrier. A key one was it was the end of the school year and after two years of much extra work consulting and preparing for the New National Curriculum they were exhausted. The other was a little subtler. I think they thought that they were already democratic. I think they have come a long way towards this especially in the area of curriculum but there is a key step that still needs to happen and that is when the whole school community, including the students, is involved in actually making the decisions at the school. They have elected representatives for the students but these are often advisory rather than decision-making. There are a couple of parent led initiatives for creating democratic schools in Finland one of which is being led by Pauliina and her partner and friends. They have some concerns about the schools as they presently exist as well as the physical state of many schools and hope to create more openly democratic and sustainable learning communities.

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Finland is a complex country, which is still grappling with knowing and understanding its identity. Swedish, Russian and Finnish culture contribute characteristics, their languages and historical roles and the independence of just 100 years all make this an evolving country. In many ways it is portrayed as a homogenous society but these differences and the presence of many people from other countries, not obvious till you delve a little deeper, make for a very interesting mix. Add in for a few weeks, over 400 people from about 35 different countries and we have an IDEC that is also growing in complexity, diversity, interest and expectations. Marko Koskinen and his team had a huge task to bring all of us together to organise this happening and despite many challenges with their very different partners from Otavan Opisto, they steered us through a fascinating time together. I want to pay tribute to some of them as I think people and our relationships with them are at the heart of IDEC and the contributions of Marko, Patrick, Pauliina, Olga, Rittus, Aimee, were central.

A very experienced person in education from India, who was totally new to IDEC and searching for ways to improve education in her country, provided a summary of her view of IDEC on the last morning. It helped me see a broad perspective. She could identify three main groupings which were present at IDEC and which somehow need to work to become integrated. They are the more privileged 'western' democratic schools, the schools and communities of the impoverished and developing countries and the democratic movement that happens/is happening within the public and state education systems of many countries.

At the opening session of IDEC the Ombudsman for children in Finland spoke of some of the issues facing students today. 49% of pupils say that teachers are not interested in their daily lives. There is a Youth Parliament but it is more a kind of theatre, according to adult paradigm, and only for a small number of participants. A key question to ask is, Are the structures made up by the adults? He also wants to see the adults and children having the hard and difficult discussions and to find ways to work together even when they disagree. He wants to see participation for all. They are also grappling with the issue of hate speech especially in this age of social media.

The first three days were open space and there were a great variety of workshops and events happening, too many to attend all and this will just be a taste of the ones I attended.



Each day would begin with a panel and forum and at the Participatory Learning session students and adults spoke about their experiences in democratic education. Michel spoke about being voted by his school in Germany, to attend EUDEC and being on the Youth

Council for the city for 4 years, Lena spoke about some of the changes that have happened to increase participation in state schools in Germany but it does not seem genuine to her and Rae, a former student at Sands spoke about the need to change traditional pedagogy into participatory learning which is interactive, questioning and engaging and how hard that is to do when the students express a preference for a more didactic experience.



The students from Humanity School in Taiwan held a number of sessions including a demonstration and teaching of martial arts and a dramatization of their education system



I enjoyed the session attempting to do calligraphy with Ann Qui and Ma from Mainland China and Matt and others from Holistic School in Taiwan.

Nunan Dissanayaka from Sri Lanka originally a chemist, told us of his dream to start the first democratic school in Sri Lanka. He filled in some of the history of the country, the great chronicle which dates back to 536BC, an old hospital to 300BC. There were 400 years of fighting and hard times and from 1836 British education became the norm. Most schools are government schools but there are asymmetrical resources. Out of 350,000 students, 14,000 go to university. He asked the question what happens to the other 336.000? A student came up to him and said I want to make a Lamborghini. Two months later he had done this out of paper and cardboard but with a running motor. It was a fine sight to see it in operation.



OiYee Lee (Littlerain) the principal of the Gaia School in Hong Kong, Starfish and other teachers students and parents, told us about their involvement in the Umbrella Revolution and how this was an example of democratic education in real life. Education in Hong Kong is usually silent about politics. In 1997 when returned to China by the British, people who now call themselves HongKongers wanted to retain their rights and freedoms and the universal right to suffrage. There were a number of protests and then in 2014

a major one when students occupied buildings and on the 28th Sept 60,00 occupied the roads. Primary 6 students studied the topic and researched it. The staff and students decided to join in this civil disobedience and joined the protesters on the street where the numbers grew to 100.000 The choice was to be peaceful, non violent but the government choose to use gas and pepper spray etc so they came ready with facemasks and umbrellas to protect against the gas and spray. Some parents thought the decision was too political and one of them explained some of the parents' concerns to us. This was a very emotional session and a reminder of how fortunate we are to be able to take our democratic rights for granted.

Derry Hannam ran a number of sessions based on his work in democratic education in mainstream over many years. He was also one of the keynote speakers. At one of the sessions I attended he told of how he had worked with a class that has failed in a conventional sense so he had licence to rebuild the students and work from their interests. This grew from one class to eight! I want to come back to Derry's contributions as over the week he articulated some key points for me about the effects of what he terms BIG EDU. It has a budget of 55million dollars and wants control of education; curriculum, textbooks, tests, training teachers and quality of instruction, TPA accreditation. In fact Governments in developing countries are handing control of their education systems to them.

Dorothea Sczhultz ran a session on what kind of democratic change is possible in public school and she outlined the work she has been doing in schools in Germany.

Iku Fujimatsu led an interesting session on the process of restorative justice as it works at Tutorial School in New Mexico. It empowers students to resolve conflict independently in small groups. "Do it for the community" is a key principle.

Maria Rittus Ikola ran a series of workshops through the week on diversity and inclusion and conducted a survey of participants about related issues. It will be interesting to see the results of this survey.

We had a fun and energetic session with CW Chow which was a hands on and whole body experience of how democratic education is hidden in Taichichuan; the philosophy and defending skills to illustrate Chinese culture in Democratic Education. As he writes, if a person is grasped by another, you just turn your wrist and follow the direction of your thumb. Then it is very easy to release your self. Even if the other one who is very strong, you just use your stronger muscle, i.e. posas. It still releases. Simply speaking, the learner needs to stay calm down and follow rationale, in Chinese word --Tao.

Marko Koskinen and Javier Bronchalo shared their work on the setting up of Online Democratic Learning and I was stuck by the concept of learners becoming knowledge constructors. They are in the process of transforming the national curriculum into questions and tasks where students can learn in their own way, in their own time and which can be as democratic as possible with a mandatory curriculum and students can network with other learners around the world.

Speaking of online – Marko and the organizers planned to have all the openspace workshops timetabled online and participants were expected to download the program on their devices, both to offer and find out what was happening. This was projected onto the wall but was difficult to read. Many people craved the old methods of paper pinned to the walls so gradually some democratic processes took over and people began to take charge of finding the ways to communicate which suited them best. Over the week a fairly pristine foyer of the school initially just with tables and computers (oh and of course all our shoes) was colonized and turned into a ‘messier’ but participant driven space.

With IDEC and EUDEC combined there were many schools present from Europe following the Sudbury Valley model. There has been a surge of start-ups and new schools, and that is a whole story in itself, which is too long to include here. In fact I think that the EUDEC AGM needs a separate report which I hope to do.

One of the threads running through the week both in workshops and conversations that I found of great interest is the passionately held views on both sides as to the processes of decision-making. In some schools and countries there is a strong culture of Sociocracy while others adhere to the more conventional one person one vote, majority rule decisions. I have been doing a little post conference reading about the development of this and found it helpful to understand Sociocracy as rule by the people who have a social relationship with each other – as opposed to [democracy](#), which is usually rule by the general mass of people. Many seem to assume that sociocracy equals consensus but in fact decisions are made more by consent, with a group reasoning together until a decision is reached that is satisfactory to each person. Consent is seen as ‘no objections’ and a willingness to work towards the aims of the group. I am sure there is much more to learn about the inner workings of this system but I like Sociocratisch Centrum co-founder Reijmer’s summary. “By consensus I must convince you that I am in the right; by consent, you ask whether you can live with the decision”

KEYNOTES

I would recommend that you look at the videos of the keynote speeches as they give a real time record of what was actually conveyed.

(www.idec2016.org - look at Program and then Videos)

In the following I attempt to summarise some of the points and issues, which captured my attention. The two full days of keynote speakers changed both the physical venue from the school to the very new modern conference centre

by the lake and the spirit of the conference to that of a more conventional, 'formal' event with its inevitable reduction of active participation. We had groups of lectures followed by a panel with those people plus a student included on each panel but not as a speaker. I can still enjoy listening to and understand the value of a well-constructed lecture, of the stories and research which can underpin our work. This format can be valuable in introducing new ideas to us and to others in the wider community but I have to admit I found these two days overwhelming and not consistent with the characteristics which we claim democratic education espouses. It felt as though power had shifted to the experts rather than the people. I want to acknowledge that this is one of my issues at the moment so my comments are to be seen in the context of that prejudice! As I said above one of the threads of the conference was attempting a considered look at the nature of our democratic education community and how it stacks up in regard to valuing ethnic, linguistic cultural, gender, differently-abled, age, class etc diversity and whether we are being genuinely inclusive.



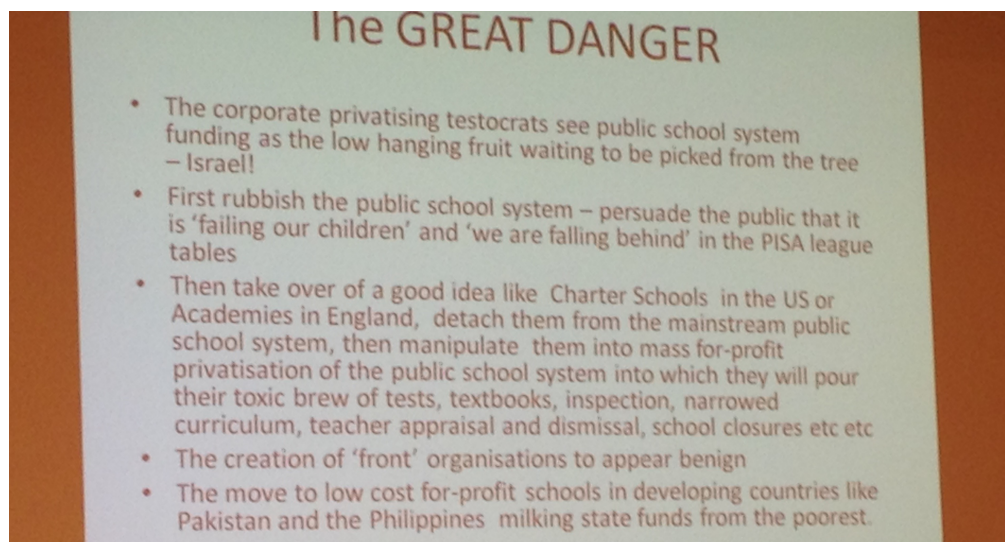
Chloe Duff, a former student and teacher at a democratic school and presently the coordinator of EUDEC, gave a timely and I think courageous critique of this as part of her keynote address and challenged us to find ways that democratic education could be free and available to all in the community regardless of their social and economic status and to not take for

granted the values of respect, equality and love. She asked us to look at the predominance of the older white male, mainly from western countries, who are most often invited to be the public face and voice of democratic education and the need to actively include many different voices and presences if we are going to be true to what we say.



Derry Hannam, (one of our older white males who I think is well worth being part of the mix), Inspector of Schools and Advisor to the Minister UK, continues to be a great believer in and champion of public education and in the Hannam Report he tells

of his research into English state secondary schools to encourage the Minister to support democratic participation and responsible action in the citizenship curriculum. He found that there were 42 ways some schools were more democratic than others and that the more democratic school had better results in examinations better attendance and less anti social behaviour. He is a fan of the public education of Finland for all of the reasons I have already mentioned and many others including their resistance to what he terms the diseased, toxic GERM, the Great Education Reform Movement of the US and UK (and Australia). I was very impressed by his analysis of the effects of what he calls the Testocracy and Big Edu. His slide can say it more accurately than my notes.



Derry spoke passionately of the need for all of us to be vigilant about the growing dominance of companies such as Pearson, and how much power the testing companies had developed all around the world. In some developing countries the governments have handed over the control of their education systems and this is something that is of major concern to them and I think for all of us and this was confirmed by other participants from countries in Africa, and India. We need a revolution! He articulates the urgent task as the need to advocate what democratic schools and education do as loudly as possible and pursue state funding so that it is as available and as inclusive as possible. To make friends and allies with the best and most potentially democratic educators and policy makers in our state systems. We need to publicise and help resist the Corporate Privatising for Profit Testocracy. Refusal and resistance is happening worldwide and the share prices are fluctuating and reducing so they are becoming nervous. He included ideas about Inspection including the experience of Summerhill and he pines for a GERM free public school system that could do without it altogether as is the case in Finland. He recommends a light touch along the lines of -

Is the school doing what it says it is doing?

Are the kids really 'free to learn?' Are resources or access to them in place in a non-coercive atmosphere? Does the peer culture coerce the passionate to hide their interests and passions or tolerate and encourage them to fly?

Are the kids safe (in a child protection sense)? Do the inspectors have the experience and imagination required? Are they comfortable 'hanging out' with the kids as a key part of the process?

Rachel Roberts, from UK and also a former student and teacher at democratic schools, used a more interactive style to look at the issue of shifting the future of education and interrogating the question, Can you embed democratic cultures in any school? She went beyond the usual concentration on the tool of meetings and looked at challenging and changing the values of those in the school community so that democratic practice would then be almost an automatic, inevitable conclusion as to how the school community acts.



Tae Wook Ha from South Korea gave a moving account of the effect of the Ferry disaster when many children drowned when they obeyed the captain and 'stayed still'. Many people have questioned the role of authoritarian education and culture in creating the climate where this was possible and are now looking for change. They no longer want to 'Stay Still! Democracy is not a spectator sport!



Kageki Asakura from Tokyo Shure in Japan reiterated the importance of democratic education particularly higher education, especially in the Japanese context of 170,000 who are refusing school but not refusing Education. He spoke of the growing effect of Hikikomori which is the social withdrawal of the young from society and life, with figures such as 153,000 staying at home. Japanese society is still focused on

efficiency, standards oriented and high expectations so that the people are divided, bullied, depressed and suicidal. He had a dream to make a democratic university with freedom to study what you are interested in, to get the self back, to know who I am and to create one's own lifestyle. He proposed the setting up an International Democratic University.

Justo Mendez and AnaYris from Puerto Rico reminded us again of the value and central place of love in democratic education and in engaging with those who have been troubled and marginalized.

The keynote speakers from Finland were Kirsti Lonka, Mauri Laakso and Lasse Leponiemi.



Kirsti, Professor of Educational Psychology at University of Helsinki, gave me much food for thought and the best joke of the conference. Some of the issues she raised included the realization that the modern work calls for collaborative knowledge creation, creative active citizens able to solve fuzzy problems in teams. Physical space, social settings and technologies can either hinder or scaffold our activities. School

engagement is declining drastically and is reflected in work disengagement. She questioned, Are we alienating our youth with old practices? She looked at the work of Rajala (2016) who, among other points, defines agency as the realized capacity of people to act upon and transform their activities and social circumstances.

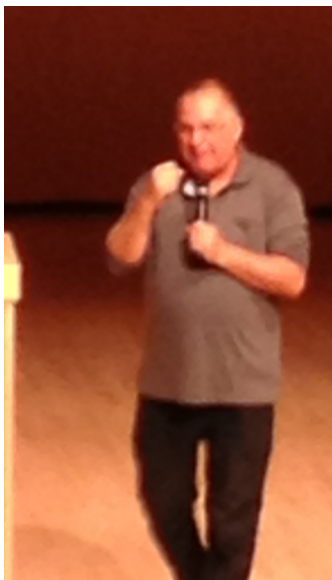
Learning involves a struggle over what counts as knowledge and whose knowledge counts. Teachers who aspire to foster student agency often find themselves caught between supporting this and the institutional demands of classroom management and transmission of knowledge. She alerted us to the Mind the Gap program. She looked at socio-digital technologies and socio-digital participation. Real readiness for advanced use of technologies is rarer amongst students especially in regard to school work. It is more for friendship entertainment, gaming orientated and creative participators.

Mauri related to us the experience of work he did with a group of students called Learning in the Magic Circle. This was in the form of a role play which resulted in participants having to make many decisions about how to live in this imaginary world. I kept thinking it would work so much more if we were creating the role play instead of just listening to it!

Lasse told us of the program that is being developed as a celebration of the Centenary of Finland as an independent country. It is called HundrED – the next 100 years of Finnish Education and it is supporting many creative and innovative projects, encouraging everyone as a change makers and finding ways to shift some of the negatives which are acknowledged in the Finnish system such as boredom, lack of engagement, stress and having ‘Too much PISA is in our head!’ This project will be worth keeping an eye on.



Henry Readhead, grandson of AS Neill, former student and now staff at Summerhill, in his easy, humourous way, with almost a hundred years of democratic education experience in the bank, spoke about the benefits of boarding school life and culture in allowing space for the child to live his or her own life. Life and school become one place. Social time is not battling with learning time. Boarding gives time to socialize and living together can mean that we push each other's boundaries and work out issues. Play is essential and issues can be dealt with quickly and easily. He sees Summerhill as a school which uses democracy to run the community.



Yaacov Hecht from Israel, when asked what is democratic education, now poses questions. What kind of education prepares for life in a democratic society? What kind of education will develop the future of democratic education? The networking society that he has been espousing for a long time points to possible ways to address these questions. Democratic Schools are different but classes are often traditional so we want to change this so that every student is a teacher and the group has a shared measureable goal and the transmitting teacher becomes a webbing, networking teacher learning with and from the world.

Sugata Mitra from UK and his Hole in the Wall experiment in India, champions the concept that children in groups have an understanding that is greater than that of each individual. With self-organizing systems, spontaneous order comes out of chaotic situations. The brain is not a computer, it is connection and memory is constructed all the time. He spoke of the setting up of "Granny Cloud," a global network of retired teachers who support children through an online School in the Cloud platform. As 'Grannies' the teachers are more like educational grandparents who listen and love unconditionally and are more hands off. The posing of big questions is meant to spark the curiosity of the learners and then drive all they do. By sharing the Self-Organized Learning Environment (SOLE) method with parents, teachers, after-school programs and communities worldwide, he hopes to transform the way kids learn.



Jerry Mintz from AERO in the USA led us on a walk through the history of democratic education.

He focussed on some of the key figures in that history and the trends and movements that have happened over the last 100 plus years.

John Kennedy Ormandi Oranjo from Kenya gave an outline of the issues involved in attempting to teach equality in an unequal society. At St Charles Lwanga Children's Centre and Secondary School Nairobi Kenya, children came to brother's house for food and were passing it to others so he started to gather them and create a school. Education was more about colonial training and education for manual labour. It was very fixed so no options for those who do not pass. Some people are committing suicide when they cannot reach the marks to pass. Education system can be a death warrant. He wanted to do something about those who do not pass. What we need is love and rehabilitation through access to education. There is a possibility that IDEC may happen in Kenya in 2019 so some of us may be able to experience this for ourselves first hand.



There was also an unscheduled talk added to the program by Khalilur Rahman about the educational situation in South Africa and the similar problems about inequality in life and education

In his presentation Gertjan Kleinpaste from the Netherlands looked at how to balance empathy, ICT and Nature. Individualism has grown too fast and the communal has been reduced. We need to ask, How is your behaviour in relation to others? He feels that democratic school are better equipped for developing relationships with each other and with the natural world.

John Moravec also from the UAS ran a session on Invisible Learning and how we create learning communities. Again networking was a key element here.

Learning is often non-formal, serendipitous. We learn just because we are curious. Nature had developed all the answers we need. In ten years time we won't have classes. It is Important to dream or you can't do any thing.

One evening we had a screening of Margarete Hentze's film "Freistunde - Doing Nothing All Day." A fictional mother and child search for a school where they can be free and delve into the history of democratic education along the way. It was very well worth seeing.

<https://doingnothingalldayengl.wordpress.com/>

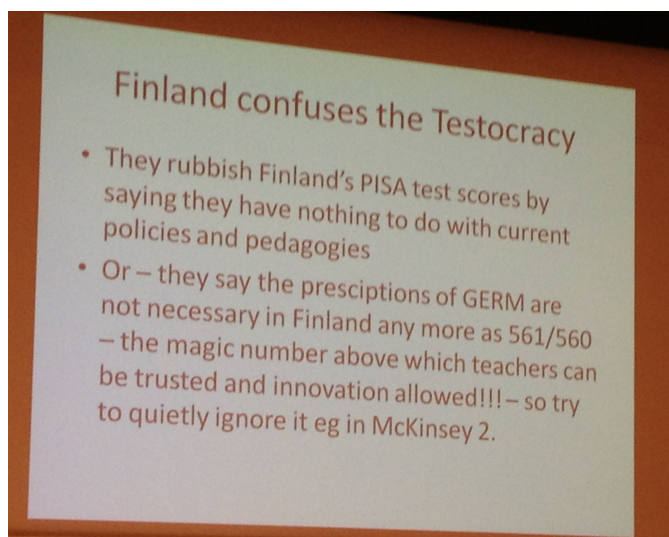
IDEC MEETINGS

We attempted to have a meeting each day but and had an agenda that we were trying to work through. The main issue decided was that Organisers of IDECs are asked to make the finances and costs of IDEC transparent. The meetings then became focused on the need to deal with the fact that Nepal had sent word that because of the after effects of the Earthquake they could not be ready to host in 2018. A decision was not reached while we were in Finland.

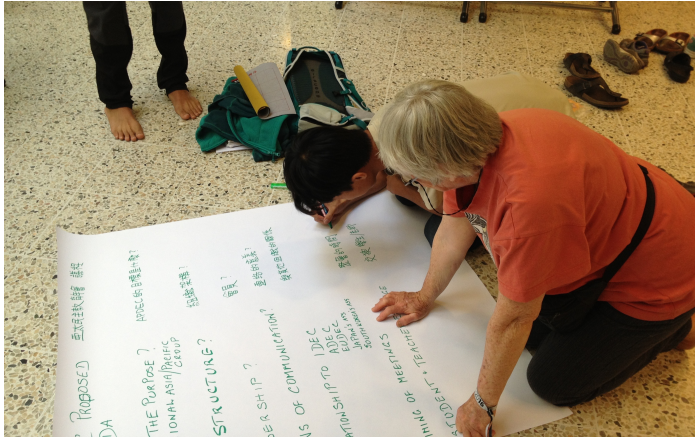


Organisers of IDEC2017 at the meeting attended by all previous IDEC Organisers present in Finland. This was a great review of the past IDECs and hopefully was a support to the next group.

IDEC2017 is being held in Israel from 29th March till the 6th April 2017
Please look at www.idec2017.org for more information.



Another of Derry's slides to consider.



Cec and Ray from Holistic School in Taiwan preparing the agenda for the APDEC meeting. We were able to Skype with Phenix in Taiwan and this gave everyone an opportunity to contribute his or her ideas for the 1st APDEC meetings.



Tae Wook Ha from South Korea, Cecelia Bradley from ADEC, Chloe Duff from EUDEC and Robert from Liberia having lunch on the last day and discussing the ways Democratic Education may work and help in his country.



Cecelia Bradley (ADEC), Michael Richardson and Sue Goode from Currumbena, farewell each other and Mikkeli, Finland. Thanks for sharing it with me!



Sign at the entrance to a riverside café in Turku the old capital of Finland.

Report written by Cecelia Bradley, 2016

