

# Democratic Schooling as an antidote to traditional Swedish education



## **i. Introduction**

If one takes the time to study the history of education and schooling in the West over the last 200 years, one is struck by the mountain of philosophies, sociological theories, psychological explanations, linguistic studies and political meanderings that vie for significance in understanding the phenomena of modern education. Whereas it may be intellectually gratifying to dwell on the arguments of theorists, in the same way as it is pleasing to grapple with a crossword puzzle, the authors of this paper are more interested in the practical implications of these theories for the present day. As voting citizens and parents, school is a significant aspect of our lives and one we are in part responsible for. This is most apparent in the run up to a general election. Teachers, parents and politicians become at turns impassioned, inspired, outraged and fed up with the current situation and the current proposals. In Sweden there is currently a political dearth of ideas for schooling. The Right has the high-ground, beating the drum of order, inspection and discipline, and the Left meekly mirrors their aims with an apparently "fairer" underlying approach. One thing is clear from the history of the last 200 years; problems and concerns faced by those engaged in improving schooling have remained remarkably similar. Despite the fact that society has metamorphosised during this time, we argue that schooling has remained, at its root, robustly unchanged. The evident engagement in the subject of schooling prior to an election shows itself in a flurry of politically motivated plans and ideologies, but if you cast your mind back to what it was actually like in the classroom, the relevance of these arguments becomes distinctly weak. The gap between daily life for a kid in school, and current political proposals for the school system, is similar to the gap between traditional research and ethnographic studies. In the words of those who have been involved with ethnographic studies in school:

*The point is that traditional research of the classroom, with its uncritical basis in the school system's objectives and norms, doesn't get at what actually happens in school – and thereby cannot provide a critique of those objectives and norms, or an understanding of the outcomes of the school system.<sup>1</sup>*

It is our experience, in agreement with Ken Robinson<sup>2</sup>, that whenever the subject of School is raised, be it in political or private conversation, or in written studies since the dawn of the industrial era, the general tendency is to list, describe, give evidence of, or analyse the many aspects of school life that do not work; that have failed to live up to their expectations, or have even created more harm than good – either on a personal level or in terms of the wider effect on society at large. The proposed solutions to the problems of today's school are old and stale, and fail to address the fundamental issue: we no longer live in the same society that our model of schooling was created for. Society has changed

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<sup>1</sup> Bjerg, J. (Red.) (2000). *Pedagogik. En grundbok*. Stockholm: Liber. (p. 240). JW's translation.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Ken Robinson: Do Schools Kill Creativity? A talk at the TED conference 2006.

irrevocably since the beginning of the Industrial era; doesn't our understanding of schooling also require a genuinely radical change? And if so, what are we going to do about it?

## **ii. Democratic Schooling and the Sudbury Model**

To that end we propose that traditional education in general, and Swedish compulsory schooling in particular, should take significant practical steps to foster an alternative movement in education, that in modern times arguably began with the writings of Henry Thoreau in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, saw some realization in Dewey's Laboratory School at the University of Chicago around 1900, and was definitively born in England with A.S. Neill's Summerhill in 1921. The label for this movement is Democratic Schooling, which places the rights of the child very high up in its ethos. We further consider the founding of Sudbury Valley School in the USA in 1968 a distinguishing moment in this movement's development, and believe the Sudbury model (as it has since become known) to be the most robust, dynamic and inspiring embodiment of the ideal, and the one best suited to our current society. While it is true that a Sudbury school is part of the Democratic Schooling movement, and that every Sudbury school is based on government by direct democracy where every individual irrespective of age has equal voting rights in all decisions affecting the school, it should however be noted that not all Democratic schools are Sudbury schools. A Sudbury school is democratic to the core, and insists on the inalienable right of every one in the community to pursue his or her own interests to their fullest extent, so long as this does not infringe on the same freedom of the other individuals in the community. It is this principle, together with the practices of a living democracy, which form the rules and shape the structures of a Sudbury school. It is therefore in accordance with this principle that a Sudbury school does not adopt any externally divined curriculum, or offer any "objective" grading, or insist that lessons according to age segregation are the best way to teach. Staff are available to help and facilitate the student's learning if the latter so wishes, and facilities are provided within the means of the school. In short, children from age 4 and up are free to choose what they want to do, all day long, and their behaviour is only limited by the confines of the genuinely democratic rules established to preserve the school community. We believe that the lack of this alternative in Sweden is both an indication of the system's inability to adapt to the "real" world outside of education, and a disservice to the many parents and children who struggle with the myriad problems caused by or aggravated by traditional schooling every day – see the contributions of Bergman, Granath, Liedman and Hill in *Ord & Bild*<sup>3</sup>, to name but a few. It is also important to clarify here that, given that one of the primary foundations of a Sudbury school is the integrity of personal choice, we do not argue that all children should attend a Sudbury school. We argue that it is a system which

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<sup>3</sup> Romhed, R. (Red.) (2006). *Ord & Bild. Tema Skolan. Nr 3-4.* (pp. 33-38, 78-90, 100-106, 106-116)

promotes self-confidence, allows self-exploration, develops a practical and deep-seated sense of community, illustrates and fosters the concept of responsibility, nourishes the innate desire to learn and celebrates independence and creativity – and for all those reasons is better suited to the world at large that children move into when they graduate, than traditional schooling. But we do not insist that it is the right or best choice for all.

### **iii. Traditional School and its foundations**

In a study across ten schools and about 1200 students in different regions referred to in Anderssons *Spräng skolan!*<sup>4</sup>, roughly 1/3 of students described themselves as “Hating school.” Another 1/3 described themselves as “Loving school,” whereas the remainder were either generally indifferent or found themselves in one or the other camp according to how conditions changed – teachers, subjects, classmates etc. One does not have to have studied Pedagogy to know that school has been and still is be a very damaging experience for a significant number of children, and literature on the subject offers many explanations as to why.

It is generally accepted that the establishment of compulsory schooling as a social and political reality was the result of society’s increasing industrialization. Lindensjö & Lundgren talk of the separation of production and reproduction in this context<sup>5</sup>, and Wästerfors clearly describes the interests of the different elements in society – the Church, farmers and the ruling classes – when Folkskolan was introduced in 1842:

*Folkskolan had its beginnings in a dramatic 19<sup>th</sup> century characterized by change, the dissolution of villages, industrialization and an enormous increase in population. The biggest increase was among the lower classes; crofters, peasants, serfs, farm hands and maids. An agricultural proletariat was being created – and, from the point of view of the ruling classes, a problem of order.*<sup>6</sup>

Or in other, altogether more sinister words of a significant figure of the period, namely Crown Prince Oscar:

*In North America, the rich and better educated, known there as Aristocrats, consider that the only way to protect their wealth from the raw desire of the masses is to advance their education, and provide significant funds towards that aim.*<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Andersson B. (1999) *Spräng Skolan!*, Jönköping: Brain Books. (pp. 20-34)

<sup>5</sup> Lindensjö, B., & Lundgren, U. (2006) *Utbildningsreformer och politisk styrning*. Stockholm: HLS Förlag. (p. 15)

<sup>6</sup> Wästerfors, D. (2008). *Skolstart – när folkskolan kom till byn*. (pp. 1-6)

<sup>7</sup> UR Film; *När vi sitta i vår bänk*. Quote Crown Prince Oskar under the signature of “R” i *Posttidningen*, 1842.

In an insight on the effect of the ruling classes' wishes, Wästerfors states that

*School's demand for order and discipline [...] would grow to become an overriding principle.*<sup>8</sup>

It is arguable that this demand served industrialization well – people were needed to operate like automatons, standing by machinery in loud and dirty factory environments for long hours in the day, exercising “the three Rs” (reading, writing and arithmetic) literally in service to the machinery of production – and the gains of the capitalist classes that owned them. Or as Kata Dalström, author and one of the workers' rights movement's key figures, sharply expressed it in 1907:

*Those in power have taken advantage of Folkskolan to serve themselves, and used it as a dressage institution for the masses' children, where they must learn submission and devotion.*<sup>9</sup>

It was important for the wealthy that the masses learn from an early age to sit still, only speak when they are spoken to, and limit their own creativity or independent thinking as much as possible. It is not for nothing that the Victorian epithet about children, “They should be seen but not heard” came from a society that bred a mass workforce of machinists.

#### **iv. The relative nature of knowledge – and traditional school's dogmatic approach**

The masses were not required to think, but to carry out orders. This principle, despite occasional anomalies of reform – Ingelög, Den Nya Skolan 1934<sup>10</sup>, for example – and despite efforts of many theorists and practitioners, is one that seems impossible to shake off. Gustafsson, with Jackson's phrase “The Hidden Curriculum”<sup>11</sup> offers many insights into the unofficial role of school<sup>12</sup>, and Lennart Mogren, in 2003 a retired teacher of 30 years, opens his book *Sluta skolan!* with:

*Obedience. That is School's objective.*<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Wästerfors, D. (2008). *Skolstart – när folkskolan kom till byn*. (pp. 1-6)

<sup>9</sup> UR Film; *När vi sitta i vår bänk*. Quote Kata Dahlström.

<sup>10</sup> Lindensjö, B., & Lundgren, U. (2006) *Utbildningsreformer och politisk styrning*. Stockholm: HLS Förlag. (p. 5) *Other efforts have been made to start schools in Sweden that prioritised the children's democratic rights, but they were short lived. Experimentgymnasiet in Göteborg was one, Sebor Skola in Borlänge was more recent, and appears to have been badly and provocatively managed.*

<sup>11</sup> Jackson, P. (1968) *Life in Schools*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. (pp. 1-178)

<sup>12</sup> Gustafsson, B. (odaterat). *Marx, Gramsci, Bourdieu och Bernstein om reproduktion*. Utdrag ur avhandlingsmanus om Den dolda läroplanen. Göteborg: Göteborgs universitet. (pp. 189-228)

<sup>13</sup> Mogren, L. (2003) *Sluta Skolan!* Visby: Books-on-demand (p. 5)

According to Britta Nørgaard, even Thomas Ziehe, a pedagogue renowned for his work as a teacher – that is to say his practice of the subject – believed:

*that in terms of pedagogy we have tried to an ever larger extent to follow young people without this having led to the best results – not in the arena of knowledge, nor in the social or the subjective arenas.*<sup>14</sup>

In addition to the questions about which purposes school actually serves, there has been extensive research into and analysis of the process of learning. Not only is there debate about which knowledge is “important” – the chapter on Kanon in *Ord & Bild*<sup>15</sup> offers many arguments in that respect – but how we as individuals accept and assimilate knowledge is highly debated. Sociologists such as Bernstein<sup>16</sup> and others discuss the significance of social background on the interpretation of language and hence the ability to progress in school; Foucault discusses the inherent dynamics of power and discipline, again clarifying the relevance of physical techniques used in school (ordered seating, classification of time and space) to serve discipline and order<sup>17</sup>, and Hermann in his analysis of Foucault offers modes of adjusting these traditions in order to benefit learning<sup>18</sup>. In his book on the subject, Knud Illeris provides nearly unending examples of varying theories on the process of learning<sup>19</sup>. In a feat of what might be considered profound absurdity, politicians and pedagogues attempt to nail down one system that will suit all. If history and human experience has shown us anything, it is that people learn, develop and understand in different ways, and at different rates. Given that the industrial age is a thing of the past for our society, the legitimacy of a school that has attempted to institutionalise obedience and minimise free thinking, is in our view absolutely indefensible. If one argues that schools do in fact impart knowledge (as opposed to reinforcing social order), does not the history of the mind make it clear that knowledge itself is a subjective thing? In the steady march towards increasing productivity and hence profits, Science gained a growing significance and authority – particularly as the influence of the Church began to wane. Positivism became society’s guiding light, and Science provided the empirical evidence of its value. The 20<sup>th</sup> century, arguably the highest point of the Age of Science, was also the age that discovered, through physicist’s creative

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<sup>14</sup> Olesen, S. G. & Pedersen, P. M. (red.) (2000). *Pedagogik i ett sociologiskt perspektiv*. Lund: Studentlitteratur. (p. 212)

<sup>15</sup> Romhed, R. (Red.) (2006). *Ord & Bild. Tema Skolan*. Nr 3-4 (pp. 116-127).

<sup>16</sup> Bjerg, J. (Red.) (2000). *Pedagogik. En grundbok*. Stockholm: Liber. (pp. 250).

<sup>17</sup> Olesen, S. G. & Pedersen, P. M. (red.) (2000). *Pedagogik i ett sociologiskt perspektiv*. Lund: Studentlitteratur. (pp. 89-93)

<sup>18</sup> Olesen, S. G. & Pedersen, P. M. (red.) (2000). *Pedagogik i ett sociologiskt perspektiv*. Lund: Studentlitteratur. (pp. 102-110)

<sup>19</sup> Illeris, Knud (2001). *Lärande i mötet mellan Piaget, Freud och Marx*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

thinkers, that light (indeed not just light, but even atoms and molecules<sup>20</sup>) is both a particle and a wave. This is important. It is not that it can behave like either a particle or a wave under different conditions, but that it behaves like both, simultaneously. Some of these same physicists have also discovered, right in the citadel of positivism, that the very act of establishing an experiment affects the behavior of the forces being examined<sup>21</sup>. So just how objective is science? We are urged to write this paper in a “scientific” way, which seemingly automatically imbues it with a credibility that it would otherwise lack; though we are well aware that in particular the Social Sciences are highly subjective ones. That is not to say that one cannot make observations, draw parallels between phenomena, and make conclusions that appear to be based on something other than an individual whim. But if the aim of science is to establish the truth, then the Social Sciences have proved beyond all doubt, as a vast body of literature shows, that truth is far from absolute.

For example, there is now ample research which strongly suggests that what is taught is very different from what is learnt, and that one individual cannot make another learn – learning comes as a result of one’s own motivation. Anyone who has ever sat in a classroom can’t really deny that – one’s retention (read understanding and interpretation) of information is closely connected to one’s personal circumstances. Yet in his summary of Humanism’s view of knowledge, Bjerg describes how it developed through history and even influenced curricula in England in the 1960s, to the extent that students were often left on their own to investigate a point of interest in connection with the subject. In striking contrast to the now widely accepted research, he then asserts:

*Such a “research orientated” approach is of course a waste of time in school, where understanding of scientific principles is learned more quickly and more effectively through the teacher's direct instruction.*<sup>22</sup>

Undoubtedly some people have the capacity to, as Romhed quotes, “*Cram in study guide stuff*”<sup>23</sup>, but how much of this leads to understanding or development is another matter. Others simply don’t have that ability. Others still may have that ability, but under the condition of being forced to do it, they refuse to do so; or they even take pride in doing it badly. In contrast to Bjerg, we believe that quite the best way to gain knowledge, is to choose the subject of study oneself, and examine it in whatever ways appeal. We also believe that humans are learners by nature, and given the opportunity to pursue their interests without the constant

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<sup>20</sup> Greiner, W. (2001) *Quantum Mechanics: an introduction*. Berlin: Springer verlag.

<sup>21</sup> Goswami, A. (1993) *The Self-Aware Universe – how consciousness creates the material world*. New York: Penguin Putnam Inc.

<sup>22</sup> Bjerg, J. (Red.) (2000). *Pedagogik. En grundbok*. Stockholm: Liber. (p. 23).

<sup>23</sup> Romhed, R. (Red.) (2006). *Ord & Bild. Tema Skolan*. Nr 3-4 (p.164).

interference from administrators, politicians and teachers who apparently know what is best for everyone under the age of 18, would do so with pleasure and intensity. Instead the average child in Sweden spends more than 8000 hours in compulsory school lessons – if one considers the actual information one remembers or uses in later life, one could well call that “**waste of time**”<sup>24</sup>. Or, in the words of others who put it very succinctly:

*Traditional education focuses on teaching, not learning. It incorrectly assumes that for every ounce of teaching there is an ounce of learning by those who are taught. However, most of what we learn before, during, and after attending schools is learned without it being taught to us. [...] Most of what is taught in classroom settings is forgotten, and much of what is remembered is irrelevant.*<sup>25</sup>

#### v. The masquerade of grading

There has been much discussion of standardized grading, and its use in education. One often comes across bizarre defences of grading; for example, in a recent discussion we had with other students of Pedagogy, the need for grading was argued by comparing it with 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> places in the context of orienteering competitions, and competitive sport in general – without results, there can be no winners. We find it amusing how the statement “Grades in school are counter-productive to learning” often triggers retorts such as “Do you mean to say that you don’t approve of driving tests?” Not only is the logic faulty, but the subtext is that if we radically change something in school, all hell will break loose – in other words, be afraid! School is the Guardian of Order! Enter Major Björklund with his populist appeal to the easily-led masses... We believe that not only standardized grading should be abolished, but the entire curriculum should go with it. The whole process of learning in school is done under duress; it is subject knowledge we are led to believe is important rather than anything we have ourselves identified as meaningful – for the majority of people, subject matter and means of studying are imposed, together with artificial timescales for studying that have no relation to the individual’s process of understanding. Under such a system, grading only refers to the relationship between the individual and his or her experience of the system; put another way, it denotes the will and/or the ability of the student to play the game,

*the intricate game whose basis is that one asks, answers and has discussions with the aim of transferring or assessing knowledge, not because one has actual questions*

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<sup>24</sup> Greenberg, D. (1995) *Free at Last!* Framingham: Sudbury Valley School Press. (pp. 15-18) *After a group of children of mixed ages at Sudbury Valley School decided they really wanted to learn algebra, Greenberg taught them: “In twenty weeks, after twenty contact hours, they had covered it all. Six years’ worth. Every one of them knew the material cold.”*

<sup>25</sup> Ackoff, R. L. & Greenberg, D. (2008), *Turning learning right side up*. New Jersey: Pearson Education Inc. (p. 3)

*and answers that feel important to think through.*<sup>26</sup>

This is a view expressed widely amongst classroom researchers, including Staf Callewaert in the second episode of *När vi sitta i vår bänk*. That is not to deny that many systems of knowledge are progressive, whereby some aspects need to be understood before others. But it is to say that a standardized delivery – often poorly delivered by teachers if the comments from many of our seminars’ participants and interviewees are to be believed – of stuff, in an unnatural environment based on social control, is an invalid framework in which to assess an individual’s ability to learn or to understand. And the grades that result from this process reflect the psychological and sociological variables at play in the classroom to a much greater degree than the ability of the individual to successfully acquire knowledge.<sup>27</sup> Jan Gustafsson has highlighted the reasons why discussion of The Hidden Curriculum is important, and these points apply equally to the question of grading in particular as they do to the institution of school in general:

- *everybody is affected by it*
- *it works against the official curriculum*
- *it is not decided upon through democratic means*
- *it is by its nature anti-democratic*<sup>28</sup>

A standardized curriculum contributes to suffocating peoples’ innate desire to learn. This is not the same as saying standards are negative – without them, manufacturing would be inefficient, consumers would be less assured of getting value for money, physical man-made structures would be less reliable. But given that human beings – yes, that includes children – are not machines, components in the manufacturing process, or empty entities ready to be filled up with stuff and shipped off to market as completed products, they all learn differently. They are interested in different things. They learn at different rates. This concept seems to be more conceivable when related to adults – we have hobbies where our curiosity and intensity is unending, and the range of interests enormous; we have different tastes in food and music, we have different choices of friends and religious beliefs. Whereas on the whole these things are accepted, and even celebrated as part of adult life, not so for children in school. And here we come to our most passionate point of all. It is our belief that traditional school is based on a perverse and prejudiced view of children and childhood, even if it can be excused or understood historically through the evolution of society.

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<sup>26</sup> Romhed, R. (Red.) (2006). *Ord & Bild. Tema Skolan. Nr 3-4* (p. 108).

<sup>27</sup> Ahlberg, I. (red.) (2009). *Specialpedagogisk forskning. En mångfacetterad utmaning*. Lund: Studentlitteratur. (pp. 319-337)

<sup>28</sup> Gustafsson, J. (2010-03-31) Lecture on “*Utbildning för det moderna samhället*”. (slide 26)

## **vi. Traditional school is based on inequality and an out-dated view of children**

Gender equality and equality between the classes are often recurring themes in literature studying schooling. In their history of educational reform, Lundgren & Lindensjö describe the political struggle from the 1880s onwards to establish a school for all in Sweden. The idea had a significant early champion in Fridtjuv Berg:

*the split in our education system divides peoples' sensibilities, as well as suffocates and suppresses the only power that has been able to and can unite man in society; sympathy.*<sup>29</sup>

This was the political story of the struggle for equal educational opportunities between the classes. Not only was it a long time in coming – it became practice in 1962 – but even after its inception the class divide remained largely unaffected. Working class boys prepare for working class jobs in practical vocations, whereas the children of the educated middle classes choose theoretical sciences for jobs as well paid professionals. Lundgren & Lindensjö state:

*But with reference to the complexity of the aim [equal right to education] – equal access, equal opportunities, equal aims, equal teaching, equal results, equal assessment and equal outcomes, equal amount of education, the right to education according to circumstances and variations in individuals' talent and interests, as well as the differing nature of the needs of working life – one must in the end, in spite of everything, give pupils differing educations.*<sup>30</sup>

And rather more plainly:

*“the ideal of equal opportunities” is in practice impossible to realise.*<sup>31</sup>

This indicates that despite political will and academic research, there is no such thing as a) one size fits all, or b) that school as an institution can influence the structures of society. The fact that in 1914 money allocated by the state annually to each student in *Folkskolan* was 15,31 SEK, whereas that allocated to each student in *Läroverket* was 248 SEK – a full 16 times as much – should indicate who was considered worthy of educating. Daniel Kallós<sup>32</sup> confirms the failure of traditional school to solve problems of inequality, believing we should ask which interests have driven the institution of school, are they

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<sup>29</sup> UR Film; *När vi sitta i vår bänk*. Quote Fridtjuv Berg, *Folkskolan såsom bottenskola*, 1883.

<sup>30</sup> Lindensjö, B. & Lundgren, U. (2006) *Utbildningsreformer och politisk styrning*. Stockholm: HLS Förlag. (p. 88)

<sup>31</sup> Lindensjö, B. & Lundgren, U. (2006) *Utbildningsreformer och politisk styrning*. Stockholm: HLS Förlag. (p. 87)

<sup>32</sup> UR Film; *När vi sitta i vår bänk*. Daniel Kallós Professor Emeritus, University of Umeå

*interests which fundamentally transform this society, or interests which fundamentally cement and maintain this society?*<sup>33</sup>

The treatment of children by adults generally, and particularly in school, as lesser citizens is considered somewhat taboo even today. Gunilla Granath does address this issue, as well as the different expectations of girls and boys in class, and shows that children as subject are often denied the common rights and decencies afforded adults in our society<sup>34</sup>. Andersen's is one of the few chapters in Bjerg's *Pedagogy* where this is raised in more detail. He concludes:

*Pedagogues and teachers are expected in ever increasing degrees to have to conduct themselves towards children as freestanding individuals – as citizens – in a childhood that doesn't grant them any particular rights or responsibilities. And this contradiction is not actually expressed very often or very clearly.*<sup>35</sup>

Even amongst those involved at higher-education level in the study of learning, we have encountered eye-opening views of children. All of these statements were made by either students or staff in the Department of Pedagogy at Gothenburg's University in 2010:

- *If you don't force them to do anything, they'll just sit around and eat pizza all day*
- *If you don't force them to do things they are not interested in, they'll miss the chance to experience things that are good for them*
- *If you let them choose what they want to do, they'll graduate into society without being able to understand that busses run to a timetable*
- *If you don't force them to do maths, they won't be able to move forward in life at all*
- *If you don't try and manipulate them through grades and other sorting methods, they'll all want to be doctors*
- *If you allow children to choose on their own terms, they'll get lost – I feel overwhelmed by choice as an adult*
- *A child of six cannot know what he or she wants, nor what is good for him or her in the long run*

Well, in response to this last one, a child of six may have different priorities to that of an adult of 30, but does it mean they are any less valid? Does it not mean that they are in the process of understanding the world around them, and assessing their needs and desires in relation to it? What happens if we as adults repress that process, and then when they leave school expect them to interact competently and responsibly with their environment? Society is changing fast. It is said that in 2016, the largest English speaking nation in the world will be China. Some statisticians argue that the average western teenager

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<sup>33</sup> UR Film; *När vi sitta i vår bänk*. Quote Daniel Kallós

<sup>34</sup> Romhed, R. (Red.) (2006). *Ord & Bild. Tema Skolan*. Nr 3-4 (pp. 84-85).

<sup>35</sup> Bjerg, J. (Red.) (2000). *Pedagogik. En grundbok*. Stockholm: Liber. (p. 375).

of today will have had 14 jobs before they reach 40, and that most of those jobs do not exist today. One may well ask, then, which adult has the right to presume what is best for a child to learn?

From a film made for the centenary of Folkskolan in 1942, amidst many glad faces of children enrolling for the first time and writing their name on a blank sheet of paper, the narrator states “*The child itself is an unwritten page*”. It is this view of children as empty vessels that require filling with the “right” knowledge that is in some part responsible for the resistance met by teachers throughout school’s history – and it still prevails even today. Hence there is a curriculum and a timetable.

We would encourage the adoption of Sudbury schools in Sweden as an important step towards educating for the future, where children are considered as people too, and where, as has been shown abroad over many years, students enjoy

***at the very least, the full range of life choices available to every other group of young people going out into the world. And they enjoy a childhood of freedom, respect and trust.***<sup>36</sup>

And yet, in 2009, when pressed on this very issue, a representative of Minister for Education Jan Björklund summarised the political position and justified their refusal to properly consider this model:

***There is [...] broad consensus in parliament that School should be of equal value and founded on commonly held beliefs and values.***<sup>37</sup>

School ought to be of equal value to all, but it clearly never has been, and probably never will be.

Where does that leave our children?

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<sup>36</sup> Greenberg, D. & Sadofsky, M. (1991) *Legacy of Trust*. Framingham: Sudbury Valley School Press. (p. 250)

<sup>37</sup> Utbildningsdepartementet Sweden; Erik Scheller (2009-12-06) *Letter to Jim Whiteford*.