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И ЛОКАЛЬНЫЙ АСПЕКТЫ**

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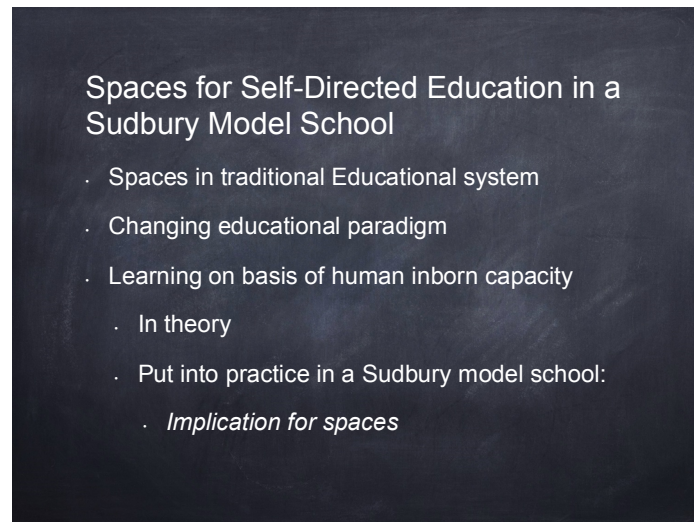


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Кафедра социальных коммуникаций**

THE AGE-MIXING AND FREE CHOICE MODEL OF EDUCATION: HOW DO THESE SCHOOLS LOOK LIKE AND WHAT KIND OF SPACES IS NEEDED TO SUPPORT THIS MODEL OF EDUCATION?

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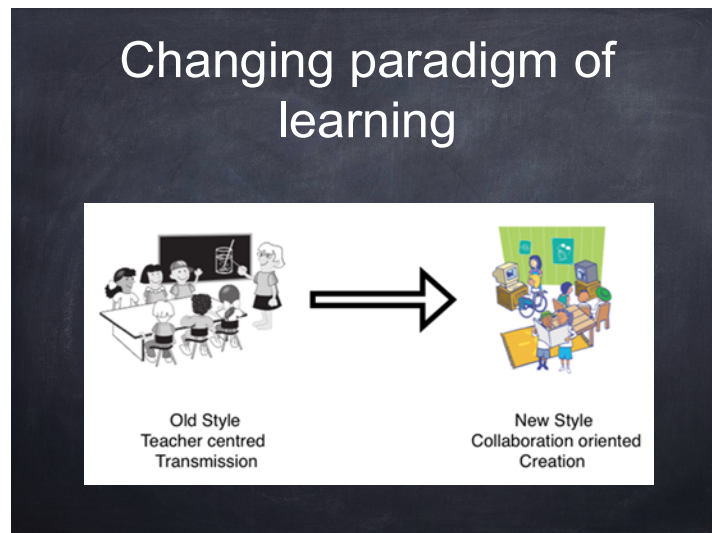
Hello! Thank you very much for being here. I am really happy to contribute! I will talk about Sudbury schools and spaces for self-directed education within these schools.



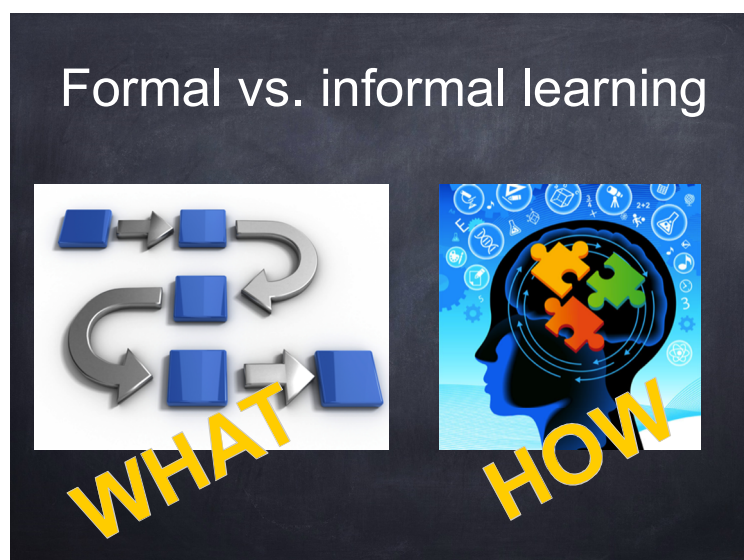
How do these spaces in traditional educational systems look like? We are so used to schools and education from historic perspective that, in order to understand how Sudbury Model Schools are organized, we need to think differently about the educational paradigm. We have to change our vision on how education could look like in the other way as well. Then I will dive into a little bit of theory behind how humans are having this inborn capacity of learning, and where that is coming from; what theories support this self-directed education, and how that is put into practice in a Sudbury model school; what is the implication for this type of education in the spaces not only within these schools but also in general, and how students learn in these schools.



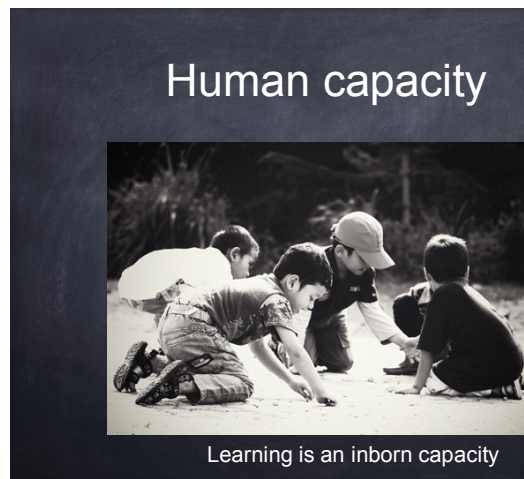
So, thinking about education in schools, we are so used to mainstream schools anywhere in the world, because they are based on the historically grown tradition. The characteristics of this system are that learning happens in prescribed places, in age groups, where the teacher actually transfers the knowledge, and where the classrooms are separated from other classrooms and also from the outside world; where students have no voice, and no choice; where the whole organization is very hierarchical. Obviously, whether that was in very ancient times or now – the spaces actually look similar everywhere in the world when you come in these schools.



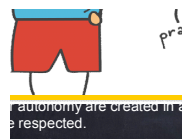
But today we are actually in a transition time. We know that we have to change, and you see this in many countries. Countries are looking for different ways to teach children. The old style teacher-centered transmission doesn't really function anymore, students become demotivated, and we are looking for different ways and options to teach the children. The new style of thinking is already more personalized education, looking for collaboration-oriented creation of knowledge together, rather than the transferal of knowledge from a "top-down" structure.



We move from more formal education into more informal learning. The formal learning was characterized as structured sequential supply-driven learning from a preset curriculum, in which the learning is the responsibility of a teacher. And now we move to more informal learning spaces characterized by random demand-driven learning with a personalized curriculum, in which learning is the responsibility of a learner, and the emphasis shifts from WHAT to learn to HOW to learn.



Learning, if you look at this, is an inborn capacity. Learning happens everywhere, in any situations, and even here when I'm taking – you all maybe learning and you don't even notice it. You probably are listening because you are motivated, because you are really interested in the things that I talk about. I hope so.



This autonomous motivation is the best driver for learning. Optimal conditions for autonomy are created in a surrounding in which personal goals and choices are respected. Autonomous motivation can thrive, when supported in an autonomy supportive context.

Relevant Learning Theories

- **Social-constructivism** (e.g. Dewey, Vygotsky, Bruner and Asubel)
 - Emphasizes the importance of a genuine and social context.
- **Evolutionary Developmental Psychology** (e.g. Bjorklund, Geary, Gray, Lancy)
 - Human learning mechanisms are strongly evolutionary determined.
 - Children are hardwired to learn, especially through play and exploration through observation and imitation, through discourse and narratives, and their cognitive immaturity serves their learning.
- **Self-Determination Theory** (Deci and Ryan)
 - Autonomy, Competence and Relatedness in support of intrinsic motivation
- **Situated Learning Theory** (Lave and Wenger)
 - The learning context is defined by voluntary participation in a caring, social environment (a community of practice) and by a free interaction between people of different ages in that environment.

Learning theories that are relevant in this type of education when we speak about Sudbury school or Sudbury model education are based on social-constructivism, where the emphasis is laid on learning in a genuine and social context. It's based on evolutionary developmental psychology, where it's actually said that humans are learning mechanisms, and this is evolutionary determined. Children are hardwired to learn, and they learn especially through play and exploration, through observation and imitation, trying out things through talking with each other, having conversations and discussions, and listening to stories. Their cognitive immaturity serves their learning – it's what Bjorklund says. And actually Bjorklund warns us for not rushing children through their childhood. It's also based on self-determination theory by Deci and Ryan, which I have already mentioned. The support for intrinsic motivation is actually supported by the basic needs for autonomy, for competence and for relatedness. And this is inherited in every person in the world. It's also based on the theory of situated learning by Lave and Wenger, where they stress that the learning context is defined by voluntary participation into a caring social environment (a community of practice), and by a free interaction between people of different ages in that environment.

Educational philosophy of a Sudbury school

The educational philosophy of Sudbury model schools is based on the innate attributes of mankind:

The social need to connect to other people, the need to lead a meaningful life and the notion that humans are naturally motivated to learn.

Ackoff, R. L., & Greenberg, D. A. (2008). *Turning learning right side up: putting education back on track* (1st ed.). Upper Saddle River, N.J., U.S.A.: Prentice Hall, Inc.

How is the educational philosophy of Sudbury school defined? It is said that the social need to connect to other people, the need to lead a meaningful life and the notion that humans are naturally motivated to learn are the basic ideas of a Sudbury model school. Sudbury model schools have built on the ideas that social connection, interactive environments and equality in the community is a breathing ground for natural learning and self-development.



And it needs the genuine context. Doing is the objective - not learning. In this context the school is real. It sets the boundaries for exploration, for all kinds of activities: playing, talking, exploration of things, doing and observing things, carrying out tasks, and that's the way people learn. They learn from each other, not by teachers or adults who are in the neighborhood, but especially from other children who are older and younger, because they are showing what you need to know, what competences they already have in life, and what you really would desire to learn.

Characteristics of a Sudbury school

- **A free age mix**
 - Different spaces for different purposes
 - Ample time for social interaction and own chosen activities
 - Equility in organization (no formal hierarchy)
 - Adults as role model
- **Participation in your own (living/learning) environment**
 - An organization in the school in which you can participate (a mini-society)
 - Order is maintained together in a Judicial committee

So what are the characteristics of a Sudbury model school? At first, a free age mix, different spaces for different purposes. Then, there is ample time for social interaction and your own chosen activities. There is also equality in organization. There is not a formal hierarchy when adults have more to say than the children themselves. Adults are role model in these circumstances. Participation in these environments means that you have it, say, in your own living and learning environments, where the democracy is a direct democracy – an organization at school in which you can participate, and which forms a mini-society. The order is maintained together in a Judicial committee.

Unlimited space for...

- Autonomous (free) choices (education is the responsibility of the individual)
- Development as individual process
- Play, discover and follow your own interests
- Play with the tools of culture
- Immersion in a stable, supportive, respectful community
- Access to a variety of caring adults, that are helpers, not judges

* Based on the six optimizing conditions as defined by Gray, P. (2016). Children's natural ways of learning still work—even for the three Rs. In D. C. Geary & D. B. Berch (eds), Evolutionary perspectives on child development and education (pp 63-93). Springer.

This creates free space for autonomous (free) choices, where education is the responsibility of the individual; development of its individual process. It gives an unlimited space for play, discovery and following your own interests. It creates an unlimited space for play with the tools of the culture, creates an unlimited space for immersion in a stable, supportive and respectful community. And it creates an unlimited space for access to a variety of caring adults that are helpers and not judges. You really need to ask for help. The adults are not there to tell you what to do all the time.



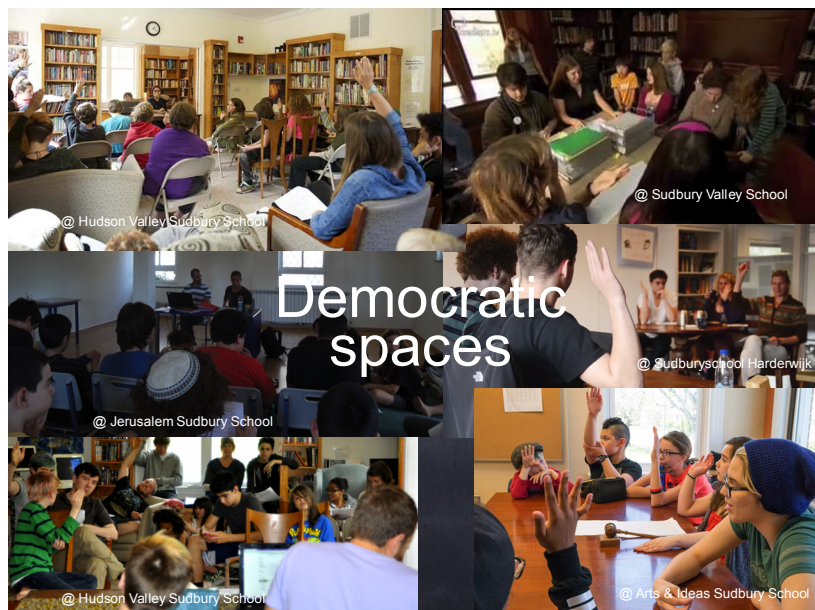
How do these spaces look like? Well, if we take a look at the outside spaces – the schools usually have some campus areas, sometimes very large campus areas where children can play and go outside at any moment they desire. They can go out for physical activities and playing games, but they can also go out for any leisure activities. If they want to sit and have a chat, or if they want to walk around, or just want some fresh air - there is nothing that stops children from going outside any moment during a day.



If we look at the inside spaces you will see a lot of different types of spaces where children can do all sorts of activities. These spaces develop during the period of time that children are around. So whenever children are starting to create a certain interest, a space can be changed due to the interest children develop. And what you generally see is that there are kitchens where you can cook, there are places where you can have creative activities, there are spaces where you can sit and have conversations, spaces where you can also retreat and sit and do things for yourself. And even if you want to do nothing – that is also okay in these schools, because doing nothing means that you are doing things in your head and thinking about your life, and what you really want to desire, what to do.



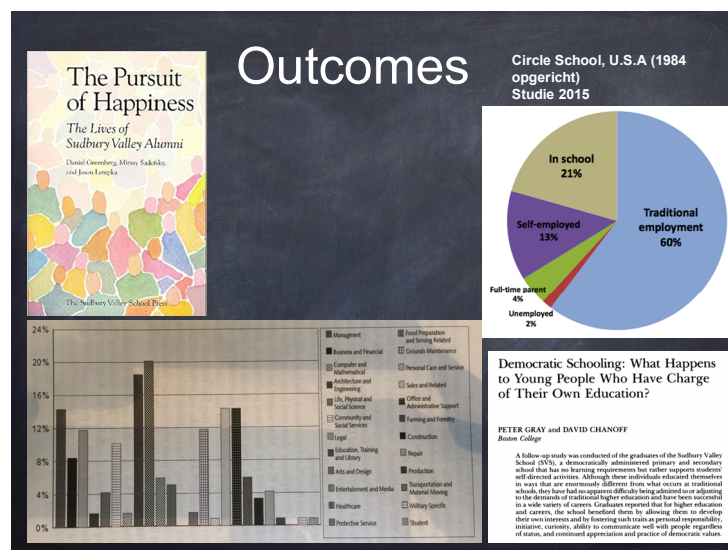
There are online spaces of course, because children play with the tools of the culture, Peter Gray has already mentioned it. Children play with computers all the time or with other devices – online devices. And this brings the outside world inside. The devices are very important as well in the whole learning of children, in becoming competent in all sorts of things, for example language. In the Netherlands we don't speak English as the first language, but young children learn English because of the online spaces that they enter.



Then, of course, there are democratic spaces in these schools because you are part of this community, and you have a voice, an equal voice in the whole organization of the schools. Those schools show the spaces where you can participate. So there is a school meeting usually once a week, every week. There are smaller committee gatherings like the judicial committee, which is actually gathering every day in the morning, or other committees, for example for PR, for finances, for doing other things. Then there are also small groups, teams or small corporations, for example, for activities like creativity, for sports and doing all sorts of interesting things together. Those spaces are all democratically organized. So everybody has a voice in the whole organization of the school of one's own surrounding.

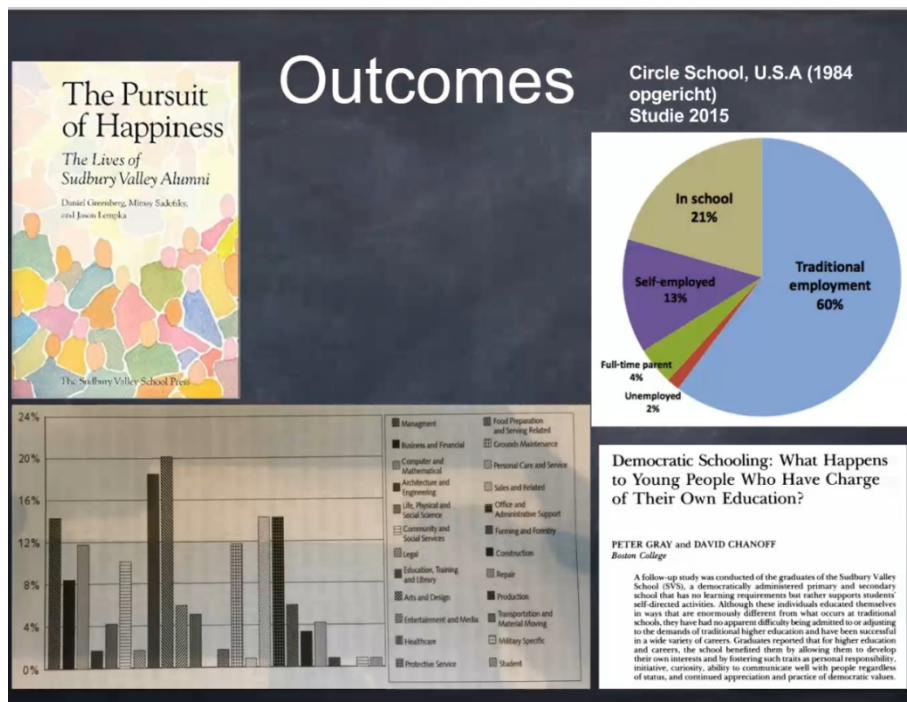


The whole school actually forms a space for age mixing. The school is open for every person everywhere. Age mixing is the most important tool for learning in the school, you see age mixing everywhere. There is no space that is deliberately designed for a smaller group or class, or a smaller amount of children – anybody can enter any room, unless there is an activity that you’re not allowed to disturb. So, in principal, the age mixing is the means for learning in the schools.



What do these schools deliver? If we look at outcomes, we don’t know very much about it. There are few studies that are presented on the Internet. One of them was an official article by Peter Gray and David Chanoff. Another one is a book by The Sudbury Valley School about the Pursuit of Happiness of their former students. And one more study that we know of is done by the Circle School on their alumni population. But what we see is that students go into society, they are accepted at colleges and universities, and they have jobs. So, one way or another they develop to the standards of our society. More importantly, I think we have to speak about the development of self-trust and self-confidence of these students, and the strong sense of responsibility not only for themselves, but also for their communities and for the care of others. The development of strong motivation, which really sets them apart. And I’ve seen examples of students that were hired for jobs or went to a higher education purely on basis of their motivation. And also, when they follow courses or traditional classes, I’ve seen that they are engaged. They don’t do it because they want to pass tests, they do it because they want to know and understand. They develop flexibility, creativity and

critical thinking skills. Especially these students are very good at working and talking together with people of different ages on an equal level. And their talent to find the resources they need in order to develop themselves is another quite interesting development.



So talking about Sudbury schools... These schools need quite a lot of trust from us as parents and as adults, trust from the society and trust from the authorities, because these schools can't be assessed on the basis of test results. Sudbury schools show their value by supporting students to develop themselves into familiarized circumstances for young people, and to be able to shape their own education, to work on basis of their own motivation, and to find the way to develop into a full-participating member of society.

So this is a little bit of an idea behind the schools. You can find more on the websites.

Sudburyschool Harderwijk: www.sudburyschoolharderwijk.nl
 Sudbury Valley School: www.sudval.org
 European Democratic Education Community: www.eudec.org