The role of students' voices and their influence on adults in creating more sustainable environments in three schools

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Abstract

This paper draws on the Sustainability Education in European Primary Schools (SEEPS) Project, which was an EU-funded project examining approaches to sustainability education. As part of that project the team developed a case study approach to the individual country contributions to the overall project, which concluded by developing a model based on whole institution approaches to school improvement towards sustainability.. These case studies form the basis of this proposed paper. In the paper we will draw on the case study materials from a range of European countries to examine how learners perceive that their participation in school improvements towards sustainability are conceived and received by school administrators and teachers. The paper will try to develop a meta-analytical rather than descriptive account of the case studies in order to identify commonalities across the cases relating to the learner's participation in decisions about learning.

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Introduction

This paper draws on the Sustainability Education in European Primary Schools (SEEPS) Project, an EC-funded project examining how school development and sustainability education are linked through whole institution approaches in which there is a strong emphasis on pupil participation and voice (Shallcross, 2004; Shallcross *et al.*, 2006; www.education.ed.ac.uk/esf; www.mmu.ac.uk/ioe(Showcase)). The SEEPS project the team developed case studies as part of a school-focused approach to Continuing Professional Development (CPD) (Shallcross, O'Loan and Hui 2000) that had a strong, but not exclusive, focus on contextual knowledge. It is data from extended versions of three of these case studies, one each from England, Greece and Malta that form the basis of this paper. We will examine how learners perceive that their participation in school improvements towards sustainability is conceived and received by school administrators and teachers. The paper will try to develop a meta-analytical rather than descriptive account of the case studies in order to identify commonalities across the cases relating to the learner's participation in decisions and actions about learning (Shallcross *et al.*, 2006 gives as account of each of the case studies separately). Part of the purpose of this account is to raise questions relating to the roles of children in affecting the attitudes and actions of adults, particularly within the context of school and community improvements towards sustainable practices.

Debates about community focused citizenship education, Environmental Education (EE) or Education for/as Sustainable Development (ESD) often distinguish between process and outcomes. The danger with focusing on outcomes alone is that this approach splits theory from practice 'seeing citizenship as a set of ideas which adults instruct pupils about, not as relationships which pupils already experience in schools' (Alderson, 2000, p. 114). A focus on process in EE/ESD is crucial because, as yet, we do not fully understand what sustainable development looks like and even when we think we understand sustainable development, sustainable solutions will differ from one community and context to another. By focusing on processes, on how societies educate their younger generations, education can empower pupils by equipping them with the skills they need to assist schools, themselves and their local communities to become more sustainable. Whole school approaches that focus on educational processes such as participation and collaboration offer one very attractive way of closing the gaps between knowledge, attitudes and actions in EE/ESD.

In simple terms whole schools approaches mean that schools practise what they teach by trying to minimise the gaps between the values they profess and the values implicit in their actions (Posch, 1993). Whole school approaches seek to integrate all aspects of education by linking formal education; what happens in classrooms with non-formal education; what happens in other aspects of school and informal education what happens in community life that influence learning (see Figure 1). Such

approaches integrate teaching and learning with the social/organisational and technical/economic aspects of school practice (Posch, 1999). If the formal curriculum addresses climate change, how is this concern reflected in the way in which energy is used in schools? If curriculum guidelines include active citizenship, how are pupils encouraged to participate in deciding and implementing sustainable actions in their schools? Whole school approaches are education as a way of life in which sustainable actions become second nature, culturally intuitive normative responses. They are approaches in which schools become a microcosm of a sustainable rather than an unsustainable society (Sterling, 2001). These approaches involve processes of development that shape 'our interaction with the environment in an intellectual, material, spatial, social and emotional sense to achieve a lasting/sustainable quality of life for all' (Posch, 1999, pp. 341-2). In this context the socio-organisational strand in Figure 1 is arguably the key to whole school approaches because it promotes the participation and collaboration that lead to the other strands not only being addressed but also integrated with each other.

Whole school approaches are not just the preserve of teachers, they involve pupils, parents, carers and all those who manage the infrastructure of schools and the services that schools offer to support education, such as catering, energy and estate management. Thus EE/ESD has to transform not only the content and processes of the formal curriculum and the purposes of learning but also the ways in which educational institutions and educational buildings work (Orr, 1994). But these changes will only come about if people think critically about values, participate in decisions and understand their consequences. Evaluation is also included in any model of whole school approaches as it is integral to a plan-do-review cycle in schools (see Figure 1). After all most proposals for educational change are responses to someone's evaluative critique of current provision.

Figure1: The Five Strands of a Whole School Approach to EE/ESD (Shallcross, 2003)
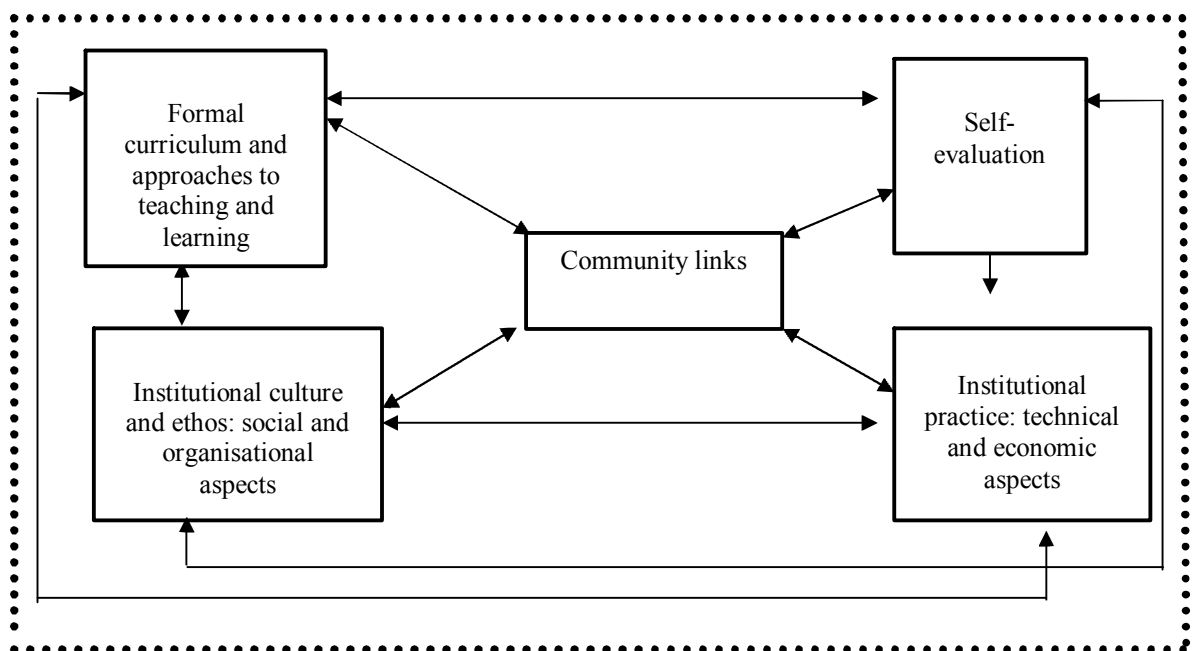
Sustainable lifestyles are not just about recycling, especially if such recycling results from authoritative interventions from outside or within schools that limit the participation of children. Reflective knowledge may sow seeds in childhood that blossom direct into sustainable actions in the future. Opening up the spaces for all voices to be heard and listened to gives power and strength to a whole school approach. Powerful instruments in an orchestra need to be played with restraint so that less powerful instruments can be heard, in this way the resultant music has greater strength. Powerful voices need to be expressed with restraint so that less powerful voices can be heard, in this way the resultant conversation has greater strength. When those with less powerful voices are children or young people, not allowing the full space for the 'orchestration' of all voices is not only unacceptable and contrary to the spirit of the Every Child Matters agenda, it also undermines the purpose and aspiration of individualized and community learning agendas. Without this ideology of whole school approaches the resultant music will be discordant.

Active participation

Conventional ideologies of childhood render pupils passive because these fail to recognise the productive contribution that pupils can make to decision-making in schools (James and Prout, 1997). Pupils also interpret the world differently from adults, not because of any developmental deficiencies but because they grow up in a distinctive childhood culture. There is a growing desire among the young to be taken seriously, to influence their living conditions and improve their environment (Posch, 1996). If education is to encourage this active citizenship, childhood has to be seen as part of society and pupils should be seen as social agents (Rudduck and Flutter, 2000). Associating democratic education with whole school development would assist the expansion of pupil participation in schools because teachers, while sometimes cautious about democratic/participative education, generally support school development which is now something of a mainstream movement. Furthermore, school pupils prefer to be educated in institutions that are considered to be 'good schools'. "*We're dead lucky to come here because it's so modern … It (the first day) was like – wow!*" (Robyn Mooney, 12). "*Behaviour here is better because of the environment*" (Milly Jo Fletcher, 16). These quotations (quoted in Garner, 2006, p. 3) encapsulate nicely the feelings that children have about the surroundings in which they are cast in the role of learners. Mitra (2001), working with a group of young, disaffected black students in Los Angeles, had identified that learners do not appreciate going to a school which is considered, by the local community, to be a 'bad school'. The learning environment matters to learners.

If EE and ESD are to empower pupils and communities to live more sustainably by reducing their environmental impact on the planet, pupils have to participate in the deliberation and selection of lifestyle actions. Children's views must be taken seriously by facilitating their participation at the higher levels shown in Table 1. It is only these levels of participation that offer the prospect of constructive empowerment and yet these may demean the idea of community by marginalising the adult initiation of ideas. Thus whole school development necessitates a change from top-down curriculum planning to the active participation of pupils in negotiating the content and nature of their own learning and the environments in which this learning occurs.

Participation is necessary because many young people do not feel that school helps them to understand issues of social and environmental justice or to be involved in local or global action (Holden, 1998). As young people get older they become more pessimistic about what they can do to make the planet a better place (Hicks and Holden, 1995). Although young people generally have positive environmental attitudes they are less environmentally conscious about their own lives and material aspirations and when they act, their actions are more related to energy conservation and recycling than green consumerism (Rickinson, 2001).

Table 1: Ladder of participation (Based on Hart, 1997).

No.	Level	
1	Child initiated, shared decisions with adults	**Degrees of participation**
2	Child initiated and directed	
3	Adult initiated shared decisions with children	
4	Child consulted and informed	
5	Child assigned but informed	
6	Tokenism when children seem to have a voice but have little or no say in the choice of a subject or the means of communicating it	**Degrees of non-participation**
7	Decoration when children are involved by for example wearing T-shirts that demonstrate a cause that they know little or nothing about	
8	Manipulation when adults knowingly use children to convey the adults' own views.	

In schools without a school council, few pupils believe that things could be different, that there are ways of learning to be a citizen in school (Davies, 1999). But where councils exist they may socialise hypocrisy and dilute children's rights if they operate to a school constitution that limits discussion to institutional practices such as catering and recycling. If this happens, schools councils rather than being venues for proactive decision-making, degenerate instead into forums for damage limitation in which discussions of the formal curriculum or teaching are usually off-limits (Holden, 1998).

Authentic participation (Levels 1 and 2, Table 1) helps pupils to see that they can educate each other with less reliance on teachers and try to change those school structures that limit their agency (Rudduck and Flutter, 2000). Although pupils want to participate more in influencing school culture than changing the formal curriculum, when schools change by addressing values such as intellectual challenge and fairness, at the request of schools councils, pupils become more committed to learning (Rudduck and Flutter, 2000).

But the notion of participation is problematic. In *The Council of Europe's Pupil Participation Project* pupils' notions of participation ranged from election to selection and included the need to educate their teachers about schools councils. This project revealed some unusual understandings of participation. Some pupils believed that the success of democratic classrooms lay in 'the patience and tolerance of the teacher .... and the obedience of the students' (Council of Europe, 2000, p. 16). But obedience is counterproductive if it rests on control achieved through ethical codes that schools impose on rather than negotiate with their pupils. Furthermore pupils are not always comfortable with the changing roles that participation requires, especially as part of the participation agenda is to appreciate that some ideas may be impossible to implement. High achieving pupils in particular can have difficulty in adjusting to schooling that lacks obvious competition. These potential limitations are issues that may have to be addressed in a school if pupil participation is to thrive by being authentic.

A model of self-evaluative research

The model (Figure 2) was used to research the processes of whole school development underpinning the English, Greek and Maltese case studies outlined below. The template employed in producing these case studies was not provided as a blueprint but as an aid to writing comparative accounts. A section was included on constraints and difficulties to ensure that the case studies were critically analytical, not purely celebratory.

The research model has four major aims. To identify;

1. barriers to implementing whole school approaches to EE/ESD
2. strategies to overcome these barriers
3. aspects of school culture which assist whole school development in EE/ESD
4. the benefits of whole school approaches to EE/ESD

The research is pluralist in recognising the need for empirical information to support the case for whole school approaches to EE/ESD, because what can be quantified has significant political credibility in European educational systems. Appropriate measurement, i.e. where units of calibration exist, is critical in deciding whether target indicators of sustainability such as reductions in atmospheric CO_2 are being achieved. Pluralism is also based on the belief that the methodological distinction between the qualitative and quantitative is often one of degree rather than kind and because it assists triangulation between different respondents and sources of data. A problem with relying on interview data is that one cannot always ascertain whether the values that people claim to hold are mirrored in their actions (Posch, 1993).

However in investigating a complex social process such as participation, analysis needs to be located in an interpretivist, ethnographic and phenomenological perspective that acknowledges the highly contested, perspectival nature of observations of school cultures:

> School cultures are not the prerogative or domain of any one group -
> teachers, students, parents, politicians, the business community or policy

makers. Rather, school cultures emerge out of and are continually constructed and reconstructed through the ongoing struggles between and among each of these groups as they vie to have their particular view of schooling represented. School culture, therefore, looks quite different depending upon whose vantage point is taken (Smyth and Hattam, 2002, p. 377).

Figure 2: A pluralist research model for the evaluation of whole school approaches to EE/ESD

Research Loop	Stage	Objective/s	Target/s	Instrument/s	Researchers
	1	Investigating adults' conceptions of EE/ESD and whole school approaches	Headteacher, teaching and support staff	Interviews, semi-structured or open	Teachers and support staff and/or external researchers
	2	Examining the school's policies, official annual external or internal evaluation reports	School staff, parents, and other adults in the community	Reports and policies examined using content analysis	Inspectors, school staff and/or external researchers
	3	Survey of the school environment	Institutional and social practices in the school and its grounds	Using an environmental audit	Pupils and/or teaching staff and/or support staff
	4	Investigating the school's social organisation	Teaching and support staff other adults involved with the school	Semi-structured or open interviews	Pupils, teachers and support staff and/or external researchers
	5	Investigating the degree of pupil participation in decision making in the school	Teachers and pupils	Semi-structured or open interviews	Teachers, support staff and/or pupils.
	6	Investigating community links	Parents and other adults involved with the school who are not school staff	Structured, semi-structured or open interviews	Teaching staff, support staff and/or pupils or external researchers

Case studies from England, Malta and Greece

Overview

Supporting Somaliland is a development project of Smallwood Primary School in England that is raising the resources to build a school in Somaliland. The project has also developed links between the school and minority ethnic groups in the UK and contributed to achieving the school's *Racial Equality and Inclusion* policies (2001) by developing the multicultural competence of its pupils, who are mainly drawn from the UK's white community.

The Green Club at St. Theresa's Secondary School in Malta is an extra-curricular group of 40 pupils and two teachers that holds to a pro-environmental agenda that manifests itself in sustainable actions. Its major focus is on protecting Malta's threatened natural heritage. Although membership of the Green Club is not achieved democratically the club itself is very democratic as every member's ideas are given due attention.

The Second Primary School of Sykies (Greece) was not very child friendly. It consists of three-storey buildings set in very restricted and steep grounds. A small group of teachers collaborated on two EE projects that set out to transform the school's physical environment and to promote more cooperative and group learning. Movement between indoors and outdoors and within the buildings created health and safety risks. The school's physical environment lacked the stimuli to motivate and promote learning. Classrooms lacked the warmth to support cooperative learning. The grounds were covered entirely by asphalt, creating the impression that that the school lacked consideration for nature and for pupil welfare.

In what follows we draw on these case studies to illustrate four of the five entry points in to the whole school approach model illustrated in Figure 1 (for the full case studies see Shallcross *et al.*, 2006)

Culture, ethos and social organisation

> *'The School Development Plan (SDP) is developed collaboratively by the staff, the children and the parents as the end product of a process of involvement and discussion'* (Headteacher - England).

The case studies show how important a collaborative culture is in EE/ESD Although the English and to some extent the Maltese case studies identify increasing size as a barrier to the development of collaborative cultures even in small schools developing collaborative culture brings difficulties especially in selling visions :

> *'It is easier in a small school because everyone does know each other, but when I first came here it certainly wasn't as it is now and the path hasn't always been very easy, we've had to talk to the staff a lot, who've had to be convinced that decision-making should be more democratic'*
> (Headteacher - England).

Once established a collaborative culture shows signs of sustainability for one teacher but for another member of staff democracy is a mixed blessing

> *'Because they're comfortable. They've had an input into it, it's their decision and they feel that if it hasn't gone right they're able to make a suggestion of how it can be improved, so it's all theirs, they've had an input on it, they've got ownership to it'* (Teacher - England).

> *'In a way yes, and in a way, no. Yes: because it wouldn't be such a great school – it's a fantastic school to work in'* (Classroom Assistant – England).

> *'So you said the children and the parents control the school, what's the negative side of it?'* (Interviewer).

> *'We can't do right for doing wrong. We were talking in the staffroom, most of the parents are complaining that the children are having too much homework, so we go one step back, and now they're not having enough homework. You can't ever have a happy medium with them because they know best. Or they think differently, they don't all think the same'* (Classroom Assistant - England).

As this last quotation illustrates people in collaborative school cultures feel free to express dissenting opinions, there is no shallow consensus here. Parents perceive Smallwood as significantly different to other local schools because of this very openness, its ear for children's voices and the richness of its extra-curricular life.

The Green Club in Malta is successful because change was initiated from within. The initiatives implemented reflected the needs and concerns expressed by the club members as representative of the school community. Changes in the lifestyle of the school community were introduced gradually over a period of time to allow for acclimatisation and enculturation into new lifestyles. Change was achieved by evolution rather than revolution.

Sykies Primary Schools in Greece adopts a participatory approach to EE that involves school staff, pupils, parents, experts, members of local authorities and art students. 80% of the teachers thought that this participatory approach to action was the best way to influencing communities, while 20% considered that community influence could be achieved through parents and the modelling role played by the school. Some discussion sessions encouraged pupils to express their opinions about their level of participation in decision-making about affairs in their own class and whole school matters. They described a profound difference in these levels of participation. With the exception of EE projects, pupils felt that they were not encouraged to participate in making decisions about whole school issues:

> *'Concerning issues related to our class, we participate but this mainly depends on the teacher. In school matters, decisions are taken elsewhere and they just ask us in the end whether we agree or not. In EE programmes, they listen to us'* (Pupil - Greece).

> *'Only through EE programmes are our views on general school matters respected'* (Pupil - Greece).

The Sykies pupils believed that they were overlooked as decision makers because of their youth: *'They consider us too young to know the right thing but this is not true'* (Pupil). Outside the EE projects pupils appear to be seen as 'becoming' rather then 'being' citizens (John, 1996). It appears from both pupil and teacher interviews that pupils' opinions were considered in a variety of situations and the degree of their participation depended on individual teacher's attitudes.

The three projects all illustrate characteristics of the procedures and principles of a democratic institutions including: equality, freedom, tolerance, consideration of other people's interests and respect for other people (Aspin, 1995), though in the Maltese case these procedures are associated more with the Green Club and in the Greek case more with EE projects more than other aspects of school life. Staff in all three schools believe that benefits of EE/ESD projects, to children in particular, cannot be overestimated. The view at Smallwood is that EE/ESD projects have influenced how children think about their own good fortune, their perspectives on the lives of other people and their understandings of their own responsibilities to change what they see as unjust. In Sykies the EE projects have raised children's self-esteem and sense of citizenship by allowing them to contribute their own ideas to the redevelopment of their school's indoor and outdoor spaces. But the projects in all three schools have displayed emergent features, especially in broadening and deepening parental perceptions of environment, community capacity and other people, their problems and their aspirations.

However whole school development has been a struggle in all three cases. In the Maltese case the whole school approach lacks the critical mass to develop an environmental ethic for the whole school. Most work still revolves around the coordinating teacher, the not unusual problem of EE/ESD projects being initiated by an enthusiastic individual rather than being a key feature of a school's *educational* identity. This problem of individual champions is also illustrated in the Greek case study. There is little evidence in any of the case studies of pupils being involved in decisions about the core business of schools i.e. policies and school plans about learning, teaching and assessment. Even for schools as accomplished as these there are still initiatives to be taken. The destination will never be reached, but it is the journey that matters.

Community links and impacts

Children from Smallwood are involved in community actions such as fund raising for Somaliland, which mainly happens out of school; these funds have already sent two containers of school equipment to Somaliland. It would be easier if staff completed the paperwork for shipping – but this would reduce the power of the project. *'We've raised quite a lot of money for Somaliland - £40000. At the Cheshire Show we had a Teddy Tombola and the money from that goes to Somaliland'* (Pupil – England). Adults in the school prefer children to have significant ownership of their incursions into changing the world.

Smallwood children visit Somali communities, eat Somali food and perform Somali dances. Consequently they have developed a real understanding of the problems that

foreigners often refugees, experience when they live in England. Multicultural competence develops their cultural awareness, knowledge, sensitivity and action. Parents accompany their children on these visits and it is interesting to see how adult attitudes change. Hopefully these experiences will make parents more supportive of charities away from home. But it is important that *Supporting Somaliland* does not dominate the school's community links and that Smallwood takes a balanced approach to community involvement by supporting local community projects. One teacher felt that *Supporting Somaliland* indicated the strength of the school's community links 'I *think certainly of the global community when you think of Somaliland*' (Teacher - England).

Supporting Somaliland has had significant impact outside the school. The local university has established connections with Somaliland and a parent has made a link with a business in Somaliland to explore the opportunities for importing Somali ornaments. Parents are very involved in decision-making in the school and the headteacher sees the need to link school and community, formal, non-formal and informal education when seeking to influence lifestyle changes.

> '*I wanted to change the system where the children ate crisps and sweets at playtime. So I went to the children, and the parents, and we set up a committee that met initially about once a month, with governors, teachers, the School Council and me and the parents, to see how we could make the school healthier. And some ideas of serving breadsticks, not allowing crisps, we knew it would meet opposition (from the children) and it did, but because the parents were in on it they would defend our stance*' (Headteacher - England).

But there is not unanimous or comprehensive support for these actions, some children still eat their crisps and parents at home and/or leave these with parents before they enter school (Parents' interview). As well as engaging parents in decision making that strengthens school based practices by giving these community support, the school is starting to act as an agent of social change. One pupil described how her father used to buy a bacon sandwich from a roadside fast food outlet for his breakfast. After she explained to her parents what she had learned about healthy eating, her father began to eat a more healthy breakfast. Another parent said that she took charitable donations more seriously as a result of discussions with her daughter about *Supporting Somaliland* and other charitable projects in the school.

St. Theresa's catchment covers a large part of Malta, which makes it difficult to develop synergies with the immediate community. However the community, particularly parents, come into the school but this is more an example of community presence in the school rather than stakeholders being involved in decisions about educational provision. The school is itself a guest in the national community when Green Club members participate in national television/radio discussions about the environment.

The teachers at Sykies agreed that cooperation was necessary to influence change in the school through the '*involvement of the whole school community*' (Teacher - Greece) and that schools could influence local communities by '*undertaking actions personally and empowering others to work with each other*' (Teacher - Greece).

School-community involvement occurred at many stages of the EE projects through for example project presentation days. When pupils were asked whether school can influence local communities they said

> '*Of course, it can. For example, it can influence them through influencing parents and through the function of the school itself, which can serve as a paradigm[1]*' (Pupil – Greece).

> '*Yes, by opening up the school activities to the local community, as well as through collaborations, and with the school paradigm itself*' (Pupil – Greece).

Adults were influenced by the EE projects, for example they showed increased citizenship values. By publicising the EE projects more widely and promoting community involvement the Sykies EE projects have connected with authentic issues outside the school. Most of the staff live in the neighbourhood and support the transformation of the school into a cultural centre, which is open to the community. Teachers from many subject areas have cooperated with and been supported by parents and local authorities. Experts such as architects, landscape architects and educationalists from the private sector were invited into the school and fieldtrips were conducted for the children in the local community. Financial support for the projects came from local authorities, but the school also raised funds from the community itself.

Local authorities were impressed by the work that the school had done and invited experts to prepare a redevelopment plan for the school's physical environment, in cooperation with the school and the community. After repeated discussions and presentations by experts, local authorities, children and school staff the final plan was agreed. This planning process will be used as a model for the redevelopment of the other schools in the Sykies area. Adults contributed to the proposals produced by the pupils by contributing money, suggesting ideas at meetings and helping with the management of the school's physical environment. This involvement confirms that Hart's ladder of participation (Table 1) may be limited in not recognising the high level of adult-pupil collaboration that is needed if schools are to become communities of practice (Wenger, 1999) that act as agencies of social change in their local communities.

Unfortunately the cultural and environmental changes to schools and schooling seen in these three case studies are not always easy to replicate. All three case studies are located in relatively centralised educational systems, which are tightly structured and test-driven by a uniform National Curriculum, which can discourage local school-based initiatives. Although the Greek system gives teachers the freedom to decide teaching approaches, teaching still remains quite didactic in many schools (Bouzakis, 2000). The highly academic nature of St Theresa's, within the test-driven Maltese secondary curriculum, has an impact on EE provision in as the coordinating teacher recognises and accepts.

> '*In a school like ours, academic achievement gets top priority. One cannot expect students to regularly miss out on lessons ... even though it's*

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[1] Paradigm here is being used to mean example.

for a good cause. I would personally object to this. That is one of the
reasons why the club's activities are carried out during breaks and during
assemblies' (Teacher – Malta)

One key to this conundrum appears to lie in getting policy makers to see that academic attainment and the sustainable achievement are not mutually exclusive. This is what the headteacher of Smallwood believes. Although her school has been ranked the top primary school in its Local Authority league tables, she shunned media publicity because she did not want Smallwood to be seen as '*a SATs factory.*' She strongly believes that democratising the school leads to the self-efficacy, motivation and ownership (Bandura, 1986) that fuels high pupil attainment.

Institutional practice

'*You can easily see the difference that the club has made in the school.*
The school is cleaner and plants make it more beautiful.' (Headteacher -
Malta)

There often seems to be a strong relationship between the changes in the institutional practices of these three schools and learning that goes alongside or in advance of those changes. The following extract from an interview with a Smallwood teacher illustrates this point when he was discussing the development of the school's healthy eating policy:

'*I think these were choices made post-learning about what's good for you,*
certainly. That was at the top of their minds. This is where it all came
from of course because that's what we were doing at the time and the
discussion came up that we may be able to change school dinners in this
way' (Teacher – England).

This learning-led and learning-creating change was recognised and approved by parents. What this extract suggests is that, on occasions, children are being guided towards decisions that resonate with the direction that the school has already decided to take. Children are beginning to learn that democratic or quasi-democratic practices operate within parameters that are subject to some degree of external and internal guidance.

At St Theresa's parents have commented positively on the school's overall image:

'*One thing that immediately strikes you as soon as you enter the school is*
its sense of cleanliness. ... I've got another child who attends another
school and the difference is striking' (Parent - Malta).

St. Theresa's Green Club's waste management strategy has been in effect for sometime consequently the whole school community has accepted waste separation and recycling. The cleaners have been particularly cooperative in changing their work patterns to align with environmentally sensitive waste management practices. However the most evident impact of the Green Club has been its embellishment of the school grounds. It has developed a garden for indigenous plants by reclaiming an

abandoned area of ground. The garden will serve a dual function by providing a place where students can relax as well as a location for fieldwork activities.

Pupils in all three schools were questioned about their school's environmental approach. Responses at St. Theresa's indicated that although environmental values are gradually being integrated into the school's ethos, there is a need for pupils to take an active role in environmental matters in the development of a whole school approach. Pupils who are not members of the Green Club are more likely to follow the club's lead than to take initiatives themselves.

> *'Recycling waste is no big deal. It's very easy because the Green Club makes collection easy. At times I also bring waste paper from home because our locality still lacks bring-in sites for waste'* (Pupil – Malta, non-Green Club member).

> *'On the whole we find a lot of cooperation from our friends. At times we find it very difficult to cope with all the waste paper that they gather! ... You always find a few individuals who are simply not interested or do things on purpose, but on the whole the interest in the environment is present'* (Pupil – Malta, Green Club member).

But from the perspective of some pupils Green Club membership comes at too high a social price:

> *'No I'm not joining the Green Club ... No it's not that I do not care for the environment, it's just that ... I've heard other students calling them 'nerds' ... and I wouldn't like that to happen to me'* (Pupil – Malta, non Green Club member).

Through the EE projects at Sykies walls were painted in bright colours, whiteboards replaced chalkboards, a seated area was created in the corner of each classroom for group gatherings, discussions, resting and reading. Classrooms were decorated with pupils' paintings, plants and small aquaria. Each class had a library created from books brought into school by children. The corridors were furnished with wooden tables and benches and decorated with plants. The redevelopment plan for the grounds included work such as painting and decorating the concrete fence around the courtyard, planting annual, perennial plants and bushes in level garden beds created in the courtyard, filling planters with herbs and putting wooden benches in the grounds. Art students from the local university worked with children on their preliminary designs for the school grounds in class and on the implementation of these designs in the grounds.

The projects were publicised in the local community by putting up posters of children's paintings in the streets. A professional artist worked with children to help them to calculate the volume of each colour of paint needed to paint the walls. The local authority sent workers to help prepare and finish off the surfaces of these walls. Through all these initiatives the three schools were linking the formal and non-formal curriculum by seeking to practise what they teach.

Curriculum

Supporting Somaliland now involves the whole school from the smallest four year old and has become cross-curricular, extra curricular and community based. It enables pupils to understand much more about the world because it connects the school to the outside world through authentic actions (Uzzell *et al.,* 1994) that bring real issues into a small, relatively affluent rural community. When School Council members were asked what they had learned about Somaliland there were indications of greater understanding '*They've not got many schools and the schools they have got are like under trees. We've raised money so we can help them get a school and I think they're building one but need a bit more money'* (Pupil - England) There were also signs of affective learning '*Well I think Somaliland deserves much more than they've got, all worn stuff'* (Pupil - England). *Supporting Somaliland* works because it is collaborative and participatory, based on whole school principles that underpin community-focused activities that are infused and modelled into other aspects of school life. This is not an adjunct, but an extension to the direction the school has been pursuing for some time both within and outside the formal curriculum.

Smallwood pupils are involved in curriculum research (Fielding, 2004) by helping to design the annual pupil questionnaire about learning and teaching (Headteacher - England). However, pupils recognise the limitations to their involvement in decisions about the curriculum. When pupils were asked whether they should have some influence on what they learn their responses acknowledged the importance of being sensible: '*Yeah. But not like art all the time, it's got to be sensible*' (Pupil - England). '*We don't like just being told stuff, we like doing it, practical. If we think we're not doing enough of it, could we do more, we'd probably do more of it. If you're being stupid they wouldn't take any notice*' (Pupil - England). The relatively ubiquitous use of the word sensible is interesting when the pupils describe how decisions are made about actions that should be followed in the school. Sensibility to the sensible is perceived to be the intellectual property of the headteacher.

'*Who decides if it's sensible?*'

'*The School Council. (The headteacher) as well. If (the headteacher) doesn't think it's sensible it doesn't happen*' (Pupil - interview).

There is a suggestion here of pupils being socialised into the understanding that comprehending the institutional connotation of what is sensible becomes part of their learning how to circumvent rejection. When the interviewers asked the children, nearly everyone said that '*(the headteacher) would listen to us if we come up with something sensible*' (Pupils – England). This was a point that the headteacher fully acknowledged, but raises the question whether this is pupil voice, a form of ventriloquism or surrogacy or pupils learning about the socio-economic boundaries within which active citizenship functions.

'*I think that when I first started this and we started the suggestion box, you've got the usual things, which they determined themselves. They're not outrageous requests, they're requests from a child's point of view, and*

they work through that stage, because our idea of being sensible isn't their idea' (Headteacher - England).

Even though the Green Club is extra-curricular and reference to academic subjects during club activities is incidental, nevertheless, the skills members learn have a positive effect on their academic abilities. Interestingly when she was asked whether she considers the Green Club's activities as curricular or extracurricular, the headteacher opted for the former:

'I don't view what the club does as being extra ... but an integral part of a girl's education ... I really admire one particular girl who comes in very early and starts working ... it is obvious that whatever she's doing stems from an internal value' (Headteacher – Malta).

The coordinating teacher also commented on other pupils' and teachers' socialisation into and internalisation of the values promoted by the club and its members as a *'pleasant surprise'* as the following quotes from her and another teacher show.

'To be honest, I did not expect the extent to which the objectives that I wanted to achieve through the club have been attained. There's been a ripple effect extending beyond the club's members and over to other students and also to teachers' (Class Teacher – Malta).

'The Green Club is not just a club… it's more of a strategy for environmental awareness that targets the whole school ... the break is mostly used for debriefing' (Class Teacher - Malta).

'Students were against the idea of just having economic considerations determining the future of their school environment. They pointed out social as well as environmental considerations that should be considered in the decision making ... mind you these were not club members' (Class Teacher - Malta).

Children at Sykies also became researchers. In order to produce proposals for the redevelopment of their classrooms and school's grounds, they worked with action research methods, under the guidance of two teachers. These methods combined methodological tools from psychology, architecture, education and social psychology. Children collected data about other pupils' feelings about characteristics of the classrooms and the school grounds (positive - negative, liked -disliked) and the behavioural problems that occurred in the school in response to children's negative perceptions of the school's physical environment. They also developed questionnaires that were sent to all pupils, parents and staff that explored the ways pupils wanted to use their school grounds, the educational features that they would like to see in the grounds, as well as ways in which parents and school staff thought that the school's grounds could be used.

All the Sykies' pupils who were interviewed agreed that the extent of their participation in decisions about the nature and content of learning depended entirely upon their class teacher, as the school lacked a policy on pupil participation in

teaching and learning. The teachers agreed saying that there were differences in pupil participation between subject areas and classes but they believed that levels of participation increased as pupils' got older. They felt that the prospect of sharing power and responsibility for decision-making with pupils about institutional practice and curriculum was highly unlikely because of the highly centralised Greek educational system. Pupil involvement in changes concerning the local community only happened at community behest and was mostly confined to EE projects. There was also a slight difference in levels of pupil participation, from non-participation to low levels of participation (see Table 1) across the three areas of curriculum, institutional practice and community involvement, with the exception of those pupils involved in EE projects.

Research findings from Sykies support the view that when school EE projects involve issues of direct interest to pupils and teachers, such as the school physical environment, these help pupils to engage in their own learning. Children are encouraged, through their own interest and active participation, to shape their immediate environment and to develop practices that correspond with sustainable practices in society at large. By creating flexible micro-environments in the school and its grounds teachers reduced teacher-oriented methods of teaching by supporting cooperative, participatory methods of teaching and learning. Sykies has an open attitude to engagement with the local community and values the improvement of its physical and educational environment, which helps the school to implement a whole school approach to EE.

But despite these positive responses only 20% of teachers get involved in EE projects. These teachers use specific teaching strategies to develop social and/or environmental action in the school and its grounds. The other 80% of teachers only got directly involved in social and environmental change when issues of personal interest arose. Their involvement in EE was limited because it was regarded as an extra-curricular activity, which they lacked the time to deal with.

Conclusion

What we have tried to do here is to draw together three separate case studies (from a collection of five case studies in Shallcross *et* al, 2006) in a way that illustrates that writing can be *for* generalisation in addition to *being* generalisation. As Richardson (1998, p. 345) argues "writing (is) a *method of inquiry*, a way of finding out about yourself and your topic" (emphasis in the original). In drawing upon these selected case studies we have revealed what we consider to be the important issues. The generalisation which we wish to draw is that these case studies demonstrate that no matter how highly centralised an educational system is motivated teachers and schools can find ways of implementing new teaching approaches and establishing connections with their local community that promote social agency. All three case studies report an improvement in pupils' opinions about their participation in whole school affairs. But as these studies show there is often a dislocation, between the positive attitudes towards EE/ESD espoused by teachers and their implementation of EE/ESD. Only in Smallwood is there a suggestion of total teacher involvement in the project. Although teachers in Sykies recognised the need to improve the physical and social school environment in their school and acknowledged that EE projects could be a means to this end there was still a low level of teacher involvement in EE projects in the school.

Although all three schools are closing the gap between knowledge, values and actions this research shows that this gap still limits the involvement of many teachers.

What these accounts show is that young people can and do have a lot to contribute to the improvement of their learning environments – both physical and ideological. Young people only go to school once, and they want and deserve it to be the best it can be. If we, as educators, were to see school improvement as a circular rather than a linear process in which all members of the school community have (rather than are given) a voice then the resultant conversation will be strengthened. The model we have proposed here is through a five dimensional whole school approach. No one of the dimensions is privileged in this account (although we have not provided any case study material to illustrate the self evaluation entry point). In or through each of the dimensions of the model young people have much to contribute. A circular approach to school improvement towards sustainable practices allows for pupils to become involved, as they have done, to a greater or lesser extent, in all three case studies.

One way forward lies in advocating EE/ESD as a whole school development process. This process through its high levels of participation, democratic organisation and involvement with authentic community situated actions constitutes good education even when judged by the centralised forms of attainment testing and outcome based performance indicators associated with the school effectiveness movement. As these case studies illustrate to an extent, when schools model achievement, attainment and sustainable development can follow.

We acknowledge the limitations of generalising from case studies. But in advocating an approach to CPD that locates professional knowledge at the intersections of personal, theoretical and contextual knowledge case studies writing can be for rather than as generalisation. What this process entails is the contextually sensitive translation of policies and practices from one educational setting to another. In this way generalisations become situated through the active engagement of teachers with an approach to CPD that is framed in contextualised rather than constructivist approaches to professional learning.

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