

## **'Wisdom in the face of urgency'**

*To our young people who will carry so much of both the future  
environmental and Covid-19 financial burdens.*

### **Abstract**

*This paper highlights writings related to wisdom and student voice in light of the current environmental and pandemic emergencies. Its purpose is to provide support to students and staff in their quest for change. It also highlights the legitimacy of protest and debate matched by collaborative and informed action at a time of severe global pressure. Two case studies ground some of the theoretical points. Coded responses to a limited number of meetings of young people, teachers, local politicians, parents and governors about sustainability provide authenticity to the concerns and requests for help in time, talent or money from young people to members of their local community. It is argued that a wider interpretation of careers guidance for young people as well as motivating an older generation to acknowledge a debt owed to younger people as a positive contribution to the renewal of democracy, are necessary ingredients for effective environmental education and action.*

### **Preface**

Written in national and international pandemic lockdown with young people experiencing very different forms and places of learning, I felt compelled to use the opportunity, helpfully provided by the Canterbury Christ Church pre Covid-19 'Fierce Urgency of Now' forum, to not only contribute to this debate but to inform two projects on which I am currently engaged. I have positioned these within the 'slow/fast: resistance/alignment' framework set out in the paradox model by Kemp and Scoffham (2021). In future years, young people will surely question the purpose of their education in the light of events and demand change when they finally head back through their university and school gates – they were already doing so in relation to climate change. But how best to support them without swamping hard-pressed university senior staff and school heads in particular?

### **The differing paces of urgency**

In preparing this article, nine different paces began to emerge in its writing which may be helpful to bear in mind in relation to the macro and the micro of the 'fierce urgency.'

- **PERSONAL** What we can realistically manage separately and / or together on a day-to-day basis in a world infected with Covid-19?
- **PRACTICAL** Appreciating the lag of old systems while we adjust to the new so that resistance is strategically aimed at educational success over a long period, rather than hostile demands likely to provoke backlash or simply being ignored.
- **PARENTAL** A sense of concern but also urgency for their children's future and resulting willingness to support extra-curricular activities, where possible, in ways that were not considered before.
- **PHILOSOPHICAL** Redefining educational values – at a slower yet pressing pace.

- **PLANETARY** The emergency in relation to biodiversity and life support systems leading for some to disruption and police arrest in support of urgent action founded on deep concern.
- **PEDAGOGICAL** The pace of change to the school and university curricula (ideally in the next 2-3 years) but informed by young people themselves.
- **POLITICAL** Skilled at slowing things down and very likely to resist change so how best to counter this?
- **PHYSICAL** Different growth rates in the natural world and how this might guide us in terms of when to move fast or slow and the synergy between the two?
- **PANDEMIC** Suddenness, interconnectedness and uncertainty resulting in huge paradigm shifts from finance to technology with potentially far-reaching reconsideration of values and ethics.

As someone who for 50 years has had to work within a 'slow resistance' frame and partially willing to do so because we felt that we had time, it is both depressing and uplifting to see the sense of urgency being generated now. Arguing that professional wisdom is an increasingly essential virtue if universities are to be effective leaders in sustainability at a time of global crisis (Kemp and Scoffham, 2021), raises the question as to how 'professional wisdom' might manifest itself. As a 'keeper of the long view' (Hayward, 2012 p.136) with the benefit of considerable life-experience, I asked myself what I could bring to the current situation? Do, or should, personal journeys have a role to play? And if so, what academic underpinning might be relevant? What within 'the slow' can help illuminate 'the fast'?

The authenticity provided by my personal, 'green' journey over several decades seems to be of value to the students I teach currently - especially if some of the anecdotal meanderings are shown to be founded on environmental theoretical concepts such as civic ecology with its focus on '*stewardship practices that integrate social and environmental values within a social-ecological framework*' (Krasny, 2009. p.466). Oakeshott's (1972) call to value 'conversations between the generations' comes to mind with the iconic head-to-head photograph of Sir David Attenborough and Greta Thunberg working together. This could be an example of what Storo (2013, p13) calls a 'common third space' in which a social pedagogue and a client come together to develop their individual positions to create something which the child needs in order to be included in their community. Wisdom is required in how such journeys are presented - a 'told you so' arrogance does not inspire; a fiery, fast resistance of anger and frustration demeans.

I shall argue for 'shared conversations' informed by theory and the 'long view' embedded in practical actions initiated by independent-thinking students of all ages exercising agency. But first, some background.

## Setting the scene

Worries about the state of the global environment are not new. In the Autumn of 2001, I wrote:

*'We have relied too heavily on tests and learning outcomes that satisfy immediate short-term objectives but which do little to prepare our children for the times that lie ahead. If world scientists are to be believed, the next two generations will have to cope with unprecedented change and global upset as climate change kicks in. We will need independent thinkers rather*

*than box ticking conformists. We will need young people who have a keen sense of their own ontological security based on powerful, learning experiences forged during a dedicated part of their school careers alongside teachers and other professionals both lay and expert.'* (Parry, 2001)

The catapulting of various government actions few people ever believed possible as a response to a deadly virus should be no surprise. There had been many authoritative warnings over the years. Well over two decades ago, the second report of the Climate Change Impacts Review Group (1996) advised that it would be prudent to assume that climate change would constitute a serious long-term hazard to human health. Nine years later, Kunstler (2005) warned that the world was overdue for a new outbreak of a supervirus. He pointed out that the stress on ecological equilibrium, rapid changes in land use, the penetration of formerly inaccessible habitats and disturbed migration routes could lead to the appearance or diffusion of a disease. Kunstler (2005. P. 173 ) concluded that *'despite miraculous advances in medical technology, genetic typing and immunology, the nations of the world are not much better prepared for a severe flu epidemic than they were for the 1918 outbreak'*.

These warnings continue. Bendell (2020) reports that a warming world with unusual weather has driven new patterns of wildlife migration and undermined the health of certain wildlife populations thus releasing larger volumes of novel coronaviruses that could infect us all. Bloomfield (2020) adds deforestation and landscape fragmentation to the list of dangers. At the same time, the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services states, *'Pandemics have their origins in diverse microbes carried by animal reservoirs but their emergence is entirely driven by human activities.'* (IPBES, 2020. p.5)

So where does our current crisis leave us in navigating paradoxes in sustainability education? Education itself and its purpose has been thrown into a mix of parental and digital learning as a result of Covid-19. This, in turn, could lead to two contrasting dangers of first, demands for too much educational change from radical groups or, secondly, a far too controlling top-down response.



*Plate 1: The arresting quiet of locked down, led to busy English roads giving way to a slower 'pedal pace' of reflection, reduced pollution and blossoming roadside, wild flowers.*

The 'slow/fast: alignment/resistance' frame is timely but fraught due to the need to tread carefully but without missing an opportunity for reform – a difficult balance. As Biesta (2020) argues it is crucial that education asserts its own integrity, interests and concerns in order to push back attempts to harness it as an instrument that can be put to work for other agendas. Biesta's (2020) critique of the constant push for the new that, *'is not necessarily or automatically that which serves the educational point of schools, colleges and universities best'* (p.3) echoes Zuboff's (2019) concerns of behavioural surplus and behavioural futures markets designed to push old and young alike towards 'inevitable' purchases we don't yet know we need. And linked to this is the worrying effect of screen time and social media on creating echo chambers, exploiting click bait and encouraging narrow, generationally-based posts and blogs that are increasingly demanding of young people's time and attention. (Alter 2017; Lanier 2018; McNamee 2019; Susskind 2018; Veliz 2020; Zuboff 2019)

These are significant forces that as a result of Covid-19 are likely to increasingly penetrate and eventually govern educational institutions. Outwardly helpful launch of distance learning programs during Covid-19 are potential vectors of such preconceived learning packages. And Hayward (2012) warns of how disasters can be used by the state to impose command and control models of governance and that *'the conditions that are required to sustain a democracy cannot be taken for granted but have to be recreated by each generation.'* Hayward (2012: 155)

In response to the call for 'professional wisdom' by Kemp and Scoffham (2021), I felt compelled to draw from some wise thinkers and in particular to highlight and focus on our young people, so often left out of decision-making, and what their agency, combined with wider social agency, could bring to the table. Professional wisdom and agency go well beyond worksheets and activities drawn up in a crisis – they had a place for hard-pressed families and teachers on a temporary basis during national lockdown but could signal danger if employed in the long term – and especially in relation to environmental and sustainability education. The following pages capture some pointers of wisdom that have helped inform and support an approach to two current projects at a pace that supports teachers and institutions while at the same time giving agency to the clients – our young people who will carry so much of the future environmental and present Covid-19 financial burdens.

## **Pointers to professional wisdom**

Hayward (2012) reminds us that all too often children have both least influence on the political process and the fewest skills of effective citizenship. As a consequence, many education programs unwittingly marginalise the very children who stand to gain most from the chance to serve on a school council or take part in a community activity with supportive peers and adult mentors. The role of adult mentors such as parents, charities and local agencies has been brought into particularly sharp focus by Covid-19. Hayward argues that:

*'Children's deliberation needs the support of active adult 'moral agents' if children are to have their voices heard: a school teacher, a local charity or a coach can often act informally to bridge discourses between school, family and even international organisations ...other institutional agents and advocates...retain community memory as keepers of the long view. [These] include*

*community members, storytellers, residents and activists. Their advocacy can be helpful for increasing the resilience of children.'* (Hayward, 2012; 135)

Such resilience can be enhanced locally by close meetings between, for example, Year 8 pupils (12-13 year-olds) and adults whose working life has been dedicated to the environment and sustainability. In offering an unthreatening pace for schools, a more nuanced approach to the statutory careers' guidance issued by the UK government (2018) could be helpful. The guidance places 'real world connections' with employers at the heart of its strategy but an additional focus on the real world environmental challenges would release the 'meaningful exchanges', called for by the strategy, between those steeped in environmental careers and those considering their future world of work.

Interestingly, the guidance includes a reminder of the danger of last minute decision-making that can leave young people overwhelmed and calls for a range of information and opportunities throughout their school life. I will expand on this later but such an easily adopted engagement with the emerging world of greening jobs echoes John Dewey who remains an inspiration through the experimental laboratory schools which he set up in Chicago in 1896. The children Dewey studied worked on a small-scale farming project harvesting and cooking the results of their labours, not so much to teach them about country matters but as a way of putting children into situations where they would grasp the problems which demanded collaborative solutions.

A newly suggested GCSE on natural history for English Secondary pupils from 2022 could learn much from Dewey who was, '*scornful of inward-looking school systems and governments laying down what students should learn, how and when and claimed that the result of such a strategy would be bored, irritated and over-stressed pupils and teachers*'. (Dewey, 1916: 109)

Dewey further observed that:

*'One of the weightier problems with which the philosophy of education has to cope is the method of keeping a proper balance between the informal and the formal, the incidental and the intentional modes of education. When the acquiring of information and technical intellectual skills do not influence the formation of a social disposition, ordinary vital experience fails to gain in meaning, while schooling creates only 'sharps' in learning – that is, egoistic specialists.'* (Ibid)

The natural history GCSE proposal has no mention of the training of its teachers, the resources required nor of the consequence of how young people might feel if they fail such an exam. There is a danger that it is at best a distraction and at worst an irrelevance given the urgency of our times - another example of sustainability for education as opposed to education for sustainability. (Harper and Peake, 2020) As the abstract to D'Agnese (2017) puts it, '*schooling is not just a place to produce the correct skills, but is also a matter of experimentation, hesitation and wait, one in which teachers and students attempt to dwell in pure potentiality for growth.*'

There is surely a pattern emerging here of the significance of hesitation and wait, experimentation and agency supremely expressed by Arendt who writes of safeguarding the freedom of children and young people to recognize their capacity for beginning something new. Arendt coined the term 'natality' to celebrate the imaginative, unexpected, disruptive and creative power of citizen action. She painted a vivid image of the potential power of an individual to act in unexpected and

innovative ways. Likening it to a birth, she argued that citizens acting with agency can take a political community in new directions that challenge dominant thinking. To act with natality is literally to create something new.

*'Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from the ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable. And education, too is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world'. (Arendt. 1954: 198)*

If ever there was a need to renew a common world, it is surely now. But we have to work together – it is no good heaping our problems on the shoulders of our young people or solely on governments or exams. Here, the wisdom of Michael Oakeshott has something important to offer in the age of twitter with its deliberately limiting characters. Oakeshott described two important facets of human existence which I suggest can help in our navigation of paradoxes in sustainability education...the ability to detect a hidden intelligence within the way people act and speak: and the notion of a 'conversation' between the generations which McClay developed in a paper presented to the biennial meeting of the Michael Oakeshott Association, Colorado College, Colorado Springs, Colorado, September 28, 2013.

*'...a different kind of conversation, the conversation of liberal learning, since it speaks across thousands of years and thousands of miles. This is not local knowledge. But it must have a local dimension. It must touch down in a real community of human beings living in propinquity to one another, a community into which and through which the larger conversation must flow, if it is to flow at all. The larger conversation must be made flesh and dwell among us. That is what colleges are for, to be those kinds of communities.'* (McClay, 2013: online)

Such larger conversations will surely include values and so let me return to the DFE career guidance on what they describe as 'meaningful exchanges' between adults and young people. Values such as patience, accuracy, economy, elegance and style did not manifest themselves to Oakeshott through what he termed a 'conversation apprenticeship' but struck him through a gymnastics teacher in which gymnastics was an intellectual art. Oakeshott claimed to have learned such things not as a result of anything the instructor said but because he simply *was* a man of patience, accuracy, economy, elegance and style.

There is hesitation too hinted in the comment, *'we may listen to what a man has to say, but unless we hear in it a mind at work and can detect the idiom of thought, we have understood nothing'*. (Oakeshott, 1989: 61). Such possibilities emerge when, for example, instead of an array of environmental or climate change facts being dominant, the facts are suspended (for a moment) in an environmentalist's argument or in this case a 'meaningful exchange'. In other words, what is important is not being talked at but rather the opportunity for younger people to over-hear an intelligent conversation. Such understandings, meanings and beliefs have to be transacted between the generations in which 'the ordeal of consciousness' is understood but which is a learned and historic condition – not a natural one. For Oakeshott, such an educational

engagement is both a discipline and a release and we would do well to remember this in relation to wisdom and the paradox model as well as the proposed Natural History GCSE.

## Wisdom – who decides who decides?

The current global pandemic could easily overwhelm such ideas though – ideas that value such interactions as well as the voices of young people who more than ever deserve to be heard. Crises can foster 'command and control' models of bureaucratic governance as described by Hayward (2012) when the New Zealand government introduced a business model for new charter schools following the Christchurch earthquake in 2011. Other more subtle threats come in the form of reading from a screen. Wolf (2018) calls for digital wisdom so that children learn how to make good decisions about content and how to self-regulate and check their attention and ability to remember what they have read during on-line reading, both in and out of school. This is amplified by an observation from Oakeshott (1989 p.61) that '*Judgement begins to appear whenever a pupil perceives that information must be used and perceives the possibility of irrelevance*'. Meanwhile, Zuboff (2019) highlights the power of companies that shape our behaviour while evading our awareness of it.

Agency, and social agency in particular, should be our wise, guiding principle. Our young people deserve to be encouraged and helped to determine the 'fast/slow: alignment/framing'. We need to come alongside to help them determine and execute *their* pace of change as well as the content of what they are learning. I will shortly concretise these ideas within two current university supported projects but first a final lens – that of a systems perspective advocated by Krasny, specializing in community environmental stewardship and environmental education in urban settings in the US and internationally. Such a perspective may well give rise to perceiving minds at work and idioms of thought in relation to positive feedback loops that

*may transpire as people engaged in civic ecology practice realize individual outcomes (e.g., sense of agency, feeling of connectedness to people and to nature) and become more active in such practices, thus contributing to greater social–ecological system resilience'. (Krasny, 2009 p.478)*

Civic ecology offers the prospect of education programmes situated within habitat restorations be they ponds, wildflower meadows, sand dunes or woodlands. Oakeshott's 'hidden intelligences' can manifest themselves in many ways such as this extract from a teenager after working for a term of civic ecology engagement with a group of adults with learning disabilities. He wrote of one particular adult who displayed a hidden intelligence for those humble enough to recognise it,

*'It was good meeting the adults. Hard to explain why but I did like it. I enjoyed working with David [the adult] because we got to know each other quickly and had a strong relationship. I needed to use patience to allow him time to speak because he speaks a lot slower than me. I liked being outside helping to look after the land properly.'*

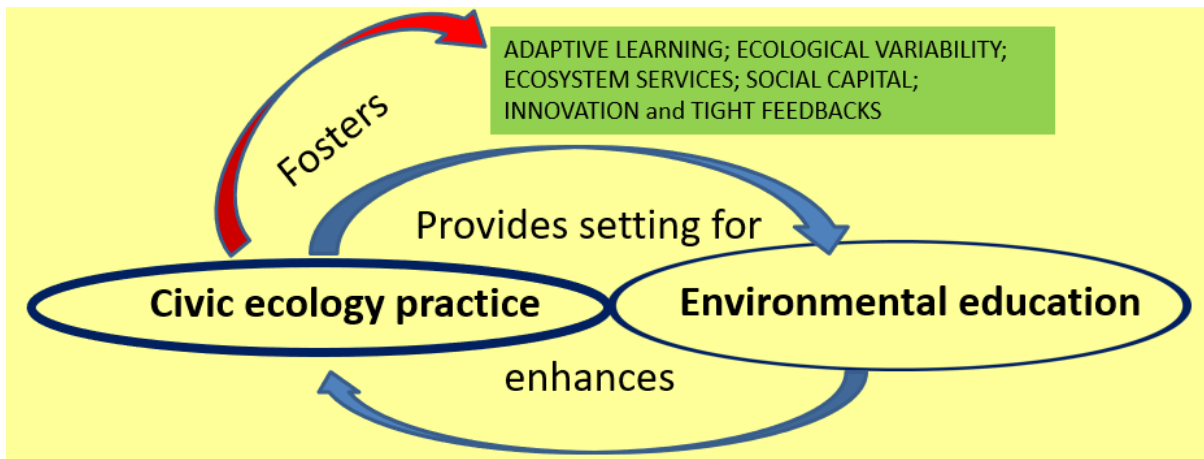


Figure 1: Hypothesised relationships of civic ecology practice, environmental education and resilience of a desirable social-ecological system. *Environmental Education Research*. Vol. 15. No4. 2009

## Two emerging case studies and a word of warning and hope

So how can what has been discussed help inform and influence a professionally wise 'fast/slow: alignment/resistance' framing of teaching and learning in two university supported projects? Given the recent, powerful critique of education for sustainability (Harper and Peake, 2020) there is a danger that both the following projects might be seen as somewhat irrelevant in relation to the urgent need to combat rapid climate change. I acknowledge this but offer the following case studies as 'petri dish ideas' on sustainability, biodiversity and agency that could be quickly scaled up.

And here Runciman articulates some contributory ideas to such potential scaling up. For example, in a podcast of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020 he claims there is polling evidence to show that climate change is a much more pressing issue for the under 35s relative to the over 65s. This older generation vote in greater numbers thus skewing democratic politics against the interests of the young. Covid-19 has changed the dynamic in that the young have borne a burden for the sake of the old. There is arguably a debt owed here - of rectifying the generational imbalance. As Runciman states ten and half minutes into the podcast: *'There is something that must be paid back to the young after this year. Now it could be financial support. It could be all sorts of things but one thing it might be is action on climate change.'*

This paper argues how that could be achieved in a way that strengthens democracy, gives agency to our young people and not only encourages conversations between the generations but offers the chance for older generations to honour that debt in time, skill and finance in order to restore a more balanced planet.

### Case Study One: University Forest Food Garden

A new elective at my university, begun in September 2020, explores the practice of harvesting food, medicine and other practical needs from a woodland ecosystem. Underlying ecological theory and its social implications are informing the forest food garden design to be developed on campus in 2021. Students will be involved in designing the tree canopy before plantings based on soils, aspect, plant guilds, and many inter-related aspects in the spirit of Dewey's philosophy. Arendt's notion of preparing for a new world will be based, for example, on distinctions between



food security and sovereignty and nutritiously-rich, locally-grown fruit and nuts linked to our gut biomes. Inputs will be invited from other members of staff not solely for their specialism but for their hidden intelligence, as championed by Oakeshott. This may come to light informally over a cup of tea brewed on site within communities of students as well as, in time, local residents contributing to greater social–ecological system resilience.

The process was exploratory, messy and challenging at first but later welcomed by the students who were guided by what Strathern (2000 p.318 ) called the '*tyranny of transparency*' in which she explored the notion of visibility in cultures (outcomes, accountability, and performance indicators) and asked, 'what does visibility conceal?' For Strathern, accountability implies that people want to know how to trust each other and make that trust visible, and yet the implementation of visible accountability also points to an absence of trust. The application of visible and invisible transparency outlined by Strathern can be applied to the UK university Research Assessment Exercise as follows:

Visible	Invisible
Research out Quality of certain publications Number of graduates Success in research funding Holding on to active staff Encouragement of the 'right'	Social structure Cultural values Modes of organisation Investment in researchers Effective relationships between researchers Transmission across the generations

Building on Strathern's argument, a visible and invisible spotlight on teaching itself is helpful regarding the fierce urgency of sustainability in four ways:

- The transparency of communication is not about enabling mutual creativity as in the experimental researcher's situation but is more about clarity and easy assimilation for the student. It would have been so easy to set down a course of action based on forest garden facts.
- However, perfect clarity as an audited goal leaves little room for students to absorb, digest and make what they have understood relevant to themselves. Instead, the students, although well out of their comfort zones at first, have indeed made relevant to themselves the understanding and need for back-planning, visioning, a sense of audience and the significance of operational constraints.
- So the growth that turns information into knowledge [and I would add wisdom] is not a simple consequence of clarity itself. Indeed, the messiness led to student debate about knowledge, power and language such as *Amazon, Cloud, Streaming* and *Apple* as four examples of big tech companies' framing.
- Strathern (2000: 318) points out that *If understanding involves process at all, then it must be predicated on some kind of self-knowledge that takes doubt, ignorance, hesitation,*

*confusion or simply despair at digesting all the facts, as the starting point'. The enormity of climate change fosters such despair but if embraced and mediated through meaningful exchanges with older generations, can surely be turned into positive actions?*

### **Case Study Two: encouraging young people's social agency at a local level.**

In the same way that Strathern provides a wider frame of invisibility in higher education, Storo's (2013) views on social pedagogy have influenced a local pupil/community initiative called *Green United*. The Danish 'common third' idea recognises the significance of a social pedagogue and young person interacting whereby it is not the young person who is the subject of their exchange but what they create together, often by addressing a shared problem such as climate change. Another useful concept is that of 'formation', whereby a growing generation that learns about the culture and the presumptions that their parents built their lives on, is provided with tools to create something new, something different and overriding. As Storo explains, '*Formation means to absorb what is and to acquire tools to discover what could be.*' Finally, 'perspectivation' encourages us to choose between different, alternative perspectives. '*Such choices are not arbitrary. They are guided by what we have learnt and what we consider sensible. We could also say that we construct perspectives on the basis of previous constructions.*' (Storo, 2013 p45). Such ideas underpinned the approach to this second case study which was relentlessly devoted to capturing the thoughts of all participants in a series of meetings in as transparent a way as possible.

The *Green United* project began in March 2019 when I was invited to give a Primary School Assembly about climate change on one of the Friday pupil strike days. This led to a series of meetings to explore the possibility of putting together a joint local schools' environmental education strategy. A further meeting of families on 19<sup>th</sup> April was held at the local Town Hall at the invitation of the Mayor. This was followed by a wider meeting of young people, teachers and governors in July. All the participants contributed in writing or to discussions which were recorded in different ways through the session – for example as bullet points on large sheets of paper, post-it notes and take away final statements that could be collated in an ammonised form that was fed back to inform any subsequent meeting.

Codes 1,2 and 3 expressed the need to see the bigger picture, across all subjects and the need for more practical skills

Code 6 recorded the wish for schools to be working much more closely together

Code	Young people on what is missing and should be included in school	Parents on what is missing and should be included in school	Councillors on what they would like to see addressed or delivered in schools	Further reflection by families on what they think a future environmental education curriculum should include	Main points from the Plenary	A chance for post-it note final comments	Feedback re the 'key takeaway' from the workshop	What resources in Lewes would like to see in relation to environmental education and outside school
1	0	2	1	1	0	1	0	0
2	3	2	1	7	5	2	0	0
3	7	1	1	1	2	4	0	4
4	0	0	0	7	2	0	0	0
5	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1
6	1	0	0	0	0	0	5	4
7	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0
8	2	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
9	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	0
10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
11	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
12	2	2	4	0	4	0	0	1
13	1	0	0	0	0	0	11	1
14	1	0	1	0	1	2	0	4

Code	Young people on what is missing and should be included in school	Teachers & Governors on what they would like to see in schools	Main points from the Plenary	A chance for post-it note final comments	'Key takeaway' from the workshop	What resources in Lewes would we like to see
1	0	1	0	8	1	0
2	1	3	4	9	1	0
3	1	3	1	9	0	0
4	1	1	1	2	0	1
5	0	1	3	2	1	0
6	0	3	2	2	2	4
7	0	0	0	1	0	0
8	7	1	4	6	3	2
9	7	1	10	1	3	3
10	0	0	0	0	0	0
11	0	0	0	0	0	0
12	6	0	6	17	0	0
13	0	0	0	2	7	0
14	0	4	4	4	1	1
15	3	0	0	0	0	2
16	3	0	1	0	0	0
17	1	0	0	0	0	0
18	0	1	1	3	0	0
Totals	33	15	37	63	22	16

**APRIL MEETING**

**JULY MEETING**

Figure 2: Coded comments throughout both meetings to provide proof of voice of all participants.

Tracking the various stages of several meetings and noting the content proved helpful in assuring the young people that their views were not only listened to but being assembled in a way that could help them reach out to their local community (Figure 2) . These notes recorded steady references to the bigger picture (Codes 1,2 and 3) throughout the April meeting along with a concentration of the same concerns in final post-it notes during the July meeting. By contrast, the idea of schools working together more closely (Code 6) which appeared towards the end of the April meeting featured almost throughout the July meeting implying that this was a growing need. Interestingly, concerns over plastic (Code 8) did not feature in the April meeting but after media coverage, featured throughout the July meeting. A final observation records the fact that Code 11 flooding (the most significant consequence of climate change for the tidal river that runs through the town) featured only once in the April meeting and not at all in the July meeting – thus giving some weight to Hayward’s notion of the importance of ‘keepers of the long view.’

No.	Issue	Wallands	Southover	Iford & K	Western	S. Malling	TOTAL	
1	Grow more in school grounds - trees, meadows, wild flowers	7	9	3	7	5	31	9
2	Using existing wild area more, upgrade, fix problems, learn outdoors	15	8	0	5	15	43	13
3	Less plastic, upcycle more, bio degradable materials	14	26	22	17	5	84	25
4	Some sort of [annual] school event on the environment	3	1	2	1	0	7	2
5	Go on strike / learn about protesting	2	0	1	4	1	8	2
6	Learn more about what happens if climate changes	4	9	3	9	2	27	8
7	More to help wildlife - bug hotels; bird boxes, water butts	8	2	1	5	3	19	6
8	Comment re energy - more solar, using less, electric bus	11	14	2	2	2	31	9
9	Stop hunting	2	0	0	0	0	2	0.5
10	Comment about eating less meat and growing food and better food	1	21	3	0	0	25	7
11	Confusion over which re-cycling bins to use or rubbish comment	2	0	3	1	5	11	3
12	A green club	0	1	1	0	3	5	1
13	Print more things in black and white	0	3	0	0	2	5	1
14	Take art more seriously as way into green thinking	0	2	0	0	0	2	0.5
15	More composting	0	2	1	0	2	5	1
16	Have a green roof	0	3	0	1	0	4	1
17	Comment about amount of food waste	0	0	4	0	3	7	2
18	Walk to school	0	0	0	1	1	2	0.5
19	Less use of the smart board	0	0	0	0	3	3	0.8
20	Save water and don't leave taps running	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.2

Figure 3: Coded results from Year 6 classes from 5 local Primary schools.

In the summer of 2019, all Year 6 classes (age 10-11) from five Primary schools completed a similar exercise and these, too, were coded (figure 3). The analysis showed:

28% of comments were about school grounds, outdoor learning and wildlife collapsed within codes 1, 2 and 7

25% of comments were on reducing plastic within code 3.

21% of comments were on more factual information about effect of climate change, energy, an annual event and learning about protesting within collapsed codes 4, 5, 6 and 8.

9% of comments were on growing food, eating less meat and tackling food waste within collapsed codes 10 and 17.

The coding identified outputs that could be traced and verified as coming from a mixture of adults and young people working together on the shared 'common third' problem of putting together a local schools and community environmental education strategy whose next phase was a workshop in February 2020 led by young people and attended by 70 people including governors, teachers, parents, pupils and local councillors. Five groups discussed how schools working more closely together, as well as being supported by the local community, could improve school grounds; food in schools; transport around schools; wildlife education in schools; green teams, eco living and joint, local school exchanges. The result was a selection of issues that would lead to a big 'ASK' (active sustainable knowledge) by young people to various individuals, businesses and organisations within their community for help either in time, talent, treasure (money) or simply the thrill of doing things differently.

**School Grounds:** Call out to relatives such as grandparents to help with repairs, maintenance and learning associated with a school allotment or wildspace area.

**Food/School Meals:** Despite good practice about healthy eating, pupils wanted simple hands-on cooking; as well as schools growing their own foods and reducing food waste.

**Transport:** The idea of shared use an air pollution monitor led to a parent with legal expertise working alongside pupils to explore car exclusion zones around schools at certain times of day.

**Wildlife:** More in the school curriculum about wildlife and climate change was called for as well as lessons about ecosystems and how to make positive changes.

**Green Teams, Eco Living, Communication:** Young people spoke of making short films to highlight local issues/potential solutions, fundraising and awareness-raising especially on energy use and monitoring as checking that lights are turned off was not seen as enough.

Hayward reminds us that embedded within such meetings is the potential for young people with the *least influence* to be heard and for a local community that suffered £94 million pounds of flood damage in 2000, 'Keepers of the long view' should be encouraged to keep the issue in the public mind. The call by young people for dealing with real problems and real projects echoes that of Dewey who reminds us of the danger of governments laying down the law, the legitimacy of young people to challenge what they are being taught and the danger of egotistical sharps. Arendt would recognise and approve of the willingness of young people to prepare for a new world through approaches that were imaginative, unexpected, disruptive and creative while Oakeshott talks about the possibility of curriculum irrelevance and the importance of speaking out as well as inviting speakers less as a representative of an organisation but more because of the possibility of 'perceiving a hidden intelligence.'

During the discussions, there emerged a clear tension between pedagogic, parent and planet pace – an acknowledgement that there is only so much that can be achieved within different timescales. Different approaches are required to meet people's different viewpoints and sense of urgency. These ranged from:

- disruption and arrest in support of very urgent action (*perceived planet pace*)
- specific extra-curricular activities to be put in place in the next year that could support teachers and pupils (*parent pace*)
- medium term changes to the school curriculum. (*pedagogic pace*)

## **Partial reset - not a total recovery of the old**

In response, and to help guide a path through the different paces, hopes and expectations, a Community Interest Company, called *Green United*, was formed in July 2020 to act as the vehicle to provide young people with agency by asking for offers of help in time, skills or finance from their local community and University to help inform their aspirations both in and outside schools. A Youth Board will decide how best to allocate funds to projects. Higher education cannot stand alone in navigating paradoxes in sustainability education and such an approach is designed to foster an even richer educational journey that has been so ruthlessly interrupted.

In the UK and other countries around the world, school heads and authorities are under massive pressure due to the acute Covid-19 emergency while a chronic climate/environmental emergency has been articulated by young people and scientists. A seeming worthwhile push by government to help pupils 'catch up' in relation to an existing curriculum is matched by a lack of imagination to

re-configure some of the curriculum in order to address the chronic emergency. Instead, we have the chance to harness some of the effects of Covid-19, such as a need for smaller class sizes, as a welcome, positive contribution to the future environmental education of our young people as opposed to what might be perceived as a threat to the status quo. We are not, surely, going to return to where we were? Work patterns will change; classes will have to be smaller if physical distancing is to remain, we have experienced some positive effects of digital learning and we have tasted a less polluted planet. Our young people are unlikely to give up easily.

Despite important issues to do with equality and family backgrounds, we should explore the potential benefits of a semi de-schooled, partially 'invisible', school year especially in the summer term. A re-working, if you will, of the agricultural past when children helped bring in the harvest to one in which communities, through local initiatives such as *Green United*, work much more closely together on enhancing, appreciating and learning from their local environment. The winter months are devoted to the skills and core subjects required to run a 'doughnut economy' (Raworth, 2017) while some of the summer term is liberated to put what has been learned into practice. We need a partial reset of our education system, in line with many other emerging and necessary resets from the NHS to transport and finance - *not* a total recovery of what came before.

## **Where and how next?**

Covid-19 could well see a defensive push towards more 'command and control' of our universities, schools and young people's education. Yet the wisdom of past and current educators warns of such moves and instead seeks to inspire university staff, parents, pupils, students and teachers to articulate and defend their stake in education. The slow/fast: resistance/alignment frame is helpful but best brought into focus through a variety of stakeholders both within *and outside* higher education during a time of continued hesitation and wait, invisibility, reflection, activity and experience. This will require different ways of thinking about our roles such as the notion of the 'polymath teacher tutor' adopting a conventional teacher role but whose duties automatically include being a personal tutor thus blurring the pastoral and academic roles that tend to be separated at present. This is a vision was presented by Quicke (1994 p164) in the following words:

*'Thus the new [summer term] teacher would not [operate as] a subject specialist but as a polymath teacher-tutor whose role would be to establish close relationships with each of his or her pupils as individuals and facilitate their learning in all areas of the 'curriculum for life'.*

New organisational structures, perhaps flowing from a *Green United* time, talent and treasure approach as well as the statutory careers guidance, might suggest groups of teachers, university students and lay community members coming together in what Hargreaves (1994. p.236) describes as a 'moving mosaic' to provide a 'portfolio of activities' (Barber 1996:236) ranging from the design, development and delivery of informed activities and solutions as well as improved distance learning techniques as a result of Covid-19 for sharing with other groups be they local, national or international.

The previously suggested Year 8 modification to the UK government statutory DFE 'meaningful exchange' (I would prefer Oakeshott's notion of 'shared conversations') with those in sustainable practices could be expanded to dedicated quality, summer experience informed by the reach of universities. Such reach should include appropriate contact with 'long view' entrepreneurs and

young start-ups from battery research development, wind turbine planning, bicycle lane schemes, green architectural businesses and home insulation projects to regenerative farming projects, woodland habitat management, wild flower meadow restoration, flood defence schemes, eco fashion businesses, formula E developments and waste disposal to name but a few.

## Conclusion

This paper argues for much greater agency of young people within a civic ecology, community-based, time, talent and treasure ASK framework actively supported by local universities and their staff. It argues for immediate, manageable, nuanced interpretations of existing government education guidance, such as within careers, alongside a much more strategic Active Sustainability Knowledge (ASK) approach to environmental education. The resulting actions, developed by young people supported by voluntary time, skills and donations by a grateful, older generation will help prepare communities for the environmental challenges that lie ahead.

This is not a revolution but a charged evolution - a condition required to sustain a democracy which Hayward reminds us cannot be taken for granted and which has to be recreated by each generation. Covid-19, that has crashed into 'the fierce urgency of now', can help us unlock this renewed potential due to the previously 'unthinkable' actions it has sown. Universities have a significant role to play in driving such a strategy by articulating the need:

- not to antagonise policy-making authorities but instead to convince them.
- not to overwhelm senior education managers but instead to support them.
- not to undermine teachers but instead to give them hope.
- not to ignore or short-change our young people in schools and universities but instead, as Arendt reminds us, to love them enough to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world.

The most significant pace of all will be that demanded by both pupils and students across the planet and we in the research community should not be found lacking to help motivate our institutions and their community hinterlands to answer their call.

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