



Welcome to this edition of the Summerhill News

In this edition you can read about Summerhill children giving evidence to the Select Committee on Education, the Centenary celebrations of A. S. Neill's 'Dominies Log', how a Beijing education group awarded Zoe a gold medal and the Fairtrade company Liberation Food's visit to Summerhill.

Happy reading, *Steve Fawdry (Editor)*

Update regarding our inspections



Summerhill has now become a full member of the Independent Schools Association which means that from now on we will no longer be inspected by Ofsted but instead by the Independent Schools Inspectorate, an alternative inspection unit which, like Ofsted, answers directly, but separately, to the Department for Education. After the latest decision by the DfE and Ofsted to revoke our court agreement, we no longer feel that we have any trust in their integrity or ability to judge us without prejudice now or in the future. To show the direction they seem to be moving, the document created in 2013 by Ofsted to assist inspectors of democratic schools, which we contributed to, has now been abandoned.....

The ISI cover a wide range of schools worldwide both large and very small. It aims to base findings upon the fulfilment of the aims and distinctiveness of each school. We are not looking for an easy ride. The inspection process is clearly very rigorous, but there also seems to be a sense of support and cooperation which we think is the way inspections of any sort should be conducted.

There has been some suggestion that in moving to an Independent schools group we are somehow leaving our grass roots behind and becoming elitist, something we thought long and hard about. All we can say is that Summerhill is actually an independent school, it is the only way it can possibly exist, and the ISA does not seem to be in the least bit elitist, but friendly and supportive to its members. The cost will be little more than we have had to pay Ofsted anyway.

So far we have been met with enthusiasm and friendship (and possibly even a little pride). We feel ISA can be helpful in many ways, not least in assisting us through the myriad of new rules and regulations that emerge each year from whichever government is in control.

We want Summerhill to be the best it can be, to tick all the boxes it needs to tick, to continue to offer a high standard of teaching and care, **without changing the values upon which it was founded**. We are looking forward to our new inspection process no matter how challenging or what the results turn out to be.....

Zoe Readhead, Principal of Summerhill

Summerhill students run workshop for Student Voice



In October 2015, four Summerhill pupils; Tom, Milo, Lasse and Georgia, ran a workshop based on the 'Summerhill meeting' at a National Conference of Student Voice, the organisation that has replaced the English School Student Association and which aims to represent the voice of children in schools in England.

It was the most popular workshop of the conference, and the children stayed and chatted excitedly afterwards. Michael Newman, (Summerhill Houseparent), gave a provocative introductory presentation celebrating the 100 years of Neill's "A Dominies Log" (A. S. Neill's journal of a schoolmaster first published in 1915), and arguing that the values of children's rights and freedom were dominant in primary schools from 1914 to the 1960s. Michael concluded the workshop with a 'rallying cry', and the acknowledgement that the conference was a part of a long and positive history of children's voice, as represented by Summerhill and New Ideals in Education.

"I've been looking through some of the feedback forms this morning, and so many of them reference the Summerhill workshop as the thing they most enjoyed about the day... and how inspired they were to hear that such a thing exists! You opened many eyes that day!" Danny Whitehouse, conference organiser.

Summerhill students give evidence to Select Committee on Education



Summerhill School had evidence accepted and published by the Select Committee on Education last term. This was for their meeting with the Children's Commissioner, Anne Longfield OBE, and was in response to her report, 'Ambitious for Children', about her vision for the lives of children in the future. In the report's introduction she writes about the children's views:

"Children also have clear messages for us all about what would improve childhood. More freedom and independence to make their own decisions and be who they want to be without judgement is a priority for half. Just under half think that school could be improved, including having less homework so that all their free time is not taken up. Children are clear that they want fewer exams and tests and better classes and lessons that not only teach them about particular subjects, but also life skills and prepare them for adult life. And just under a third of children and young people say that childhood would be better if they were respected, had their views heard and taken seriously."

Our evidence stated, "That what the children are asking of their schools reflects what the heroes of teaching in 1914-1937 struggled for in order to help create a world of active citizens who would contribute to justice and peace. That this history should allow us, teachers and children, to help contribute to the dream they pursued. That 'liberating the child' should be the main focus of our schools."

We then went on to describe the history of the fight to free children in schools from 1914 onwards by the New Ideals in Education Conferences of that time, ending with,

"One such teacher, A. S. Neill, having taught in state schools for ten years, and whose first book, 'A Dominies Log', published 100 years ago this November, describes his headmastership of a village primary school in Gretna Green, changing it from a centre of academic drudgery to one of happiness and humanity. He then founded the oldest school in the world based on these values, Summerhill School. As a school of outstanding practice in PSHE, citizenship and values, it is about time we reflected on what we have learnt from successful and heroic practice."

The Select Committee asked for evidence on the purpose of education and how to measure its success. A group of three staff, Joan (new English teacher), Montse (House Houseparent) and Michael (Shack Houseparent) joined four children (aged 9 and 10), Latisha, Sure, Elodie and Eleanor in Summerhill's café to discuss what they thought of these questions. A summary of the children's views were written down, agreed by the children and submitted to the Select Committee.

In response to the question "**What are schools for?**" the children stated...

You should be allowed to be yourself, to develop into an individual and be allowed to be different.

You should be happy and free to choose what to learn.

You should learn to be free. The children should not be forced to do anything.

They should not be trained to conform, or to be like each other.

They should not have to conform to the wishes of their parents in terms of what they learn or what they want to be.

They should not have to do exams, but can choose to do them if they want them or they are really needed.

Childhood is short enough, let the children enjoy it, and enjoy their learning.

Do not fill their lives with the stress of learning for exams, and conforming to a school life they have no control over.

In response to the question **“How should we measure whether schools work?”** The children stated...

Ask the children if they are happy, if they like their schools. The attitude of the children will tell us whether it is a good school, not the exam results.

Discovering Democracy Award



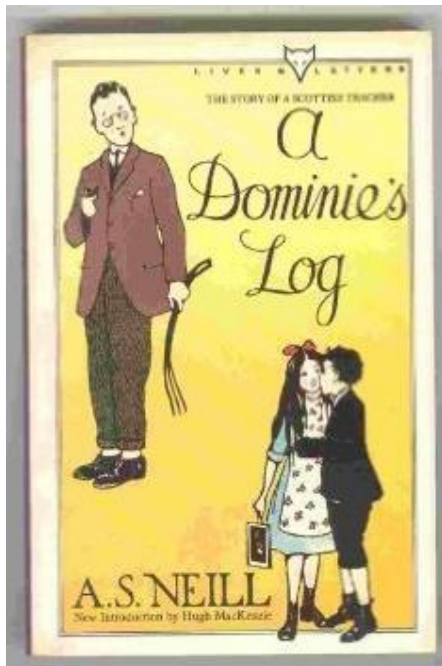
On 15th September 2015, International Democracy Day, the British Youth Council and the Cabinet launched an award scheme to find the most democratic schools. The ‘Discovering Democracy Award’ was set-up to promote active democratic citizenship in schools and is funded by the Cabinet. On the 26th January 2016 it was announced that Summerhill School, along with 40 other schools have received this prestigious award. This was decided by a panel of experts and young people who sift through the nominees.

Children and Families Minister, Edward Timpson said,

“I welcome this Discovering Democracy Award that is owned and judged by young people themselves. It is vital that all school pupils develop character and understanding, and engaging in the democratic process is a key part of this. We want young people to leave school with not just a strong academic grounding, but a wider understanding of fundamental British values so they are fully prepared to succeed in adult life.”

Centenary of A.S. Neill's 'A Dominies Log'

Michael Newman has teamed up with Futures Publishing who has printed 100 special edition copies of Neill's 'A Dominies Log'. These have a special introduction that explains its importance to the history of education, and placing Neill within the community of teachers, professors, psychologists and politicians who were organising to 'liberate the child' within our schools.



'A Dominies Log', is Neill's diary as a new head teacher at Gretna Green School. He had just lost his journalism job in London due to the forthcoming threat of war. In 1914, as the country goes to war, Neill is transforming a 'hard working school' into a 'playground'. The book represents a significant voice, that of a state school teacher exploring how he can help his children be happy, be citizens, and be children. (Left, picture of original book).

The children arrive early at the school; Neill is puzzled as there is an ice slide on the road that they generally play on. They explain they are early because the policeman has salted the ice because of complaints from a local farmer. A discussion ensues; Neill explains that the power is with the farmer to look after his property, the horse, and that the children have no vote and no power. He compares them to women, without a vote, and therefore with meagre wages. He thinks they should write a charter of rights!

We will be using the book to celebrate all the teachers and educationalists who wanted to 'liberate' the children in their schools, including Clara Grant, Prof Percy Nunn, Bertram Hawker, Lillian de Lissa, Norman MacMunn, Edmond Holmes, Homer Lane, Montessori, Harriet Finley Johnson, Prof Millicent Mackenzie, Mrs Hutchinson from Catherine Street LCC School and many, many more.

It is being sent to eminent educationalists and contributors to the culture of modern Britain, as well as lead campaigners for children's rights, asking them to support the centenary, either by writing a contribution to a major reprint of the book, celebrating the centenary with a quote, or by taking part in events during the year. So keep an eye out for the celebrations.

Michael has already been celebrating with numerous presentations in Italy and England. He spoke to one of the largest conferences in Italy of alternative schools, 'Tutta un Altra Scuola 2015', organised by the magazine Terra Nuova Edizione, which was filmed and put online. He also spoke at co-operatives for outdoor learning; at Modena University; in a public conversation with teacher and writer, Alex Corlazzoli, in Ravenna; with parents and teachers from newly created democratic schools. He is speaking at various conferences in Italy in April.

Watch Michael giving one of his presentations after the first 6 minutes of this [YouTube video...](#)

For Michael's series of presentations click [here](#)

Beijing Chaoyang Education Group Visit Summerhill



Summerhill hosted a group of mainly primary school state head teachers from Beijing, who were shown around by Zoe and chatted to children and staff. They were so impressed by the freedom, play and learning at the school that they presented Zoe with a medal in recognition of our contribution to education (see picture below), and gave some emotional goodbyes. Summerhill has a growing number of Chinese students, and a few years ago at a paper presentation about Summerhill to an international conference on Citizenship Education (jointly organised by the Institute of Education and Beijing University), the head of Education at Beijing expressed his desire to visit the school.



Yaacov Hecht chats to Summerhill children and staff



Whenever Summerhill has visitors we try to use the opportunity for community members to meet and learn from them, this includes ex-students as well as people from other democratic schools. Yaacov Hecht, the founder and ex-head teacher of Hadera Democratic School, Israel, visited Summerhill on Friday 22nd January 2016.

With around 380 students aged four to eighteen, it is the largest of twenty-five Israeli democratic schools.

Yaacov met with a small group of students and staff to answer questions about his life, Hadera School and education.

He discussed with us our vision of Summerhill and democratic living, and how learning in classrooms can be a collaborative experience with everyone taking the roles of teacher and student. It was a fascinating and thought-provoking meeting.

Liberation Food visits Summerhill

Last summer, we were visited by Helen Long, education officer for the Fairtrade Company 'Liberation Food'. She was interviewed by the children and filmed with a view to posting a video online. Helen also ran a workshop for the school and spent some time learning about how Summerhill works. She shared Liberation's nut products with us (see picture below) and the community voted to support the company.



Fairtrade is about better prices, decent working conditions and fair terms of trade for farmers and workers. It's about supporting the development of thriving farming and worker communities that have more control over their futures and protecting the environment in which they live and work.

Liberation Food is the UK's only Fair Trade, farmer-owned nut company. Their vision is a world in which small-holder nut producers earn a decent, secure income and can plan for the future of their families and communities. Liberation Food buys their nuts from the co-operatives of small-scale growers and farmers who own a 44 percent share of the company.

We organised for Helen to meet the Leiston Town Fairtrade Committee to tell them about her company and to get support from Leiston shops.



(Picture, Helen Long, far right, with members of Leiston Fairtrade Committee at the local cafe, Simply Delicious)

(Picture, Summerhill kids voting to support Liberation's nut products)



Summerhill children are delegates for Rotary Club's first Youth Peace Conference

Four Summerhill students, Lasse, Milo, Pauline, and June, represented Summerhill at a Youth Peace conference organised by the Rotary Club at Norwich County Hall. Guest speakers included local MP Chloe Smith and Norfolk police chief constable Simon Bailey. The event was promoted to teenagers throughout Norfolk and Suffolk, and Summerhill was specifically requested to send students by one of the organisers, Pat Webb.



Music expands at Summerhill



Under the leadership of Henry Readhead, and in partnership with his music colleagues, including an ex-student, Jesse, and ex-staff member, Martin, the music department has continued to grow over the past few years. It now has eight peripatetic teachers, and a full weekly timetable of learning with instruments, groups, singing, electronic music, sound recording and engineering.

With exciting experiments of jamming sessions during non-lesson times, normally held outside in the summer, along with guest musicians visiting for the day, there is a powerful ethos of children experiencing music naturally and playfully, and seeing it as a way of expressing their emotions and ideas. More on this in the next newsletter.

The Trust

By Steve Fawdry, Trustee

The A. S. Neill Summerhill Trust is a registered charity whose purpose is to promote the educational philosophy, ideas, life and writings of A. S. Neill, and to provide bursaries or other forms of financial assistance to school pupils.

Last year we awarded 5 bursaries totalling £7,000 to existing Summerhill pupils.

We currently have a policy of making bursaries to existing pupils only. For information on how to apply for a bursary, parents can contact the school office 01728 830540.

Last but not least, a very big thank you to all our regular donors, those who donate via the website and to the Summerhill parents, we couldn't do it without you!

Thank you!



If you'd like to make a difference to a child's life you too can make a donation to the Trust. Whether it is a one off or regular donation, we will spend it wisely.

£25 means a child can join their friends on a school trip.

£50 will pay for two extra-curricular lessons.



£100 will pay for travel costs incurred by the External Affairs Committee during their promotion of Summerhill & the ideas/philosophies of A. S. Neill.

£1,000 will provide assistance over two terms for parents who are struggling to pay their child's school fees.

A regular donation made by standing order will become an important part of our 'bread and butter'. To set this up please contact the school office on 01728 830540.

TED “Ideas worth Spreading”

Links to Video talks on education

[Sir Ken Robinson says schools kill creativity](#)

[Sugata Mitra: The child-driven education](#)

[Our digital lives, Eli Pariser: Beware online "filter bubbles"](#)

[Nick Thorpe, Author of 'Urban Worrier' mentions how a visit to Summerhill inspired him](#)

[Arvind Gupta, Science toy maker “Toys from Trash”](#)

Suggest some more to.... summerhillnewsletter@gmail.com



A.S. Neill talks about freedom and his Summerhill School in England. Summerhill is often said to be the first school based on freedom and democratic ideals. The documentary was called "[Here and Now](#)".

More interesting videos

[Make Your Voice Heard: Discover Democratic Education](#)

[Think Global School](#)

Suggest some more to.... summerhillnewsletter@gmail.com



Links to pages related to education

[A. S. Neill's Summerhill School](#)

[EUDEC](#)

[Alternative education resource organization \(AERO\)](#)

Suggest some more... summerhillnewsletter@gmail.com



All the Summerhill Newsletters can be viewed at Dropbox [here](#)

vimeo

SUMMERHILL

A four part double BAFTA award winning children's drama made by Tiger Aspect about life at Summerhill, culminating in the battle and court case with OFSTED in 2000 [here](#).

Organisations & Resources

Links to organisations and resources

[Personalised Education Now](#)

Personalised Education Now promotes education based on learner-managed learning within a framework of democratic values and practices. An educator becomes, pre-dominantly, 'the guide on the side' rather than 'the sage on the stage'.

[Education Otherwise](#)

Whether you're thinking about home educating or are already doing it, Education Otherwise provides information, guidance and resources to help you achieve this.

[EUDEC](#)

EUDEC is a non-profit organisation that promotes democratic education as a sensible educational model for all democratic states. Its [members](#) are individuals, [schools](#) and institutions throughout Europe with decades of experience in democratic education.

[Arvind Gupta Toys](#)

Arvind Gupta is a science toy maker - he shares his passion for toys and books through his [website](#). Everyday 50,000 children across the world view his films in 18 languages. Also 15,000 passionate books on Education, Peace, Science, Environment and Maths are downloaded every day.

[Other Education](#)

The Journal of Educational Alternatives

If you have something interesting you'd like to share with Summerhill readers that is related to Summerhill School, please do get in touch with me.

Steve Fawdry, Editor.

The next Summerhill News will be mailed out in August 2016

Copy deadline is 31st July.

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