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Illuminating Schools and Communities

DAVID LIMOND

ABSTRACT The UK Government's commitment to Full-Service or Extended Schools is now firmly established in the Every Child Matters legislation. Here David Limond examines these developments, largely inspired and dominated by North American models, and in the light of older English and Scottish traditions argues for a more radical approach that exemplifies people's capacity to take charge of their own lives without bureaucratic interference. He argues that modern British Third Way communitarianism animating the current agenda is too often haphazard, poorly thought-out, driven by novelty and easy prey to authoritarian tendencies. He suggests current models of community school are little more than the extension of medicalised surveillance into the lives of certain people and the industrialisation of education as a whole.

It was beyond doubt that there was a significant movement afoot in the United Kingdom to develop so called 'lighted' or extended schools – institutions that serve their communities in such a diversity of ways that they never close (Henderson, 1998; Henderson, 2001; Henderson, 2003; Revell, 2003; Revell, 2004) – even before the announcement of this policy in June 2005 by the Secretary of State at the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (DfES, 2005).

> [T]he government's five-year programme [aims] to ensure all schools offer 8am-to-6pm activities by 2010…Under the plan, all parents of primary age children should be able to access affordable childcare 'at or through their school at 8am to 6pm, all year round'…Secondary schools will have to of- fer a range of activities…for a similar period that will include school holi- days. (*The Guardian*, 2005)

That there was an interest in community schools was indicated shortly into the term of office of the government elected in 1997 when a semi-detached ally of that government started to look for ways of 'apply[ing] third-way principles to the future of our schools' (Kellner, 1998). In his search Peter Kellner invoked

the model of the village colleges founded in England in the 1930s and 1940s. In what follows it is my intention to consider the metaphor of the lighted school and to ask whether or not the new model arises from a desire to have schools that illuminate or simply to have schools that are industrially productive by colonising the night.

Schools have been characterised variously as prisons, factories, fortresses or castles holding down subject populations; even as asylums or blindly humming monstrous termite mounds, ant-hills or bee hives. But they have also, or alternatively, been cast as lighthouses of knowledge amid seas of ignorance and it is self-evident that if they are to be, and be seen, in terms at all comparable to this last description then they must enjoy good community relations. That is to say: they must exist, and be known to exist, not simply *in* but *for* the communities that, at least nominally, they serve. Failure to achieve and maintain this ecological balance or ecumenical harmony risks compromising everything that schools can accomplish: however much or little that may be and of whatever nature. It is for this reason that it is essential to understand how and in what way[s] schools have operated, and might operate, in, and for, their communities.

Learning and Community: schools as lighthouses

Descriptively, schools can be thought of as oriented on two axes. One axis plots the extent to which the school is distant or alienated from its community; the other plots the extent to which it is concerned solely with learning activities. Thus a school (or hypothetical model of school organisation) may be very much concerned with learning but might yet be closely aligned with its community, or it may be concerned with a multiplicity of activities and only minimally with learning but could still be disconnected from the community in which it is located; and a variety of other combinations can be imagined. It is self evident that anywhere that is entirely unconcerned with education cannot be described as a school: it is a closed school perhaps, a former school building, but not a school. Thus the axis on which concern with the activity/ies of learning can be plotted runs not from 'total' to 'none' but from 'total' to 'partial'. In the case of the so-called full-service school we see only a partial concern with learning. It may be averred that the ultimate reason for promoting health care in/through such schools is that this will contribute to learning in the long run but this is not the primary, or even usually the main, reason for promoting healthiness and it thus seems quite legitimate to suggest that full-service schooling, understood as schooling + health care + any other service[s] offered, is ultimately a reduction in a school's educational work rather than an addition to it. By whatever indicator[s] may be chosen – floor space devoted to classrooms and libraries as against parent and child clinics say – if a school is involved in something other than education then it is less involved in education than it was before or than it might otherwise have been, if it has been built with the intention of its being a full-service school. By contrast, if a school takes on the

work of dealing with adult learners – either during 'normal' school hours, or out of hours, or some combination of both – then it follows that this school is more involved in education than otherwise. As to the intersecting axis, we have already said that a school may be more or less aligned with, or accepted in, its community: a lighthouse as opposed to a factory/castle/asylum/prison. The emphasis in current policy is to set up full-service or community schools on much the same model. As such it is a movement away from education on the basis of the assumption that alienation derives from schools' being perceived as purely educational establishments. Those who do not themselves believe in education, beyond seeing it in economistic and technicist terms do not imagine that anyone else might believe in its power and value in any other way.[s] Those who cannot dream cannot imagine, or tolerate, others doing so either. This is why they must fear community schools except those that operate along the lines that they dictate.

Lighthouses belong where they are – they are integral to their context and they exist because the people who most need them, those who live by the sea, also most want them. Schools must be like lighthouses in this respect if they are to be community schools in any more than name. Carefully examined, the school as lighthouse is a profoundly striking metaphor. A lighthouse is large, imposing, dominant in a landscape – though not domineering. Lighthouses are ancient but can be innovative, respected in every era and in each generation. The Pharos lighthouse, one of the true wonders of the classical world, was constructed *circa* 275 BCE. The oldest known lighthouse still in existence dates to 1584. In the same year as the translation of the bible known as the King James or authorised version was published, 1611, the now classically familiar design of revolving light was perfected and first used in the French Tour de Condonan light. The Scottish scientist David Brewster (1781-1768) was responsible for significant innovations in lighthouse optics but the Fresnel lens, devised by the eponymous Augustin-Jean Fresnel, (1788-1827) appeared on the scene in 1820 and has been in use ever since. Henry Winstanley (1644-1703), the designer of the first light to stand in open sea, the Eddystone light, disappeared 'aboard' his creation when it was washed away in a storm; though he had lived long enough to prove that such a light could be constructed. Lighthouses continue to be the classic example of a 'public good', meaning: something which, once created or unleashed, cannot but be of service to all relevant parties who choose to make use of it. Thus the question is: how to go about persuading people (adults and children as students and pupils alike) that they can make use as freely and productively of schools as mariners make use of lighthouses?

Henry Morris and the Village Colleges

In practice, when have schools ever resembled lighthouses? When have they been beacons to communities, signalling good hope and cheer, drawing those in need towards them? An obvious example of schools operating in this way might

be the village colleges in their heyday. The foundation document for the village college 'movement' is the longwindedly titled *Memorandum on the Provision of Educational and Social Facilities for the Countryside with Special Reference to Cambridgeshire*, drawn up in 1924 by Henry Morris (1889-1961). Despite being only 33, Morris had by then already been Cambridgeshire's Secretary for Education (Chief Education Officer [CEO]) for two years. He remained in this post for more than three decades. Senior educational bureaucrats are not often charismatic figures but Morris is remembered to this day for his combination of practical determination, intellectualism, idealistic vision and stubbornness. Deeply rooted in English rural life, his life-long commitment was to the revival of an economic and social *milieu* that he saw to be failing: the village. The intention of the village colleges that he first proposed in 1924 was to arrest the net outflow of rural people from counties such as Cambridgeshire to take up urban employment and life. This had of course been evident since the onset of the industrial revolution but Morris set himself the task of reversing this already centuries old trend. He diagnosed the fundamental cause of this demographic movement as being lack of educational, recreational and employment opportunities in rural communities.

His twin aspirations, therefore, were to provide 'a rural education of the secondary type for the training of boys and girls for life as countrymen and countrywomen…[so that] rural England …[might] have the education it needs and the social and recreational life it deserves' (Morris, 1924, sections VII-VIII). This was to be brought about by an initiative which would see 'All the activities and facilities that already exist in the countryside… be[ing] brought together in and around one institution' (Morris, 1924, section X). This he named, the village college.

When Morris wrote, against the background of an austere and seemingly penurious post-First World War Britain, community development initiatives and formal education were not only not co-ordinated, they were competing for funds. At that time: 'Village Halls and Community Centres had to stand at the back of the grant queue to receive the crumbs that fell from the Treasury table' wrote one of his CEO contemporaries reflecting on the situation decades later (Lester Smith, 1969, p. 88). The plan that Morris drew up was intended to break down such distinctions and certainly qualifies him as one of the most ambitious and radically original British educationalists of the twentieth century.

Each village college was to have a primary school (though these were to be limited in their scope to serving only children in the immediate vicinity – there were to be separate schools for those under 11 in places which were not the locations of village colleges) and a secondary school but also a centre for adult education and a communal focus for social and, broadly defined, educational activities. Morris outlined the plan of the proposed new arrangements in his Memorandum with a drawing intended to sum up his aspirations for both form and function of the colleges. This can perhaps best be described as resembling a wicket (an 'E' turned through 90°) – one wing for

adults, one wing for children and a set of communal facilities (library, assembly hall, dining room and the like) set between them (Morris,1924, section XVI).

Morris cared as much about the aesthetics of the village colleges as their administration and organisation. he employed the architect Walter Gropius (1883-1946) to design Impington College and had ambitious plans for the colleges' development though these were largely unfilled in his lifetime and the colleges have long since ceased to be truly distinctive.

My contention here is simply this, that it is far easier to invoke the example of something such as the village colleges as a precedent for new community schools than it is to strive seriously to recapture and recreate the genuine love of genuine communities that inspired Morris to act as he did. Glossing over plans to industrialise schooling and further increase medicalised surveillance on largely inner-city populations with a few references to the village colleges will do nothing to make the new lighted schools truly equivalent to the schools Morris planned.

The Scottish Community School Tradition

Shortly after Kellner wrote there was an apparently even more significant endorsement of the general idea that schools ought to be intimately linked to the communities in which they reside when the Scottish Office (succeeded by the Scottish Executive in 1999) published a document entitled *A New Community Schools Prospectus* . Unfortunately nothing more amply demonstrates the falsity of claims on the part of the current government to be interested in community schools than a detailed examination of the Scottish New Community Schools (SNCS) programme (Scottish Office, 1998). It was immediately evident in the Scottish Office document that introduced the SNCS programme that the inspiration was international, specifically north American. Annex A was devoted to 'The full service school in the USA' and announced that 'The concept of the Full Service School emerged in the USA during the early 1980s to provide integrated, school-based health and social services…in disadvantaged areas'. To British third way modernists/communitarians this was an obvious choice of inspiration, being both new and from the 'home' of communitarianism, hence the rush to adopt the model (Driscoll, 2001; Dryfus, 2002). A model of 'community schooling' imported from elsewhere cannot, by definition, truly be community schooling. The village colleges were organic, rooted in the soil of the rural world that Morris knew and loved so much. The proposal to go along north American lines in Scotland amounted to little more than the adoption of a new production method, akin to buying in a technology from abroad, as is routinely the case in industry. The case for continuing with an organic and specifically Scottish experiment in community schooling was not even considered.

A decade ago Scotland was already recognised as being distinctive in the quantity and quality of its community school arrangements: '[being] unique in Europe in the degree to which it promotes provision for adults within the

secondary school system' (Blair at al, 1994, p. 6). An informal network of Scottish community schools began to grow from at least 1980 and within ten years they were an established, though still not commonplace, feature of the Scottish educational landscape (Vallely & Peacock, 1982; Wilson & Pirrie, 2000a,b). Such schools were more favoured in Scotland's second largest population centre – the area in and around the east-coast city of Edinburgh – than in its demographic heartland the urban and (post-)industrial landscapes of Glasgow and its environs, but by the early 1990s community schools were widely spread. But nowhere is this pre-existing pattern of community schools reflected in the document that introduced the SNCS programme. Deracinated policy making made it *possible* to ignore this fact – ideological modernism made it *desirable* to do so for a government prone to equating novelty with desirability. This point has been made by many people but it is as usefully summed up as anywhere else by Robin Alexander who, in the context of discussing whether or not there is accumulated wisdom and knowledge of and in primary education, describes it as: 'a political worldview in which history and enlightenment begin in 1997' (Alexander, 2003). But what had gone before was a success: an educational policy success. Failure to learn from the past has resulted in ignorance of the simple fact that the most effective, integrated community schools ever to have existed in the UK were, and are, the 'old' Scottish community schools. These were, and are, the most lighthouse-like schools the country has ever known: being schools which people (adults) volunteered to attend. Alas, given the emphasis now being placed on the full-service model of community school, it seems extremely unlikely that there will be any new foundations of the 'old' Scottish community school pattern in the immediate or foreseeable future. That is: secondary schools that open their doors to adult students and – where possible and appropriate – mix those adult students with their 'ordinary' pupils. But here it may be objected that if the 'old' community schools were as eminently sensible, and simple, an idea as I have suggested, why have they not been adopted as the model for new developments? Surely, it might be said, they must not have been as effective (however effectiveness is to be measured) in practice as I have suggested. If they had been a good idea then they would have been emulated. This however does not follow. For a host of reasons, the fact of the matter is that they have not been adopted as a model. They were largely an independent initiative, pioneered by certain of the erstwhile Scottish regional authorities. Central governments (and for these purposes the Scottish Executive can be treated as tantamount to being a central government) tend to be averse to adopting ideas which have not been originated centrally. That alone may explain the reluctance to learn the lessons they taught; the desire to be novel at all costs and a bias towards Atlanticism on the part of the UK's incumbent government may also have contributed to this instance of flawed policy making. (For the initial evaluation of the new SNCS programme see Elliot et al, 2002).

The Case for Radical Community Schools

But this should not be a cause for despair. It may in fact be an opportunity. In broad terms, two possible models of community school management can be discerned – though each of these contains within itself myriad specifically different alternatives. I shall call these models: the radical community school and the official, sponsored or sanctioned community school. The village colleges and the 'old' Scottish community schools belonged to this latter category. We shall not see their like again. Given changed governmental priorities which now concentrate entirely on the economistic and technicist discourses dominant in almost all policy-making circles, all vestiges of interest in either the ruralism that motivated Morris or the educational humanism that lay behind the original Scottish community schools can be assumed to have quit the scene.

Thus what hope there is for the future must reside in the prospects for a new generation of radical community schools. A radical community school is one that eschews official sponsorship or even sanction. A clear example of a school in this category would be the erstwhile Croxteth Comprehensive in Liverpool. Finding themselves faced with the imminent closure of their community's secondary school in the early 1980s, parents and community activists (not politicians) in this part of inner city Liverpool occupied the Croxteth Comprehensive building and ran an *ad hoc* school there with the assistance (sometimes misguided) of a bewildering array of volunteer teachers, including a visiting academic from the USA and a number of Jesuit priests interested in liberation theology (Carspecken, 1991).

For some two years the school was effectively the site of a squat until the closure decision was eventually reversed and the school reverted to the control of the Local Education Authority for the area, although its period of dynamic experimentation was now over. The Croxteth occupation was hardly a success, but it might be a precedent. Without going as far as squatting vacant school premises, why ought not parents and others to by-pass existing educational arrangements and found their own community schools? If there are those who, as I do, believe that a school can be a lighthouse for a community and if, as I do, they believe further that community is necessary for the best, most fulfilled, human life and if they accept my contention that the coming together of adults and adolescents with the common end of learning is desirable because it lights the way towards ever greater community cohesion in all matters and if they seek to reject the extension of medicalised surveillance currently masquerading as the provision of new community schools then let them band together and act to secure a kind of true community schooling that will illuminate communities and their power.

The idea of the community school has since been hijacked for other purposes than truly building communities. It is currently being used to mean little more than the extension of medicalised surveillance into the lives of certain people and the industrialisation of education as a whole. There is no effective life without community: only survival; this is the fundamental truth which

communitarianism espouses – perhaps the only truth it has to offer. But modern British third way communitarianism is haphazard and poorly thought out. It frequently lapses into fetishistic modernism: worship of change and novelty and persistently tends towards authoritarianism. It thus fails to understand the terms of its own discourse and while cleaving to the language of community schooling has careered off in quite another direction – the road towards medicalised surveillance of those living in poverty. In addition it promotes an industrialised model of education in which the expenditure of energy is tantamount to the achievement of desirable ends: the lighted school must be preferable because it can be seen to be 'working' all day and all night. But this neglects the fact that learning requires contemplation and that industrial productivity and its demands are incompatible with intellectualism. A true community school would be a lighthouse of knowledge and a symbol of people's capacity to take charge of their lives without bureaucratic interference. The original lighthouses were little more than beacons, blazing braziers lighting up the sky so they were visible from a distance, leading ships towards safe ports and offering hope to those seeking a better future through illumination. Setting light to existing schools might achieve the same effect. Burning down the new 'community schools' might be drastic and irresponsible, but metaphorically at least, a bonfire of the vanities would be a welcome development where they are concerned. That at least would the first step along the road to showing how communities can assert themselves and from the metaphorical ashes, as the phoenix from the flames, there might yet arise schools that truly illuminate communities with the searching light of knowledge.

Correspondence

Dr David Limond, School of Education, 3987 Arts Building, Trinity College, University of Dublin, Dublin 2, Ireland.

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