



pinscotland }
pupil inclusion network



PAUSE:REFRESH

A report on the PINS Event

NOVEMBER 2012

PINS brought together an audience of PINS members and asked them to take some time to pause and refresh. We listened to some inspiring speakers and engage with some big questions.

PINS would like every member and member agency to continue this reflection and dialogue. If you consider the purposes of education and school do let us know what you think.

The PAUSE:REFRESH event was also sponsored by our partners Kibble and Barnardo's Scotland.

Kibble
EDUCATION AND CARE CENTRE

Believe in
children
 Barnardo's

ABOUT THE DAY

Delegate discussion was based around a series of inspiring speakers and presentations from a range of backgrounds.

Bob Holman spoke about his disrupted education and how on meeting an inspirational teacher who told him “You can do it Robert!” he began to believe that academic success was possible for him. Bob began one of the main themes for the day, when he said: “I am an egalitarian. I long for a more equal society. It is education’s job to promote an equal society”.

Marc Lambert started us off with the poem

‘I don’t want to go into school’ by Colin McNaughton:

I don’t want to go into school today; Mum,
I don’t feel like school work today.
Oh, don’t make me go to school today, Mum
Oh, please let me stay home and play.

But you must go to school, my cherub, my lamb,
If you don’t it will be a disaster,
How would they manage without you, my sweet,
After all you are the headmaster!

Then in a fast paced 40 minutes on the theme of ‘education as punishment, knowledge as prohibition’ we covered Socrates, Dickens and the Finnish education system (amongst others). Marc’s concern was that despite Scotland’s claim to be one of the first countries to have mass literacy our model for schooling in Scotland today remains essentially Victorian - but we could do so much more, starting with our common core values, focusing on the importance of play, and learning from our friends in Finland!

John Carnochan kicked us off with his quote from David Hume that “Truth springs from argument among friends”. With that in mind he reminded us that to work with children we need to be creative, resilient, persistent, brave and focused.

We heard from young people through the drama presentation from Kibble Theatre Company. We also watched the BAFTA award nominated film *Joose* by Tom Duncan.

After each input delegates worked in small groups to consider our key questions:

- What is the purpose of education?
- What is school for?
- On reflection what do I need to think about again?

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION?

The main themes which emerged were these:

- To build a sense of self: So that education starts with and nurtures the individual, encourages understanding and awareness of self, builds esteem, fosters imagination and enquiry and works with the individual's strengths. To do this the experience of education must be interested in the whole child.
- To promote belonging and being part of a community: In addition to a sense of belonging, being part of something, education was also thought to be about preparation for citizenship and being able to contribute positively to the communities within which children and young people live their lives. Being connected, to others, to school, to community, was seen as self-fulfilling.
- As preparation for life and throughout life: This was about social skills, positive attitudes, pro-social behaviour and skills for life (literacy, numeracy, employability, thinking skills, information technology), so that education is not just about (or in) school but learning in all contexts and across the life course. In a sense then this is also linked to promoting belonging, but this can only be achieved if this preparation for life is personalised, individualised so that it is relevant to the learner who in turn sees the positive experience of childhood learning (in school) as a motivation to learn throughout life.
- To promote equality: Reflecting a strong theme from the Pause:Refresh event delegates viewed education as underpinning a more equal, just society.

For some delegates education has a less empowering and enabling purpose, perhaps reflecting the theme of one of the presentations which addressed the roots of our education system, with the view that the purpose of education is: control, containment, conformity and childcare.

WHAT IS SCHOOL FOR?

Many of the themes which emerged reflected some of the discussions about the purposes of education so that the child's school experience should reflect the intention of education to build a sense of self, to promote belonging and being part of a community, and as preparation for life. The conversations and recordings which small groups undertook reflected a positive view of school but a concern that in Scotland we are on a journey in terms of each of these issues, some are more real than others, and some are still aspirational. With this in mind school (does/should) offer:

- A place to play, explore and experiment with others, both peers and adults (who in turn should be seen as role models).
- A place to be safe, particularly where home might not be so.
- Opportunities to socialise, to make friends and through this learn social skills and behaviours associated with a positive role in society. Part of this learning will be about understanding difference and diversity.
- A programme where one purpose is to allow the learner to gain qualifications.
- A place to participate in sport and other activities, to do new things that might not be available elsewhere and find out what you are good at.
- A connection to the world of work or 'the real world' so that young people learn the skills they need for the workplace and adult life.
- A place to build ambition.

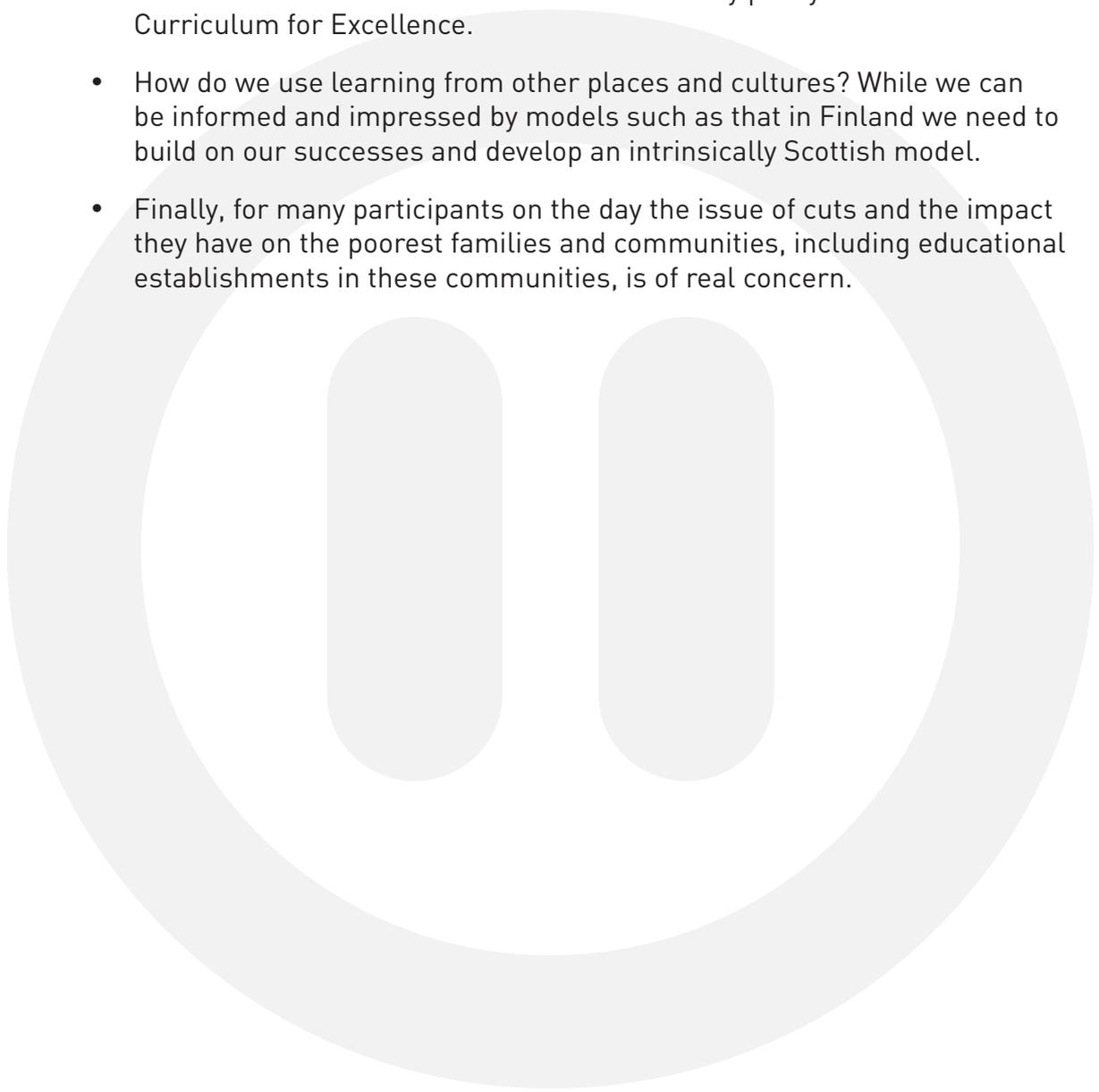
For some delegates school serves a more pragmatic or functional purpose, so that for some children and young people it is simply a place to go, it contains and supervises the pupil and is still overly focused on ensuring the child conforms to rules; indeed attendance is obligatory. A further theme was that an overt focus on qualifications remains and as such school is pitched to meet the needs of the 'middle ground' and so fails the learner who is not academically oriented or the learner who is gifted.

ON REFLECTION WHAT DO I NEED TO THINK ABOUT AGAIN?

The individual contributions of participants on the day have been summarized to present these main themes for personal reflection:

- Relationships are at the core of all work we do with children, families and communities. This means we have to reflect on who we are and how we use ourselves in the learning environments we create. This is perhaps a real challenge for many classroom teachers. A question for us all is how nurturing are our school environments for learners and staff? Further, delegates identified an overemphasis on management systems, and not on people, reflecting that we need leaders and managers whose focus is on the humanity of our educational establishments and making the individual and collective experience of school positive for people.
- Our professional practice must retain a focus on the child at the centre by building bespoke approaches to each learner, and must not be overly influenced by other factors or pressures such as qualifications/results.
- The need to influence teachers, so they all recognise the role and impact they have on the lives of every child and young person they engage.
- The imperative to listen to children and young people: how do we make this the norm? Beyond listening participants also recognised the need to reflect further on meaningful participation of learners in planning and reviewing the experience of school.
- The need to revisit the role and value of play in our educational establishments; and perhaps then this new understanding might impact on our view of the age at which children start school.
- The shift in policy, practice and resourcing to early years and early intervention: what does this mean to how we have done things to date? In particular there is a need to work with children at the earliest possible point of life to ensure their capacity to learn and make the most of school is not compromised by early experiences.
- Exclusions remain a tool to punish children and this must stop. Where children and young people are disaffected there is a need to reflect on how we have allowed them to reach this point and ask what can we do now, together, to make learning and school relevant?
- The input from Kibble Theatre Company encouraged delegates to think beyond the experience of school/learning to consider the needs of looked after children and young people in the round; this recognised the 'care' needs of the child but also emphasised the importance of getting school right for those who are looked after.

- For voluntary sector workers and agencies there is a need to reflect on what is known and how work connects to key policy drivers such as Curriculum for Excellence.
- How do we use learning from other places and cultures? While we can be informed and impressed by models such as that in Finland we need to build on our successes and develop an intrinsically Scottish model.
- Finally, for many participants on the day the issue of cuts and the impact they have on the poorest families and communities, including educational establishments in these communities, is of real concern.



MORE ABOUT PINS - GET INVOLVED!

Over several years the Network has grown and through the PINS on-line resource and a series of seminars and workshops a body of knowledge has been built which captures what we need to do, in partnership, to make a difference.

PINS has a website at www.pinscotland.org

Membership of the Network is free and registration is via the PINS homepage. PINS is supported by the Scottish Government and managed jointly by the Scottish Government (Learning Directorate) and voluntary sector agencies. On a day to day basis the Network is facilitated by TASC (Scotland).

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