The Perfect School?

Imagine there is an island inhabited and ruled only by children. No grown–ups are allowed.
The children decide to build a school, which they will run.
The classes will be taught by children as well.

Close your eyes...

Contents:

The Perfect School?

Devised by Paul Maheke in collaboration with the Serpentine Galleries Education Team.

The propositions for the perfect school that appear throughout this booklet were produced by Year 6 students at Gateway Academy, North Westminster as part of Paul Maheke's *Moving Up* commission in Summer 2015.

Kid's Rule.

In my school everybody is welcome and whatever is wanted is aloud. Nobody will be stuck in detentions. Dispite this is a school, everyone will be wearing their own clothes

As a classroom community, our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another's voices, in recognizing one another's presence.

hooks, bell (1994). *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, New York: Routledge (p8).

About

The Perfect School? developed following the Serpentine Galleries 2015 *Moving Up* commission with artist Paul Maheke.

Through collaborative dance, drawings and conversation children at Gateway Academy in North Westminster reflected on their experiences of primary school and explored their expectations about moving up to secondary school. Using spaces around the school the children choreographed and performed short dance pieces to articulate their feelings about transition from primary to secondary school. In small groups they mapped out their visions for a perfect school. Their proposals ranged from smaller class sizes, access to school outside of school hours and more art and music in the curriculum.

The Perfect School? is an invitation to you and your group to explore transition through activities that invite discussion, drawing and imagination. This resource is developed to support teaching staff working with Year 5 and Year 6 students preparing for transition from primary to secondary school.

> *'One of my ideas was to pretend that the place we were having the workshop in was some sort of island and this island was completely ruled by children. That was a means for me to enable them to think about political systems and how they would be in their perfect school. And how then we can look at their concerns and how school can be better. At the time we started the research for the project, I was really interested in looking at the island as the idealised space to be colonised–in the history of our Western world and also as a space for utopia to kind of thrive. I was really interested in looking at the body as an island and trying to look at those colonised zones in our bodies.'*[1]

The resource contains a poster, a set of cards and a booklet, and is designed to be used by teachers and children to facilitate an exchange about their concerns and to rethink how schools can be.

[1] See 'Conversations' section (p23).

Play

Find the Time

Set aside a lesson to play the game. We recommend at least one hour, or ideally an afternoon. You could revisit the game once a term, or three times throughout the school year.

Change the Space

Ask one of the children to place the poster in your classroom, they could hang the poster in a window so the words on the back shine through.

Introduce the Island

Read aloud:

Imagine there is an island inhabited and ruled only by children. No grown-ups are allowed. The children decide to build a school, which they will run. The classes will be taught by children as well.

Close your eyes.

Take a minute to try and picture your school. What does the school look like? What lessons will take place? Do you wear a uniform?

Design Your Perfect School

Try to draw your perfect school. Don't worry too much about making your drawing perfect. Think of it as a way to communicate your ideas. You can use words if you want. Teachers should draw too.

Reflect

Form groups (we found groups of six work well). Place the cards in the centre of the group and take turns to ask a question from one of the cards to the rest of the group. Use the cards to have a conversation about your perfect school.

Refocus

In the groups, take a large piece of paper and collectively try to draw a school that incorporates everybody's ideas.

Share

Display your collaborative drawing in a space where the whole school can see it – think about the 'in-between' spaces at your school like a corridor or the stairs.

'When we visited the school, it struck me that even the architecture of the school was very hierarchical, the youngest children were on the ground floor and you would go up with the years up the stairs, and up the building. So it was really vertical. I also noticed that the transitional spaces, the staircase, the corridors, were never used really. I was interested in using them, both as a way to bring back that notion of transition, and also as a way of creating some sort of absurdity. I think it was important for the children to interact with those neglected spaces in unusual ways.'[1]

Extend

Invite children to play the game at home with their parents, carers and siblings. Cards can be photocopied or downloaded from: serpentinegalleries.org/theperfectschool

Recommended materials:

– Pencils or markers
– A4 photocopier paper
– A1 or other large sheets or rolls of paper

[1] See 'Conversations' section (p25).

Mutuality, difference, hierarchies, anti-colonial, agency, feminist, banking system, unlearning, commonalities, collectivity, empowerment, community, dialogue, critical pedagogy, freedom, horizontal structures.
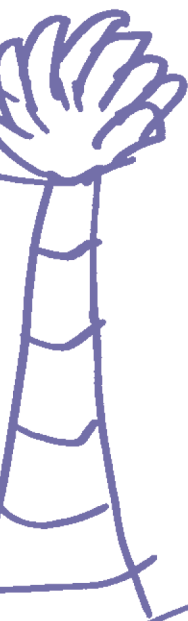
What are schools for?
How are decisions made?
Who speaks, who is silent?
Who decides what is taught in schools?
Who wins and who loses?
Can knowledge exist outside of ourselves?
How does school serve the community?
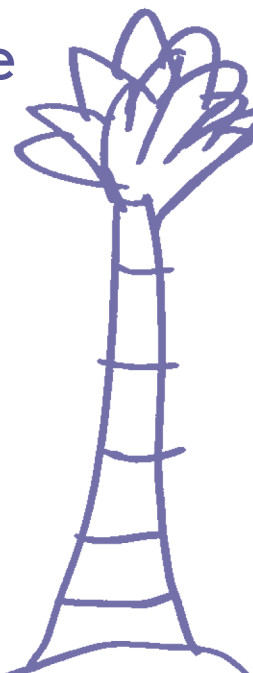
Challenges

'Aims, purposes and values in primary education have changed considerably over time; moving from models of humanist and child centred philosophies in the 1960s and 1970s into models that reflect economic and social principles today.'[1]

Corporate ideals have crept into and overtaken the British classroom, with individual accumulation of knowledge measured in standardised tests, a culture of competition between and within schools, performance-related pay for teachers and a narrowing of focus onto so-called 'core' subjects and a subsequent reduction in the provision of subjects that don't serve these ends, such as the arts.

In 2015, the same year that Paul Maheke took up residency at the Gateway Academy, the UK government declared that the major goal of primary education was achieving basic literacy and numeracy among all pupils.[2]

The Statutory Assessment Tests (SATs) taken by children in Year 6 are a key instrument in this process. The results of these tests form a major component of the primary school league tables and offer one of the first opportunities for children to be divided and labelled for future employability. SATs have been the focus of criticism in recent years with parents and teachers arguing that the tests narrow the curriculum because schools increasingly direct their educational focus to only the subjects and requirements that will be tested. In addition, the tests introduce unrealistic standards and are an unnecessary burden for children, with anxiety and mental health problems reportedly on the increase. In 2016, parents and carers launched a national campaign to stand in opposition to the SATs-driven curriculum by taking children out of school in protest in a 'kids strike'.[3]

Education is now increasingly understood as preparation for future employment. The emphasis on employability leads to a greater focus on grades and teaching towards assessment. Despite the noted increase in mental health problems in primary-aged children, there is generally far less time for structures of support, care and well-being in schools as a result of timetabling pressures and changes in student–teacher relationships that have accompanied increases in assessment.

The *Moving Up* commission from which *the Perfect School?* resource has emerged marks out a space for artists to work with children to rethink school structures and imagine new possibilities for being together in school. The content in this booklet draws on the lived experiences of children navigating the education system and their relationships with teachers. In the face of an increasingly pressurised education system, it is our hope that this resource will support teaching staff to create temporary spaces for care, listening and creativity in the classroom.

'Our schools will become effective only when they refocus on meeting the needs of students rather than the needs of the economy or the broader society.'[4]

[1] Shuayb, M. and O'Donnell, S. (2008). 'Aims and Values in Primary Education: England and Other Countries' (Primary Review Research Survey 1/2), Cambridge: University of Cambridge Faculty of Education.
Available from: http://cprtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/research-survey-1-2.pdf [viewed 25/02/2017].
[2] Department for Education (2015). 'Education and Training Statistics for the United Kingdom: 2015' Additional text: SR43/2015, 5 November 2015, Page 5.
Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/473861/SR43_2015_Additional_Text.pdf [viewed 25/02/2017].
[3] https://letthekidsbekids.wordpress.com/faqs/ [viewed 25/02/2017].
[4] Miller, Ron (1997). *What Are Schools For? Holistic Education in American Culture*, 3rd edition, Brandon, VT: Holistic Education Press.

Alternatives

A brief introduction to a selection of alternative and radical educational models, philosophers and critical educators who provide a context for *The Perfect School?*

A.S. Neill's Summerhill School
Founded in 1921, Suffolk, UK

> '*The necessity for a child's happiness should be the first tenet of all educational systems. A school should be judged by the faces of its pupils, not by its academic successes.*'[1]

The Summerhill School was founded on the principle that children should have the right to decide for themselves. Adults are not there to create things for the children to do. A new timetable is created each term and children can 'sign-up' for classes. Attendance is not compulsory and there is a wide choice of subjects on offer, up to GCSE level.

At the Summerhill School, children come together on equal terms to discuss how they organise as a community. There is free access to art, woodwork and computers and open areas, where children and young people can hang out, amuse themselves, socialise, play games and be creative.

The Walden School
Founded in 1956, California, USA

Drama, music and visual art formed the core curriculum of the Walden School. There were no grades or standardised testing. A significant part of each child's curriculum was an independent study project chosen and directed by the student. Teachers acted as facilitators, supporting the learning goals set by each child.

The Walden School upheld the belief that education is the concern of both teachers and students, so all decisions were made at the teacher-child level with many made by the students themselves. Small class sizes, hands-on activities, collaborative learning, and authentic assessment were key concerns of the Walden School.

On Wednesdays there was no formal school at all and groups and individuals were encouraged to do whatever interested them. On the first day of spring, the Walden School community (including parents) celebrated 'Hooky Day', an opportunity to simply go to the park and play.

Autonomous Zapatista Schools
Founded in 2001, Ricardo Flores Magón Autonomous Municipality in Rebellion, Mexico

> '*We believe that education is not only about teaching literacy and numeracy, but also about solving problems between our peoples, how to defend ourselves, about our history and how to keep on fighting.*'[2]

In 2001, the Zapatista families of the Autonomous Municipality in Rebellion, Ricardo Flores Magónm, took their children out of the Mexican state education system. Autonomous education centres were formed in search of an alternative to an education system that did not teach children their rights as indigenous peoples or respect their culture and histories.

Autonomous Zapatista teachers are democratically elected by their communities and trained directly by professionals in their respective fields, such as biologists or historians. Developed as a 'university of life', the curriculum is drawn from the lived experiences of the community. Through reflection and collective participation, Autonomous Zapatista students investigate solutions at a local level.

In Autonomous Zapatista Schools, the values of individualism, competition, consumerism and private property are questioned and replaced with values of community. The curriculum of the Mexican state education system is re-presented through local symbols, so that national and international narratives share space with colonial Spanish history and the histories of the Tzeltal people.

[1] A.S Neill, https://francoistremblay.wordpress.com/2014/09/18/quotes-from-summerhill-school-by-a-s-neill/ [viewed 25/1/2018].
[2] Hortencia, Tzeltal promoter of True Education, https://roarmag.org/essays/zapatista-autonomous-education-chiapas/ [viewed 12/1/2018].

Reggio Emilia Pre-schools
Founded 1945, Reggio Emilia, Italy

'The cornerstone of our experience, based on practice, theory, and research, is the image of the child as rich, strong, and powerful. The emphasis is placed on seeing the children as unique subjects with rights rather than simply needs. They have potential, plasticity, the desire to grow, curiosity, the ability to be amazed, and the desire to relate to other people and to communicate.'[3]

The Reggio Emilia Pre-schools for children aged 0–6, originated in northern Italy in the aftermath of World War II. Young children are viewed as confident, full of questions and active citizens with their own rights.

The Reggio approach emphasises education based on relationships, between children, teachers and parents. Much of the curriculum is project-based and designed around children's everyday experiences, questions and ideas, with teachers acting as observers and facilitators rather than instructors.

Central to each school is the *atelier*, an art studio supported by a teacher with an arts background, where children can research, invent and empathise.[4] Classrooms are often organised around a central piazza, a place for conversation and encounters, which is designed to echo the central square of the city.

Schools Without Walls
Founded 1967, Philadelphia, USA

'The city offers an incredible variety of learning labs: art students study at the Art Museum, biology students at the Zoo; business and vocational courses meet at on-the-job sites such as journalism at a newspaper or mechanics at a garage.... The Program pays for none of its facilities, but instead looks for 'wasted space'.... Students, then, in going from class to class, travel around the city (normally on foot).'[5]

Schools Without Walls were a series of experiments in the US and the UK, which used the urban environment as an educational resource. Many of these education programmes had no school buildings, with all teaching taking place in the community. The search for facilities was considered to be a part of the learning process.

In their 1973 book *Streetwork: The Exploding School,* Ward and Fyson put forward the idea that a school department could be an integrated community-based program of decision making on local urban issues.

Paulo Freire
1921–1997

'No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption.'[6]

Paulo Freire argued against the banking model of education – the idea that the teacher's role is to deposit their knowledge into students, as passive receptacles. Freire instead articulated the need for a dialogical (or conversational) education built around mutual respect, and for an education with the intent of making a change in the world.

Key Texts:
Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York: The Seabury Press.
Freire, P. (1995). *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York: Continuum.

Henry Giroux
1943–

'Pedagogy is always political because it is connected to the acquisition of agency. As a political project, critical pedagogy illuminates the relationships among knowledge, authority, and power. It draws attention to questions concerning who has control over the conditions for the production of knowledge, values, and skills, and it illuminates how knowledge, identities and authority are constructed within particular sets of social relations.'[7]

[3] Rinaldi C., 'Projected Curriculum Constructed Through Documentation – Progettazione: An Interview with Lella Gandini' in Edwards, C., Gandini, L. and Forman, G. (eds) (2012). *The Hundred Languages of Children*. Santa Barbar, CA: Praeger (p114).
[4] http://reggiochildren.it [viewed 19/01/2018].
[5] 'School Without Walls', *Bulletin of Environmental Education,* No. 11, March 1972. Quoted in: Ward, C. and Fyson, A. (1973). S*treetwork*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul (p5–6).

[6] Freire, Paulo (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* New York: The Seabury Press (p54).
[7] Tristan, Jose Maria Barroso (2013). *Henry Giroux: The Necessity of Critical Pedagogy in Dark Times*, available from: http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/14331-a-critical-interview-with-henry-giroux [viewed 15/02/2018].

Henry Giroux is one of the foremost contemporary writers on critical pedagogy, schooling, higher education, neo-liberalism and the condition of young people. Giroux advocates for a renewed commitment to community development and learning for social justice, equality and democracy.

Giroux's work develops many key themes in the overall challenge to neo-liberalism and class-divided society and the development of a progressive critical pedagogy. He speaks constantly of the importance of democratic engagement in public life.

Key Texts:
Giroux, Henry A. (1981). *Ideology, Culture and the Process of Schooling*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press.
Giroux, Henry A. (1983). *Theory and Resistance in Education*, Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey Press (Introduction by Paulo Freire).

bell hooks
1952–

> 'Progressive, holistic education, "engaged pedagogy" is more demanding than conventional critical or feminist pedagogy. For, unlike these two teaching practices, it emphasizes well-being. That means that teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students.'[7]

bell hooks is a Distinguished Professor of English at City College in New York. Her first major book (1981) *Ain't I a Woman : Black Women and Feminism* established her as a formidable critic and intellectual and set out some of the central themes around culture, gender, race and class that have characterised her work.
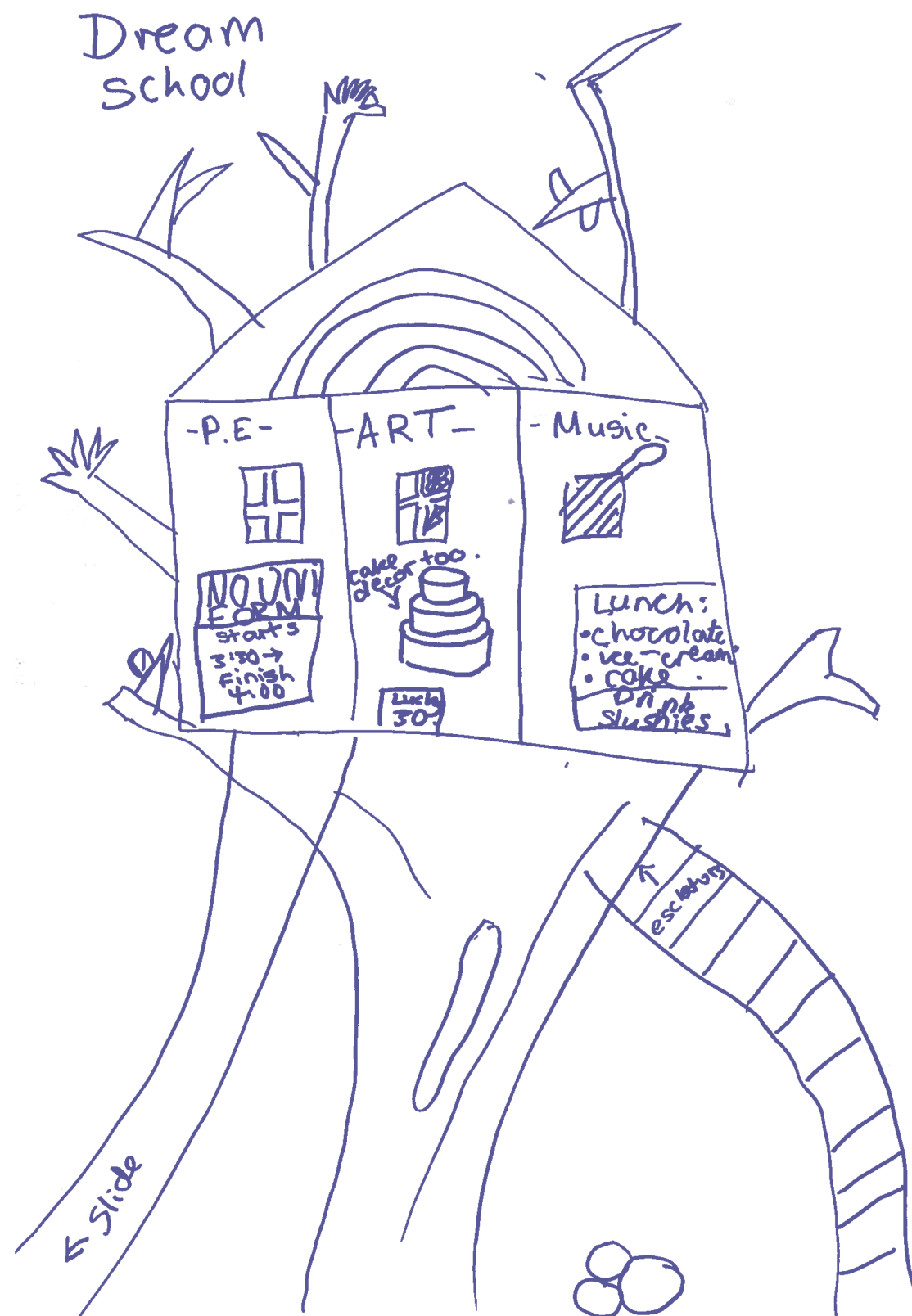
hooks argues for a progressive and holistic education, which she terms 'engaged pedagogy'. hooks writes in a personal and accessible style, often drawing on anecdotal examples from her own experience as a strategy to remain grounded in the practice of education. Additionally, hooks has written widely on the subject of community development within the context of the classroom.

Key Texts:
hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to Transgress*, London: Routledge.
hooks, b. (2003). *Teaching Community, A Pedagogy of Hope*, New York: Routledge.

[7] hooks, bell (1994). *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, London: Routledge (p15).

Dream School

Left page (floor plan drawing with labels):

art — shining metals — science — electronic room — big writing — swimming beach — literacy — sleeping room — dance room — food hall — Giant play ground — bird room — dog cat room — panda room — polar bear — creature room — snake room — football pitch — swimming beach pool — animal

Right page:

In my school I would like it to be next to a sea so when its playtime we could swim. For example. and a football pitch.

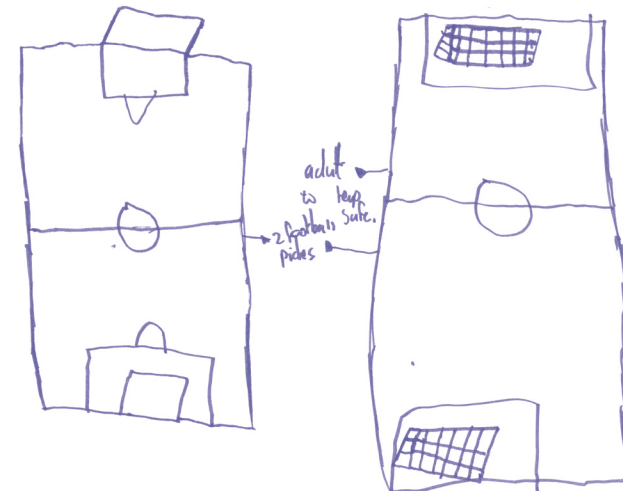No detetions and kind teachers who give you what you want but only at a specific time.

swimming pool
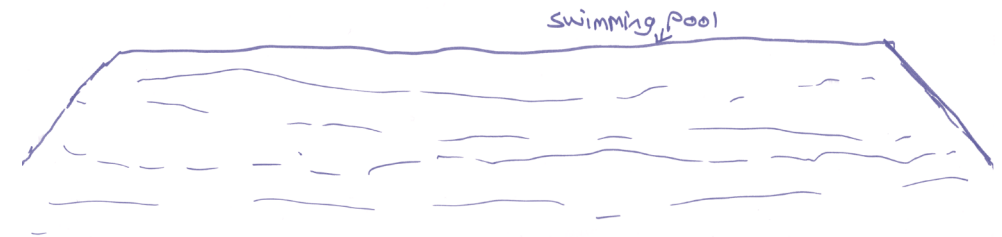
Chelsea Fc   100 children   kids as long as you want

adult to teah 2 football pitches

stand for kit

kid bit free

A conversation between artist Paul Maheke and Alex Thorp

At the Magazine Restaurant, Spring 2016

Would you like to start by sharing a little bit about your artistic practice?

My practice at the moment is centred on the use of dance as a means of resistance and a gesture of remembrance. I like to work in collaboration with other artists, theorists and activists. I'm producing many films and objects that investigate identity politics and use poetic forms as a means to convey political agency or a political stance. I'm very interested in black and brown identities.

How does your practice connect to the *Moving Up* project?

For me, the *Moving Up* project was an opportunity to work with children again. I was interested in trying to bring together a group of children to think about their experiences and how to use these experiences as a starting point.

For this project I invited the filmmaker Filip Tulak,[1] and a choreographer and dancer Benny Ord[2] to collaborate with me. I was interested in trying to find a way to question the idea of transitioning from primary school to secondary school, by centring on the children's issues and concerns about moving up. I was also trying to find a way to use art as the means to look at how the school and education system are structured.

I wanted to try to disrupt the structure and find a way to work around the hierarchies and the power relationships that exist in the school, to focus on the children and to put myself in the position of a facilitator instead of a teacher.

I know that you're very interested in the writing and teaching of bell hooks.[3] Could you talk about her influence on your thinking?

I am really interested in how bell hooks is self-critical about her approach to education and how she sees education as a form of love, in the form of empowerment.

Her research centres on emotions and experiences, where sometimes in school those kind of parameters can be dismissed. She talks about how teaching can bring a sense of freedom, since knowledge is a power, and how the classroom can be a space for that power to flourish, but in a very collective, mutual and horizontal way. She speaks a lot about how she's trying to position herself in a way that the students are not really students anymore, but peers.

A lot of her teaching processes are based on peer-to-peer exchange and a constant dialogue. I saw that in traditional education this kind of relationship doesn't really exist, or is not really allowed, because of government decisions, how the school is designed, or because of the need for teachers to be efficient.

How did you translate those ideas in the project?

I was wary of arriving into a context that I didn't know. I was a foreigner to the school, I'm not English and I have never experienced an English school before. I was really interested in first hearing what the students had to say about how their school operates, and how that school was working for them, or if it was not working for them. And trying to use some sort of metaphor to allow them to think through things and maybe trying to step away a little bit from the context of the school, which could be quite difficult and hard to navigate, especially at that age.

You've used the metaphor of the island before in your work. Do you want to talk about why that interests you?

One of my ideas was to pretend that the place we were having the workshop in was some sort of island and this island was completely ruled by children. That was a means for me to enable them to think about political systems and how they would be in their perfect school. And how then we can look at their concerns and how school can be better.

At the time we started the research for the project, I was really interested in looking at the island as the idealised space to be colonised–in the history of our Western world and also as a space for utopia to kind of thrive. I was really interested in looking at the body as an island and trying to look at those colonised zones in our bodies. The sites of resilience and resistance in our bodies, and our experiences as well.

[1] See 'Contributors' section (p47).
[2] See 'Contributors' section (p47).
[3] See 'Alternatives' section (p18).

I knew that some of the students were going through really difficult things and they were quite vulnerable. This was a way for us to distance ourselves from the context, but then to come back to it afterwards, once we reached that connection.

And you mentioned about the body and dance in relation to your work.

In the specific context of the school, I was interested in using dance and the body as a way for them to express their concerns rather than only in a verbal way.

I knew that it would be very different from the traditional classes in school; the children are not really used to engaging with each other through their bodies[4] and body language in the classroom. I think it created an interesting dynamic, some of the students were really uncomfortable at the beginning, but in the end, I think it helped them to distance themselves from the hierarchies in the school, between the teachers and students and among the students.

I was really concerned about not reproducing oppressive dynamics, letting the shyest students express themselves as much as the more vocal, or more confident ones. So I think dance was a nice way to approach that, in a very non-authoritarian way, with the help of the choreographer Benny.

I was keen on bringing a professional into the context. I think it is important to consider children as people who deserve to have access to that type of culture.

What about your relationship with the teachers?

For me, it was really important to have the teachers involved in the whole process, because they are the main reference point for the young people. I knew from the very beginning that I was not interested in putting

the teachers in the position where they would assert some type of authority. I was trying to involve them in a way that they felt as concerned by the workshop as we were, and as the students were.

The main idea was to bring awareness about the concerns of the children in a different way. That this would allow the teachers to see them in a different context and maybe, if a student was considered as a 'bad student', in the context of the workshops, they could be a very different student, because they would interact with their peers in a different way. It was really important for me to try not to reproduce what school does, because as I am an artist, not a teacher, I don't have that expertise. I think it's crucial to assert a very specific perspective to create an interesting dynamic.

That was important for me because I was clueless about how school works, and how the teachers are put under pressure by a bigger structure. Some of the concerns the students had were quite similar to the teachers and it was interesting for me to point towards the possibility of that shared experience. Not only are the teachers and the students sharing a space, but also maybe going through the same crises and difficult situations.

One concept that was really key to the project was this idea of mutual survival and mutuality. And that concept comes from Audre Lorde,[4] I was really interested in that, in looking at the collective, not as a way to erase, but rather as a way to support and reinforce, and bring empowerment.

Can you talk a bit more about the physical spaces that the workshops took place in, and why you chose the locations that you did.

When we visited the school, it struck me that even the architecture of the school was very hierarchical, the youngest children were on the ground floor and you would go up with the years up the stairs, and up the building.

[4] Lorde, Audre (1984). *Sister Outsider. Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde* Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press.

So it was really vertical. I also noticed that the transitional spaces, the staircase, the corridors, were never used really.

I was interested in using them, both as a way to bring back that notion of transition, and also as a way of creating some sort of absurdity. I think it was important for the children to interact with those neglected spaces in unusual ways.

Can you explain what you did on the staircase?

On the staircase, we did an exercise that was based on mutuality and collectivity – how to create a human bridge. So they had to create both movements and a connection between their bodies in the staircase, to both interact with their bodies between each other, and also use the staircase as a space to experiment with dance movements.

I'm interested to hear you talk about how the sessions evolved over the course of the project in conversation with the children and the teachers.

That was really important, to not impose some kind of pre-determined pattern to what the workshop would be. It was a very 'in progress' thing and this idea of self-actualising in regards to the context was really important for the workshop to be successful.

It evolved in terms of how we organised the session, how we were addressing issues, or how we were using another vocabulary to address issues. Because the words we were using were not always relevant to the context, it was important to actualise that throughout the workshops and not come in with a fixed agenda.

Was there anything in the responses of the children that really surprised you?

I think the relationship of trust and the trust we built. I was quite amazed by how responsive they were, because some things we were asking could come across as really abstract. For example, how you would use your body as a way to express yourself, but not through an illustrational way.

Dance was not a way to illustrate their feelings, but rather, a way to assert both their subjectivity and their concerns. I was really impressed with the way they were quite sure about the ways in which the school could be better.

Were there any particular ideas that kept recurring?

Having plenty of food at school was something that was mentioned a lot. A disco room, or some kind of leisure space also surfaced frequently.

The school for the children is almost a second home, because they spend most of their time there. I remember one student whose drawing was some sort of town, where the school was at the centre of the town and the school was almost a shelter for when things went wrong at home.

She was expressing her needs quite clearly. It was easy to see what was wrong and in what ways the school was not the supportive structure that it should be.

So the resource that you developed is a kit to ask children to imagine their perfect school?

From the very beginning I was interested in the outcome of the project being something quite useful and practical to use. Some kind of tool for the children

and teachers to reflect on themselves, on the structures, and think about what could be improved.

So the resource includes a set of cue cards, intended as a way to open a dialogue between the teachers and the children in small groups. It's very important that the dialogue is on a very peer-to-peer level. It's a way of emphasising the importance of an on going exchange and communication and the present lack of communication between teachers and the students. What is important for me is to give a place for the children's voices to be heard. It's quite rare, actually, that we hear young people talking about what is wrong in their school, or how it is dysfunctional. As grown-ups, we don't pay enough attention to what young people would have to say about those situations, because we assume that they are not mature enough to think things through.

A lot of questions they raised in the workshop were really relevant. So I think it was fair for me to devise kind of a resource that would pay homage to that and allow the children to voice their concerns and share them with the rest of the world.

How do you hope that it will be used in the classroom?

Hopefully, the resource is quite open to interpretation. It's something really important in my work to let people's agency thrive. It's not about me being critical about school. It's about the children and the teacher trying to exchange ideas about what could be better.

I think it's also important that it can be used in smaller groups, in an intimate way, out of the context of the classroom. I don't know if it's possible or not. But hopefully some of the teachers would be interested in engaging with their students in different ways. And maybe in a less hierarchical way, or less authoritarian way.

The teachers at the school were interested in having that space to discuss those issues. I think they were quite amazed at how the children were already quite clear about what they wanted the school to be.

From looking through the drawings, I remember that there were some playful proposals and some more serious suggestions.

Exactly. I think it's really important to have a variety of registers and voices because, obviously, each child has their own relationship to school.

Do you envisage there being answers to the questions?

Some of the questions are really easy to respond to, so I'm quite confident that they would bring both practical and quite simple resolutions.

But some other questions demand more reflection and time to think. I don't require the question to be fulfilled. There is a starting point, but there is not a specific ending point. There may be multiple ending points and possibilities, and I think that's what is interesting.

I also think it's really quite important that it's an on-going thing, because from what I understand, most transition programmes take place at the end of the school year.

It's really important to think about transition programmes as a build-up, rather than a culmination point and not thinking of the end of Year 6 as the end of something, but rather as the beginning of something, because the rupture can be brutal and what could help to smooth the process is to have an ongoing dialogue.

A conversation between Year 6 teacher Jess Tarrant and Alex Thorp

At Gateway Academy, Spring 2016

Can you tell me a little bit about your background and your role at Gateway Academy?

I joined teaching three years ago, so I'm relatively new to the profession. I've been at Gateway since September 2015. I taught in another school in Slough for two years before that and I did a programme called Teach First, which runs at Gateway. At Gateway, I'm a Year 6 teacher and the coordinator for literacy throughout the school.

What do you think some of the specific challenges are that children at Gateway face?

One of the main things is that hardly any of the children speak English as their first language at home. This makes it challenging for them because even though they might have been born in England, their parents don't speak English as a first language, it's not being modelled to them in the way that we want them to read and write at school.

When we do PSHE, the things they bring up are that they live in really close proximity to each other and that they've got nowhere to play. So they go home, they do their homework, they play in the corridors of the flats, and they get in trouble. They want to go outside, but it's not safe for them to go to certain places.

Why do you think that the transition from primary to secondary school is such an important period of time?

I think the setup in primary school is so different to secondary school. We know the children individually as people. Secondary school teachers teach them for one subject, and then they move on. You might get to know certain children, but not a whole class in the same way that we do. So I think we're trying to prepare the children for that.

I also think it's really difficult because the way that the SATs are, it's so highly pressured. They go through this rigorous preparation for tests, then the test itself and then they have to move into this completely different environment.

Maybe secondary schools could learn from primary schools in terms of being able to provide that kind of pastoral support?

Yeah, I definitely agree. You get to know the children really personally. You can tailor the learning to them because you're only thinking about those children. I do think that the secondary school system could learn from that. But I understand why it's so much more difficult; they might have 400 children in a year level, whereas we've got 90.

Have there been any changes in the curriculum, or things external to the school that impact on transition?

I think it'll be really difficult this year because of the new levelling system,[1] and particularly the wording of it. The reason for taking away levels was because the government didn't want children banded, 'I'm a level three', and 'I'm a level five'. The replacement language is 'working towards the expected standard', 'working below expectations', 'working within the standard', or 'working at national expectation'. At the top end, they have 'in greater depth'. The children have to go to secondary school with that label. There are two things happening here: a change in language used and the raising of the academic targets.

We try our best to make sure that they're learning for the right reasons and not just to pass the test. Obviously, we need to prepare them, because they need that good result for their secondary school and we also want to show what good work the school is doing, which I genuinely believe we are.

I teach the target literacy group. It's the bottom 12 children. They are there for different reasons. They're really capable, but they have been at the bottom of their classes for five years and so much of what we do in their group is just making them believe that they can do it and that they are capable.

[1] In September 2014 national curriculum levels in English schools were replaced by a new grading system.

When you're thinking about supporting children through the transition, what do you hope they will get out of it?

I think a lot of it is soft skills, like resilience, bouncing back after a failure and being optimistic, learning about what their emotions mean and how they can control them, and also coping with the fear of the unknown. As a school, we do everything that we possibly can to make sure that children are still making progress and not falling behind in those soft skills and academically, but it's a hard balance.

...and maybe getting harder?

Yeah, it feels like it is at the moment, definitely. Even just the way we're juggling the timetable at the moment, we're doing an extra half hour of literacy every day.

What we just decided in our planning meeting was that we were going to spend an extra 15 minutes in the morning just talking to the children about how they are. We do things like part school news, part rundown for them and that sparks a conversation, and just having a bit of relaxation time. They're 11, you know!?

And do you find that subjects like drama, art and music are being pared back?

I think that it's really important to include subjects like drama, art and music. We don't have an allocated drama time and the arts are definitely one of the first things that go off the timetable. It's nice for them to just have a bit of more freedom and to be a bit creative, but it does get pushed aside.

What do you think needs to change in schools as a whole so that we can better meet children's needs?

I think the way that we assess them. There's so much research into how to assess children, but I don't think that the tests always reflect their capabilities in all areas. I think those labels can be really damaging. So that's the biggest change that I'd like to see.

What was your experience of secondary school like Jess?

I went to the local comprehensive. It really wasn't a very good school when I went there. I basically went on my own as well, but I really enjoyed it. The school that I've got in my head for these children is not necessarily the secondary school that I experienced. I hope that they do have that positive experience, but a lot of them have so much else to contend with.

A conversation between children's counsellor Anne-Sophie Bammens and Alex Thorp

At the Lido Bar and Café, Hyde Park, Spring 2016

Can you tell me a bit about your studies and area of work?

I have a Bachelors in Psychology, a Masters in International Children's Rights and a Masters in Psychoanalytic Developmental Psychology. After that I worked for one year in a primary school as a counsellor. I saw three children a week and I also worked in social services for a year with parents and young children.

Why do you think that it's important to listen to children?

I think by listening to children and allowing them to express their current feelings minimises the chances of those feelings becoming pushed away, or suppressed, or becoming the foundation for a future emotional or behavioural disturbance.

As an adult when I'm observing and listening to a child I may not understand the message straight away. I can reflect back to the child what it is they're showing and what it is that they're doing. I can verbalise the child's feelings so that they can start using words instead of acting out. So listening comes within those two parts: the verbal communication and also what the child shows us through play, drawing, and their behaviour.

You mentioned earlier that children express themselves differently from adults.

We cannot counsel children in the same way we counsel adults. When it comes to adults, we invite them to sit down and talk with us. If we were to do this with children, they probably wouldn't tell us anything except for answering some direct questions. They would likely get bored with the conversation and they might shut down, especially with children that have experienced some adverse life experiences. Children who haven't had an experience of being listened to, they almost shut down tight, because talking hasn't been helpful.

So the way that children communicate their feelings and things they're experiencing instead is through play, drawings, and their behaviour. It's how they try to understand the world. So the combination of these aspects is really important.

Do you have a sense that creating space for children to embody some of these feelings was particularly important?

There's definitely something to be said for being able to express yourself through the body, because we don't always have awareness about the things we're feeling or experiencing. But our body somehow knows it. We feel it. We just don't have the words for it.

So if we can somehow enact that in the physical, I think that's a first step towards being able to understand our experiences and look at ourselves and say what is happening.

How do you think we can create a culture of listening at schools? Is it possible?

I think we have to create a culture of taking children seriously. I think as adults we have a tendency to say, 'oh, they'll get over it', or 'they're too young to understand', or 'we know what's best for them'.

But the truth is that children have valuable and important things to tell us, they are the experts on their own life story. They offer very creative ways of finding solutions to their problems. And they really understand what's happening around them. So when it's something important, we really have to take them seriously that their experiences are valuable. I think that's the first step.

And what about the teacher's role?

The dual role of the teacher makes it very difficult for students to talk to them. The teacher has the responsibility to take care of the classroom. If a child comes and discloses something about an issue they're having that also puts the teacher in a very awkward position of what to do with that information. And I think the children can feel that. They don't know whether that teacher is going to share it with somebody else. Are they going to go to the headmaster? Are they going to share it with other teachers? Are they going to share it with their parents?

What do you think needs to change in schools to better support children and what do you think needs to change in society to better support children?

In terms of schools, there need to be structures in place that adequately support children and their emotional well-being, through outside agencies and helping teachers to implement some of these tools as well.

In terms of society, there needs to be much more preventive support. We know the things that are causing behavioural and emotional difficulties and mental health issues. We know that it's about adverse experiences in childhood and not being supported.

In order to access psychological services in the NHS, you need a mental health diagnosis. Which means that if a child is having problems, in order to get help they actually need to have a label that says you have conduct disorder, which really disadvantages children even more. So not only do you have problems to start with, you then have a label on top of that in order to start to receive care.

I think that's the wrong way to go. We need to offer support to children very early on and not stigmatise it, and not label them as abnormal.

Maybe you could talk through your understanding of self-esteem and what your findings show?

Self-esteem is described as a favourable or unfavourable evaluation of oneself or one's place in the world, and a sense of his or her worth. Children with low self-esteem are more likely to interpret challenges as overwhelming obstacles. They will then struggle with initiating and maintaining constant peer relationships and will have difficulties succeeding in school environments. It makes sense. If I don't feel good about myself, my place in the world, or in school, or I have a negative opinion about myself, I'm going to see everything as unmanageable. Little challenges will turn into obstacles. In Year 6 children's self-esteem is likely to be the highest because they are familiar with their environment, familiar with teachers, everybody knows them. They're more likely to hold a significant position in a group.

When they move to Year 7 they don't know anyone. Nobody knows them. They're not familiar with the environment. So their self-esteem really plummets.

Not only does self-esteem plummet in Year 7, but the anticipation of this major upcoming event can also cause self-esteem to plummet. So tackling this at the end of Year 5, or early in Year 6, can be an important preventative measure.

And finally Anne-Sophie, what was your experience of secondary school?

It was quite a confusing and difficult time because not only did I change to secondary school, I also moved country. So there was a sense of total isolation. That was quite difficult and that coincided with my pre-adolescence, which was also a very, very difficult time. I think with my personal experience, I really isolated myself from other people. I kind of stopped trying to make friends.

I was always really into football teams and basketball teams, and I stopped doing that as well. I think it was too overwhelming and also we didn't have any support in the school. I didn't really feel like there was somebody there to listen to me.
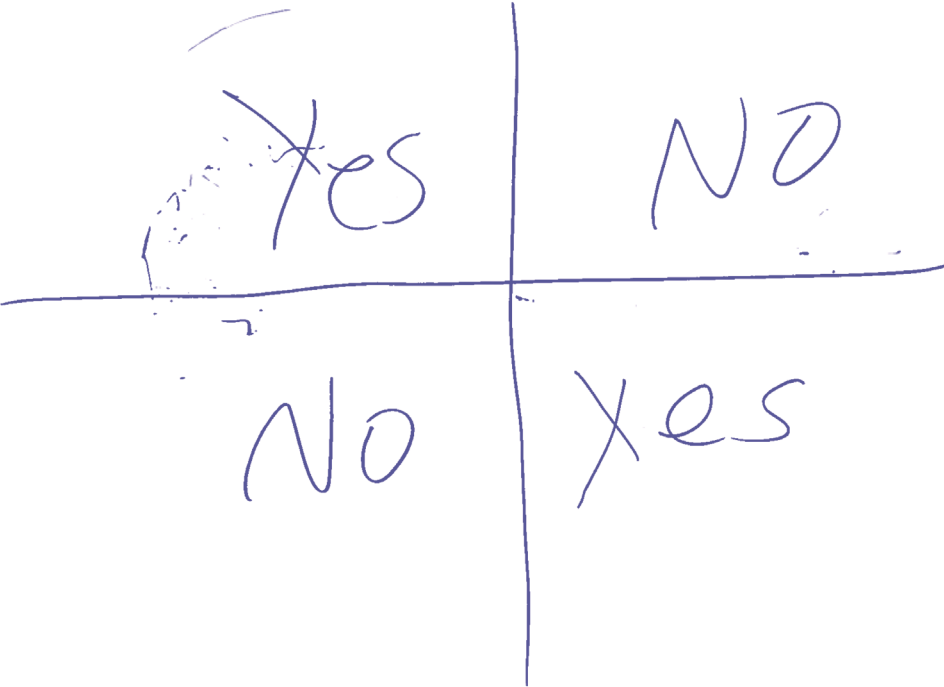
A conversation between early intervention practitioner Jemmelle Griffith and Alex Thorp

At Westminster Early Intervention and Localities Offices, Spring, 2016

Can you tell us about your role and the work your team does?

My specific role is as a senior young people's practitioner within a locality team. The locality team is made up of young people's practitioners and social work students. At the moment, we're going through a restructure.

We are the people who intervene with families and children before it gets to a point where it would be considered as child protection or needing a child-in-need assessment by a social worker. So our work covers a lot of things. It could be antisocial behaviour, emotional and social difficulties, behavioural problems, problems at school, problems at home. One part of our job is to support children who are going through the transition between primary and secondary school.

I wonder if you can talk a bit about the specific challenges in Westminster?

A lot of people think of Westminster as quite an affluent borough, when actually it is a diverse mix of affluence and poverty.

In different localities there are pockets of gang activity. Young people at transition age can be quite vulnerable so they might get influenced to be part of a gang because it's another kind of place to belong if you don't feel that you belong somewhere. That's one of the challenges, but it's not unique to the borough.

Child sexual exploitation is quite high on our agenda in the borough because it happens a lot. But it's one of our priorities to make sure we address it as much as possible.

The borough is quite diverse. There are so many languages that are spoken here. A lot of the children will have parents who have English as a second language. And they'll also have parents who have lived here for like 10 or 15 years but really don't speak any English at all. If they've got older siblings, you have to then be reliant on going through them to then translate messages to the parents about the younger children.

I think the housing benefit cap has affected people so you'll find a lot of residents in Westminster being relocated outside of the borough. The rents here are astronomical so they then end up living somewhere else. We do get some children who will be living outside of the borough and attending school in the borough or vice versa, so that is a challenge.

Do you feel like things are getting worse or have things changed over the last few years?

Housing is probably the one thing that is worse. If anything, I think they are going to move more people out of the borough unfortunately.

Maybe that's a good point for you to talk about why transition's so important.

Primary schools provide an environment that is comparatively safe: normally a lot smaller than secondary school, and very contained. You tend to be in one class so you develop a relationship with the teacher, and the teacher is to some extent, your daytime parent. So if you're upset, they're going to know.

When you go to secondary school, it's a completely different environment. As a student, you have a lot more responsibility. And you're expected to have a lot more autonomy as well and have a lot more responsibility for yourself, be more organised.

So for young people who are young carers or have behavioural problems, it's even more of a challenge. If you're a young carer, not only are you doing your caring duties, you're now caring for yourself, which you were probably doing anyway, but now to a greater degree. In secondary school there are a vast number of staff that young people have to interact with, and they don't necessarily have the ability to develop relationships in the same way. There are also things like peer pressure, and bullying, and *'Do I look all right?'* or *'How do I develop friendships?'* You also don't have detentions in primary

school. So where you could be cheeky before and get away with it, now you're being pulled up on it. *'You're picking on me. Why is it I'm always getting in detention?'* In their mind they're probably thinking *'...but I've always talked this much, and I've always done this, and I've always done that!'* and it's like *'actually now things are really different'*.

How do children differ from adults in their approach to problems?

If someone is struggling you don't want to appear as though you're being stupid or a geek. So what's the easiest thing to do? Say nothing? You're being bullied, but you don't want to say anything because if you say something, the bully is going to attack you more so you say nothing.

So it's important to feel empowered, because actually we're in control of ourselves as human beings, and you have a right to feel safe at school, and you have a right to feel that you can ask for help.

I've worked here for six years. The amount of times I've heard children say they don't want to ask a question in class, or they've tried to ask questions in class but then the teacher tells them they haven't got time to answer their questions, I mean that's just awful. Why haven't you got time to answer a child's question? What are teachers there for if you're not there to answer their questions?

Do you think there are enough groups or facilities for young people outside of the school in the area?

I would say it probably feels like there ought to be enough, but there probably isn't. The difficulty that we have is that not every child will go to the youth club. Sometimes it's because they don't find it interesting, because of who goes there, or they don't have time. And also that's a bit of a sensitive question because quite a lot of children's services are being restructured at the moment. So a lot of things that exist now probably aren't going to be there next year.

Child and Adult Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are winding down, as well. I think they're cutting a lot of money from mental health. I really don't know why they're doing that and what they're expecting these children to do with themselves.
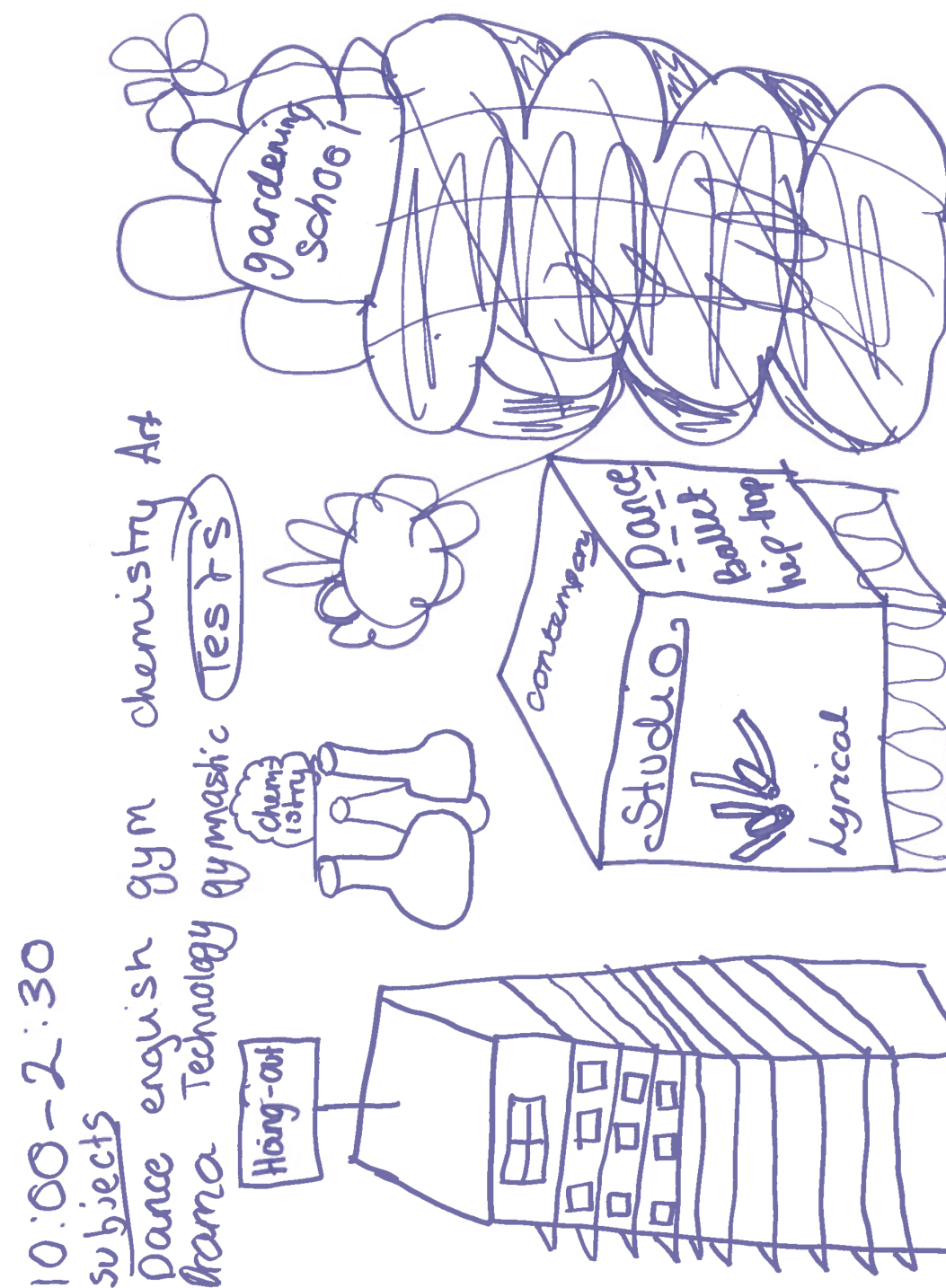
A conversation between psychologist Wanderley Moiera and Alex Thorp

At the Magazine Restaurant, Spring 2016

Would you like to start by talking a little bit about yourself, your work in Brazil and what you've been doing in the UK?

My name is Wanderley Moiera, I'm a psychologist. I have a Masters in Clinical Psychology and a Masters in the Philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. I studied racial issues in Brazil through break-dancing – the beat boys and beat girls – how and why they dance. I'm currently finishing my masters at the Tavistock Institute in psychodynamic psychotherapy, and also practising intercultural psychodynamic psychotherapy, which is based upon race and how race can appear in the clinical setting.

In Brazil, I worked for ten years as a leader of art workshops with children, especially those who have problems at school. The important thing about this project was listening to children and making them the protagonists in their own life. We'd construct sculptures together and then evaluate, which helped them to see that they could make something in their life. The project was based on Paolo Freire's *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.[1]

Why do you think it's important that we listen to children?

When I first heard the question, I thought, why do we like to have friends to talk to? For children, I think it's more important because, in our culture, lots of the time children are not listened to. We always decide for them. We name their feelings for them. We don't have the patience to listen to children to try to see what's going on with them. We are always trying to stop something or fix something or try to organise things for them. Sometimes it is necessary to do that, but sometimes it is not, sometimes we should just listen and connect to them. I believe that our emotional life begins in childhood and I think it is important for children to elaborate their feelings. If we don't have the possibility to talk about what's going on, anxiety or depression can come later. So I think listening to children is also a chance to prevent something. I'm not saying that listening can solve everything, but not listening can cause more damage.

The listening is not a passive action. It's an active action. So you have to listen actively to a child and then connect to them so that they can express emotions and feelings, and be more confident themselves. The adult's role is not to play the oppressor.

Do you think that children express themselves differently from adults?

Oh, for sure. They are more real than adults. There are some psychoanalysts who say that children are not human beings, which I find really fascinating. Because for these psychoanalysts, human beings are people who went through the culture, the social rules. Children have not.

Children say everything that comes to their minds. When they are older the school puts a stop to that, they are more conditioned by society. Children younger than seven are more alive; they can say everything that they want to say. Children don't have the adult language. They use play to tell you things or draw things rather than talking about it. So we need to be able to listen, as well, for what they are doing.

It must be quite hard in everyday life, to create that space for listening?

I think it is, in our daily life, almost impossible. I was talking to my partner yesterday, about how listening and silence are important in dynamic psychotherapy. He proposed it would be amazing if, at the business table, everyone would be silent if you feel it's true, like if you feel right, to be silent.

But, it's impossible. It's really impossible because the business table is somewhere where the cleverest will speak first.

In the classroom as well, because the culture of business affects the culture of the classroom more and more.

Yes, because also the silence seems not productive. You have to produce. Children have to learn, have to say, have to do. And they are able to do, of course. You're training them to do. But we don't know what lies behind that, what is behind this whole no pausing to listen.

[1] See 'Alternatives' section (p17).

Why do you think it's important that we listen to children?

The school is the main socialisation that children have outside of the family. In school, you have to deal with differences – sexuality, race, the clever one, the fighter, the slim one, the blond one, everything. Are you comfortable? Who are you comfortable with? This is why I think school is a challenging and important place for children. I think, as adults, we have some strategies that children don't have. For children, when they move school it is like the world has ended, vanished completely.

Do you have ideas about what needs to change so that we can better support children? What do you see as the alternative?

In general, we don't think about prevention. We just attack the problem. We are living in a world where there is no time to think, no time to process things. No time to prevent things.

As an alternative? I think it would have to be something outside the school because within the system it is impossible. I think the community could generate something. What format? I have no idea. But I think the children can help to build it. We could ask them. What makes sense for them?

Finally, Wanderley, I'm curious about your experiences of school.

I was a challenging child. I hated school, actually, because no one listened to me. Then I had a new teacher, she was so nice and because I could connect to her this completely changed my behaviour.

My experience in secondary school was if you don't speak, you will be a good student. Silence. This is the normality: don't speak up, don't say anything.
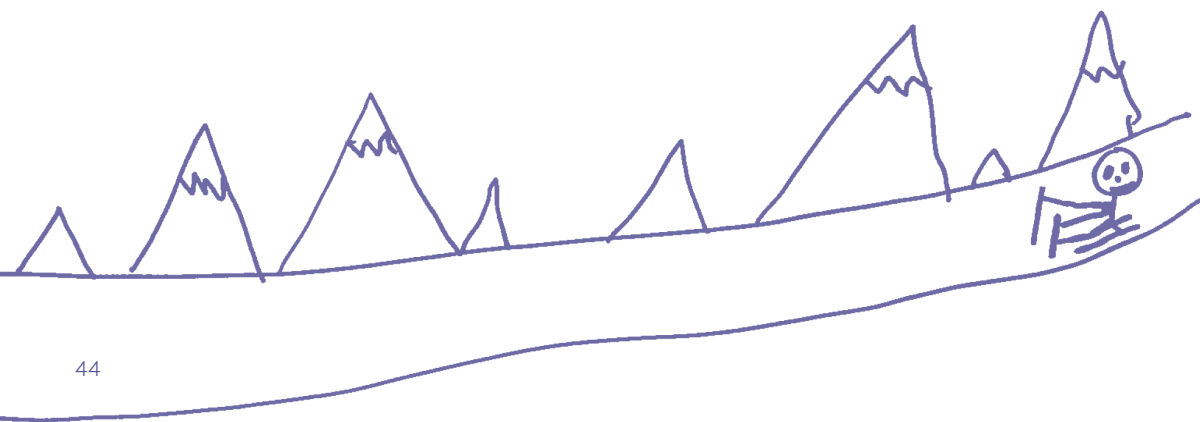
44

45

Contributors

Paul Maheke

Paul Maheke is an artist. He has an MA in Art Practice at l'École Nationale Supérieure d'Arts de Paris-Cergy and completed a programme of study at Open School East, London. Maheke's current research imagines the body as an archive using its waters as pathways to information and knowledge. This investigation occupies a metaphorical space wherein which the body resonates and echoes with the broader socio-political and historical context that have birthed it. With particular attention to dance, it proposes to rearticulate the representations of queer Blackness that emerge from Western imaginations by addressing history through non-human subjectivity. It is also a way to question social and geographical relationships to places as they relate to a more personal inquiry that mainly deals with unsettling idea of 'main-ness'.

Recent projects include: 'Ten Days Six Nights', cur. Catherine Wood and Andrea Lissoni, Tate Modern, London, UK (2017); 'Acqua Alta', Sultana Gallery, Paris, FR (2017, solo show); 'What Flows Through and Across', Assembly Point, London (2017, solo show).

Anne-Sophie Bammens

Anne-Sophie Bammens is a children's counsellor. She holds an MSc in Psychoanalytic Developmental Psychology, Anna Freud Centre, UCL, an MA in Child Studies, King's College London, and is a PHD candidate in the Counselling Psychology programme, Regents University London. Bammens has previously published on psycho-educational intervention to increase reflective functioning in foster and adoptive parents and holds a certificate in mentalisation-based therapy for patients.

Wanderley Dos Santos

Wanderley Dos Santos is a psychologist. He has a Masters Degree in Clinical Psychology from PUC, São Paulo and a second Masters in Psychodynamic Psychotherapy from the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust. Dos Santos is training to become an intercultural psychodynamic psychotherapist, he works as a counsellor for the charity Place2be and is researching historic and contemporary slavery for an artistic commission.

Jemmelle Griffith

Jemmelle Griffith is Practice Manager in the South Locality Early Help Team, Westminster. At the time of this project, Griffith was working for Westminster City Council as Senior Young People's Practitioner, part of her remit was overseeing the Transition programme for children in Year 6 across the city, to help support their journey into secondary school.

Benjamin Ord

Benjamin Ord is a dancer and choreographer. He has danced with Company Z, Curve Foundation Dance Company and the Royal New Zealand Ballet, Marc Brew Company, Company Wayne McGregor (formerly Wayne McGregor | Random Dance) as well as performing for artists Tino Seghal and Pablo Bronstein. His choreographic practice lies at the cusp of dance and visual art and has spanned the mediums of dance, sculpture, video and underground music.

Jessica Tarrant

Jessica Tarrant is a teacher. She has a degree in English from the University of Birmingham and after working as a stage manager at several national theatres, joined the Teach First programme in 2013. She is currently teaching Year 6 at Gateway Academy in Westminster and shares the responsibility of literacy coordinator.

Filip Tulak

Filip Tulak is a film-maker with a Degree in Media and Cultural Studies from University of the Arts, London. His accomplishments include working as an Associate Producer at Rooks Nest Entertainment and scouting Sally El Hosaini's 2012 Sundance World Cinematography Award-winning drama *My Brother the Devil*. He directs music and fashion videos and collaborates with artists in London, Warsaw and New York.

No homework

No Fighting

Art room no Pernom paint anything

Skee-bo-korr club

IN?

Skeleton key

K Idris's

kitchen lunch room class

swimming class

Bedroom Boy

Bedroom (Girl)

Sience lab build Robitics tech build new

Hot classroom cookie room

Dodge battle ice cream and Milkshake room

boy vs Girl room

Ball your Land

Labith's room

Toilet boy

keybos

Lock hole

Toilet Girl

Lab

You can wear makeup and jewels and you can wear non uniform !!

School uniform

no home work

no teacha

no teacher & principl

no PE

no violence !!

my kids

no classes
no meanies

NO DETENTION!!

Tyba's BOSSY SCHOOL

Cofeteria

sweets, sandwiches, fizzy drinks, crips, manymany..., phone time in school

Resort

School candy world

Welome to SCHOOL

learn what ever

learn what ever

disco room

play room

art room

SERP ENTINE
GALLERIES

serpentinegalleries.org/learn