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Inspection at Summerhill

Did OFSTED inspection result in improvement?

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## Abstract

### Inspection at Summerhill Did OFSTED inspection result in improvement?

#### Abstract

This thesis investigates issues surrounding the 1999 OFSTED inspection of Summerhill school (in Suffolk) which led to a Notice of Closure, and subsequent successful appeal on the grounds of inappropriate judgements made by OFSTED inspectors. However, in addressing the research problem, it considered whether an OFSTED inspection of an atypical independent school (Summerhill) is able to make appropriate judgements about that school given an inspection methodology based in modernist constructs and systematic observation.

Summerhill, in Suffolk, is 'an international free' school, established approx 80 years ago. As an institution, Summerhill maintains child democracy or freedom as its unique focus. To clarify the relevance of investigating the Summerhill case, it is useful to note that Summerhill School has existed in the independent sector offering 'progressive education' since the 1920s. However, following a 1990s inspection from OFSTED, its existence was threatened in terms of its freedom in future continuing to offer an independent UK-based fully 'democratic' schooling (despite the fact that parents pay for their children to attend Summerhill outside any UK state offering). Whilst Summerhill had been consistently subjected to government inspection since its conception, it was an OFSTED inspection which presented the school with a notice of closure subsequent to which the independent schools appeal upheld Summerhill's right to offer non-compulsory lesson attendance within its provision.

Whilst utilising post-modernist tradition for data collection, the case study filters data using the ambiguity organisational model, school effectiveness and improvement paradigms and the deprofessionalisation of staff through inspection. It identifies the problems for organisations subject to inspection which do not conform to the formal organisation model. It interrogates OFSTED's claims of improvement through inspection and concludes that improvement at Summerhill may have been incidental and not the improvement planned by the motives of OFSTED inspection regime. Further, it finds that the outcome of the appeal case might have re-professionalised staff post OFSTED inspection.

#### Key Words

Summerhill, OFSTED, School Effectiveness, Independent School Inspection

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## **1.0 Introduction**

### **1.1 Statement of the Issue – Purpose and nature of research problem Focus and aims**

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the rationale of the thesis and research problem which surrounds the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) inspection process and in particular, one OFSTED inspection, namely of Summerhill School. This thesis examines the extent to which an OFSTED inspection of an atypical independent school (Summerhill) is able to make appropriate judgements about that school. The research problem relates to the (stated) purpose of OFSTED inspections - which is to improve schools through accountability based upon inspections. The thesis seeks to ask to what extent, however, do the methodological approaches adopted for OFSTED inspections allow the process to reach sound judgements about atypical schools. Then, given radically different philosophical standpoints that underpin education at Summerhill, compared to the OFSTED inspection process, how far do these inspection processes undermine both the potential for improvement at Summerhill or constrain the accuracy of OFSTED's judgement.

### **1.2 Context**

It should be noted that Summerhill, in Suffolk, is 'progressive' democratic, free educational establishment, established approx 80 years ago. As an institution, Summerhill maintains child democracy or freedom as its unique focus. To clarify the relevance of investigating the Summerhill case, it is useful to note that Summerhill School has existed in the independent sector offering 'progressive education' since the 1920s. However, following a 1990s inspection from OFSTED, its existence was threatened in terms of its freedom to offer an independent UK-based fully 'democratic' schooling (despite the fact that parents pay for their children to attend Summerhill outside any UK state offering). Despite Summerhill being consistently subjected to government inspection since its conception, it was an OFSTED inspection which presented the school with a notice of closure. Moreover, at appeal,

the DFEE dropped its case against Summerhill after only 3 days of tribunal hearing (Playdon, 2000).

### 1.3 Background of OFSTED Inspection of Summerhill

It is important to recognise that the OFSTED inspection process set out to change notions in terms of public definitions of 'value for money' and access to information regarding schooling (West-Burnham, 1997). The OFSTED inspection process of 4-yearly inspections intended to widen the comparative evidence available about schools for parents, governors and the local community. OFSTED inspections claimed to 'demystify education' (Government White Paper, Choice and Diversity 1992). Public distrust or lack of confidence in established procedures to deal with defective educational practice may have been the forerunner for any perceived need for assurance of quality through publicly reported inspection. In terms of the school inspection regime, the influence of the 1987 election shows a clear shift towards central control (rather than a central influence) over education and subsequently, inspection (Brighouse and Moon, 1995). As a result, the emergence of OFSTED in replacing the role of Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) in its inspection remit presented considerable change insofar as OFSTED school inspection, to be objective, measures the exact levels of performance against set criteria (Clegg and Billington, 1994). OFSTED faced insurmountable problems at inception in the introducing of the inspection process in that the inspection language used - which attempted to suggest that same meaning and interpretation can be fixed across the variety of institutions - and further, in making judgements that assumes any certainties in 'good practice' (Bowring-Carr, 1996).

At this point, it is helpful to note that HMI had been responsible for the inspection of Summerhill school until OFSTED replaced HMI by conducting the 1999 inspection. However, HMI inspection was infrequent nationally and reports were relatively secret (Ormston and Shaw, 1994). Whilst HMI, as a national, independent Inspectorate acted outside party politics, over time HMI had increasingly become politicised. Evidence of the demand for increasing the external validity of data collection of inspection methodology (accountability) might be evidenced through the later progression to publishing HMI reports (Lawton and Gordon, 1987). Additionally,

the intention of OFSTED was not only to expose 'failing schools' but to work towards international comparison, which allows economic judgements to be made with global competitors in terms of educational provision (Ormston and Shaw, 1994). Yet Summerhill attracts learners worldwide. Globally, parents choosing and funding a Summerhill education had not perceived the school as 'failing' since Summerhill would fail simply by the parental withdrawal of student cohorts. Despite OFSTED judgement of Summerhill, it had a longevity exceeding 80 years.

In 1999, OFSTED inspection judgements were based upon evidence from observations; pre-inspection evidence (which includes statistical evidence from the school as well as policy and curriculum documentation and staff job descriptions). The examination of pupil work; and discussions with Headteachers, Deputy Heads, Senior Managers, pupils and teachers supplemented pre-inspection evidence (Clegg and Billington, 1994). OFSTED produced a separate booklet for inspection of Independent Schools. This differed from state school guidance in that OFSTED do not judge every aspect of school life but only areas negotiated between the head and inspector. Potentially, independent schools have largely been able to avoid the full OFSTED model (Dunsford, 1998).

Criticisms of OFSTED inspection in the state sector have included its cumbersome nature, the separation of inspection from advice giving, the cost of OFSTED, the uneven level of experience of individual inspectors; poor quality feedback; inconsistent and subjective nature of judgements (Dunsford, 1998). Interestingly, the independent sector negotiated separate 'modus operandi' to that forced upon state-funded provision. Possibly, this suggests a lack of acceptance for OFSTED inspection methods. Though, simply, it might be countered that the nature of the independent may be significantly different to state provision and as a result, demands differences in inspection process particularly since independent schools are not funded by the same mechanisms as state sector and need not deliver National Curriculum.

Conceptually, the OFSTED inspection regime was introduced during the era of John Major's Citizen and Parents Charters, which sought to make the wider government of the UK more answerable in its activities than previously. As a result, the Education (Schools) Act 1992 was enacted. It maintained 5 themes: quality, diversity,

increasing parental choice, greater school autonomy and accountability would lead to school improvement. Further, that OFSTED inspection would publicly identify schools 'at risk' (Choice and Diversity, 1992). Simple analysis of test results does not necessarily offer any indication to educational standards given the differences of children and any difficulties they may incur. However, similarly, publication of an OFSTED report may not disclose a full picture ie excludes matters of confidentiality. Report publication may merely result in an educational provision being 'submitted to trial by inadequately informed opinion' (Barton et al, 1980). Parents may be the least able to interpret inspection if they do not 'buy into' educational consumerism' (Ball et al, 1997). Yet, in the Major era of increasing 'consumerism' of the public sector, viewing education as a commodity purveyed through market mechanisms, had meant that internal scrutiny of schools was generally accepted (Bush, 1994). There is parental need for confidence that real improvement takes place within institutions. Since political accountability is determined by policy popularity or level of interest to meet needs of voting public, this 'confidence' needs to be held within the community (Ball et al, 1997). This might be attained through inspection by the measurement of an institution against national standards. As such, compliance to national educational 'norms' had been imposed by a national inspection regime (Bush, 1994).

Self-managed educational institutions no longer hide shortcomings since inspection highlights any managerial failing to meet educational 'norms'. Equally, OFSTED inspection considers the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. This feature is the essence of educational life - the backdrop that underpins any other area of learning and development (Smith, 1995). OFSTED considers the extent to which the school functions as an orderly community. Contributory to which, compliant behaviour and discipline are judged together with the quality of learning experience (Smith, 1995). This suggests that the fundamental methodology for OFSTED inspection lies with a prescribed criteria and thus, perception for behaviour and order against which levels of learning might be judged. This may have proved to be a source of 'difficulty' for inspection of Summerhill given Summerhill sets out to meet demand for an education which falls outside of educational 'norms'. It should also be pointed out that learning and education are both intangible. Both are open to highly different interpretations of 'quality' eg exceptionally high standards, consistency (zero defects), fitness for purpose, value for money or transformation

(Harvey, 1993). Yet, OFSTED inspection lies with judgements surrounding criteria 'consistency' with educational norms. To sum up, Summerhill may have 'fallen foul' of this approach. Therefore, some examination of the Summerhill case, and its subsequent appeal, might introduce the factors which contribute to this idea.

### **1.5 The Summerhill Case for Appeal**

The detail of the case is considered later in the documentary evidence findings (Chapter 4). As an overview, however, it is helpful to explain that, as part of the appeal of the OFSTED judgement Summerhill set up an independent 'inspection'. OFSTED's Notice of Complaint identified 6 specific complaints outlining rectifying actions required by the Secretary of State would have resulted in the institution's closure. Summerhill accepted 3 areas. Yet, the 3 remaining complaints, rather than being issues for educational improvement, Summerhill heralded as being directly at variance with Summerhill school educational philosophy (Cunningham, 2000).

The Centre for Self-Managed Learning, (which Cunningham chairs), carried out an independent inquiry to successfully counteract the OFSTED inspection. This included another inspection. The independent inspection team undertook an inspection over 17 days at the school (to include staying overnight which they claimed provided the fuller experience of a pupil-boarder) by contrast to the OFSTED model, where the inspection lasted 5 days (Cunningham, 2000).

The independent inspection team produced visit reports allowing each inspector as free to comment, unconstrained. The independent inspection time comprised university lecturers, a psychologist, teaching school heads, an educational consultant and a children's author (Cunningham, 2000). By contrast, the OFSTED inspection comprised 8 trained inspectors who undertook 36 hours and 40 minutes of observed classroom-based learning totalling 55 lessons (OFSTED, 2001). The independent inquiry argued that the statistical evidence of GCSE result attainment used by OFSTED at Summerhill was an inadequate method of comparison. To explain, low school entry numbers for a small school, in any one year, skews any true interpretation with national trends (Cunningham, 2000). Further, a major difference of the independent inspection was the attendance of inspectors on three rounds of

visits over 6 weeks. The independent inquiry claimed a 'better picture of the school' could be achieved by this (Cunningham, 2000). Further distinction may be achieved also from comparison of the autonomous reports from the independent inspectors with the report derived from grading criterion of OFSTED inspection. The methodological differences of deductive OFSTED research design contrasts with the inductive, open, 'deeper' research undertaken by the independent inquiry. It suggests that inspection 'judgements' lie with affiliations of 'schools of thought' as to what is 'measurable' quality or leads to raised standards.

The OFSTED inspection included a review of the prior 1990 HMI report (OFSTED 1999) and previous reports since 1949 (Cunningham, 2000). The independent inquiry additionally reviewed Social Services reports including those made after the OFSTED visit and surveyed leaver, parent and community attitudes to the school. Further texts informing the independent inquiry included an independent analysis of the OFSTED report, legislation, a PhD thesis and writing surrounding Neill's philosophy as founder of Summerhill (Cunningham, 2000). Documentary sources exceeded those utilised by OFSTED. The drawing by the independent inspection team of wider documentary sources than by the OFSTED inspection reveals a perception of insufficiency in the textual sources used to inform OFSTED inspectors (Cunningham, 2000). The OFSTED approach to classroom observation equally provides useful comparison insofar as the Independent Inspection team autonomously produced reports with free comment, unconstrained from each observer. The OFSTED report observation grading was flawed at best, at worst inadequate, insofar that 'behaviourally-anchored criteria' grading is inappropriate as it provides only a 'unidimensional' measure (Wragg, 1999). Possibly the 'free' independent inquiry's approach, potentially postmodernist, naturalist (Usher and Edwards, 1994), attracted greater 'understanding' (Wragg, 1999).

Observing and judging 'good teaching' is dependent upon affiliation to school of thought. Chris Woodhead, Chief Inspector OFSTED, berated Progressive child-centred teaching due to its absence of 'whole-class teaching'. Woodhead (2002) claims thinking surrounding 'Schools in a Learning Age' as lunacy. The Learning Age suggests the weight of (National) curriculum inhibits creativity and the 21<sup>st</sup> century needed skills of 'learnacy'. Woodhead (2002) argues pupils secure the skill

of 'learning how to learn' (learnacy) through structured opportunities and that a thousand permutations of mapping multiple intelligences results only in child-centred, pedagogic nightmares. Moreover, 'concerns' for pupil control over curricula are cited as the 'problems' within Progressive Education (Silcock, 1997). This might suggest a fundamental conflict in lesson observation between OFSTED and Summerhill at outset. Potential deficiency in documentary sources used in inspection and the constrained time, must question whether OFSTED's claim to 'judge quality' or 'improve standards' at Summerhill is defeated by their processes of inspection.

The Notice for Complaint served at Summerhill identified areas that must be addressed. Standard OFSTED feedback was not 'contextualised' to meet the needs of 'democratic' schooling. The statutory responsibility of OFSTED inspection is to report the 'quality' of education, the standards achieved, the efficient use of resources and the spiritual, moral and cultural development of the pupils (Clegg and Billington, 1994). Yet the time constraints upon OFSTED inspection may only result in a 'still photograph' of the institution rather than any reflection over time of the spiritual, moral or cultural development (Bowring-Carr, 1996). This suggests that the need for OFSTED to report back on Summerhill took predominance over any encouragement for proactive change or real improvement. In terms of fulfilling 'local accountability' (Ball et al, 1997) needs of Summerhill parents and governors, failings also must lay in any philosophical weaknesses of inspection.

In order to gain reprieve from the notice, the independent inquiry mainly highlighted inadequacies of OFSTED inspection methodologies. This raises questions as to whether OFSTED's methodology could be a 'valid' test for educational standards at Summerhill? Methodologically, 'observation validity' is founded by the purpose of the observation (Bell, 1993; Croll, 1986). OFSTED observation 'snapshots', absent of recognition for the underpinning theory-laden values, against which judgements are made (Hammersley, 1994; Hughes, 1990), may originate from within a reductionist, politically-founded paradigm through compliance to national educational 'norms' (Bush, 1997). A different methodological and philosophical approach may have facilitated a different outcome. The independent inquiry identified OFSTED claimed a 'drift' in standards could not be substantiated (through Summerhill's GCSE results). As a result, the independent inquiry considered that it was the school's philosophy,

rather than observation evidence, which resulted in the 1999 OFSTED Notice of Closure (Cunningham, 2000). The independent inquiry was successful in defending OFSTED's resulting Notice of Complaint. Therefore, it may be argued that a difference of philosophy was at the root.

It is important to identify that of the 3 report complaints to which Summerhill appealed, only one (complaint 4) related to classroom observation (Cunningham, 2000). Complaint 4 is critical to this investigation since it centred upon OFSTED's view of Summerhill's 'confusing educational freedom...(where) many pupils have been allowed to mistake the pursuit of idleness for the exercise of personal liberty' (OFSTED report, 1999, para 11) and asserting that the school had 'drifted'. Summerhill argued that inspectors did not assess 'out of class learning activities' through 'time constraints'. Summerhill pupils complained that inspectors were only interested by 'lessons' and held no other interest in other aspects of the learning (environment) (Cunningham, 2000). OFSTED Code of Conduct for inspections requires that inspections should sample all substantial evidence.



## 1.5 Summary

The introduction of OFSTED inspection within schools presented major change in the public accountability of educational provision. Whilst intended as a measure of the effectiveness of state-funded provision, OFSTED also claimed that inspection effected improvement within schools. The OFSTED inspection of Summerhill differed from the main thrust of OFSTED inspection insofar as Summerhill was an established independent school, which was attributed to democratic, free schooling practices. The OFSTED framework for inspection measures institutions against educational norms and Summerhill claimed that this basic element would result in inappropriate judgements of Summerhill.

The appeal case does not illustrate impact, or subsequent improvement, upon the educational provision of Summerhill resulting from the inspection process. This work then further deliberates upon debates surrounding school improvement and effectiveness and whether OFSTED inspection could provide any vehicle for improvement for Summerhill. The appeal of OFSTED judgements illustrates that differing approaches or methodologies to inspection of educational provision may lead to different conclusions. The appeal by Summerhill to the Notice of Closure reflected (by recognition by the government) significant weaknesses in OFSTED reporting. Equally, in undertaking this work, methodologically, the independent inspection 'throws up' the idea that pre-defined constructs may not facilitate 'reality' upon observation. Therefore, to view these issues further, the debate is informed by the following review of literature.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature relating to Summerhill and its founder A S Neill and then, the processes of OFSTED inspection and the nature of School Improvement debates. As outlined in the Introduction, to address the research problem, the overall thesis investigates issues subsequent to the 1999 OFSTED inspection of Summerhill school. There is a further need to consider the extent to which an OFSTED inspection of an atypical independent school (Summerhill) is able to make appropriate judgements about that school. Particularly in light of OFSTED's claim of 'improvement through inspection', the debates surrounding School Improvement and School Effectiveness are considered by looking at literature to question whether it is possible to effect improvement of Summerhill school through inspection.

Initially, within this chapter, to contemplate any potential reception of OFSTED inspectors at Summerhill, and to assist understanding of the nature of Summerhill, at least historically, the literature surrounding Neill provides insights. Views of A S Neill in his and others' writing (Hart (1970), Hemmings (1973), Lamb (1992), Walmsley (1969)) provide background to the acclaimed 'unique', philosophical approach of Summerhill and potentially, Summerhillian thinking regarding inspection.

### **2.1 The Philosophy of Summerhill**

#### **2.1.1 Background to the views of A S Neill**

As noted, an historical review of A S Neill provides indications of the influences since founding of the school over 80 years ago. The philosophical underpinnings of Summerhill as an independent, self proclaimed 'Free School' is an important starting point. A S Neill, the founder of Summerhill, has authored texts, which outline the school's philosophy which he espoused as an antidote to the negative influences of traditional restrictive timetables and schooling programmes.

Neill initially founded, with others, a school in Dresden, which later moved to Austria (1921-1924). Neill brought Summerhill, for which he gained worldwide fame, to the

UK in 1921. Following his vision his partner Ena, and then his daughter Zoe, continued to operate Summerhill after his death. Lamb (1992) notes that A S Neill was born in 1883 in Scotland and died in 1973 – culturally, he was a Scot - gained an MA in English from Edinburgh University having worked previously as an Assistant Teacher and a Pupil-Teacher in his father's school in Scotland. Within *The New Summerhill*, Neill (1992) details his rural Scottish boyhood and the clear cultural influences from Calvinism within his family upbringing. Calvinist beliefs which, in his writing, he treats with contempt. A limited relationship in childhood with his father, as well paternal expectations for Neill to pursue an academic role are detailed, coupled with illustrations of punitive controlling practices within the family and within the school that his father was Head. The depth of his love for his mother is also contrasted with his experiences of unsuccessful youth employment in Scotland and his father's view that he was only 'fit' for teaching. This chronicle paints an emergence of an educational 'revolutionary' formed by a background peculiar to his family history contained by a rural lifestyle and its subsequent economic history around the First World War.

Insights into Neill's educational philosophy can be drawn from his reflections of army life (in 1917). Anecdotal insights into strongly-held opinions colour his writing. These include an illustration of his personal 'revelation' of the value of individuals. This is embodied by recounting Neill's perceived 'stupid' soldier - who, it transpires, had been previously a maths teacher – and whom Neill later empowered to teach other recruits. Neill presents that 'stupidity' may be the weakness of perception of the beholder rather than the person considered 'stupid' (Neill, 1992). Perhaps this story provides the philosophical approach of Neill and, at his time of writing, Neill's revolutionary ideology for education. This picture of Neill is extended by Neill's publication, *Hearts not Heads in the School*, (Neill, 1944), written when Summerhill school was 23 years old. It relates the use of psychology in school, that asylums hold people who are considered mad merely because they cannot fit into an insane society. These were, possibly, visionary opinions for the time of writing. Neill (1944) suggests the world was moving away from Individualism to some sort of collectivism with the future of education treating the masses in such a way that the individual will be more likely to be pliable. He claimed the gregariousness of Summerhill lay with 'a mother-child attitude' (Neill, 1944, p 17-28).

Neill's (1944) views of social psychology and its application to education (as control) are illustrated, when discussing Curriculum. Neill's deeply held views of a state educated 'Powerless Youth' are clarified by claims surrounding the role of play as opposing to classroom discipline, by arguing only a small per cent of teachers are on the side of the child (p139). Neill (1944) reflected that during the summer his 'gangster pupils' of North Wales never went to a lesson. Whilst considered as simply wasting time, the break in their studies had no harmful effect in the long run. Students worked better for exhausting their immediate urge to play. Behaviour was the most important factor in state education (Neill, 1944). It might be drawn that Neill felt other schools were not generally developmental socially nor embraced any theme of freedom. He considered freedom as an essential 'need'. Within his work, it would appear that much of the 'deviance of learners' appears to be attributed to a failure of satisfying children's need by educationalists. Neill (1944) seems to feel that rather than addressing the whole needs of the individual, education is delivered in a functional fashion. This might be evidenced by his questioning of the opportunities for fellowship within schooling. Neill (1944) argued that there was no real fellowship unless the community is free from taboo and morality and fear, that crime will always flourish in a society whose emotions are repressed. Education, he argued should aim at preventing buried emotions from being inimical to society, education should concentrate on feeling and not on thinking (Neill, 1944).

In the main, this demonstrates Neill's dissatisfaction with educational practices of the time and the strength of his feeling which influenced the basic foundations and formation of ideas claimed to be practiced at (and central to the activities of) Summerhill school. In addition, this provides a picture of Neill's views providing a base for Summerhillian educational practices, where the pupils held an equal voice to staff and other adults. Of an educational culture which focussed upon the learning needs of the child, placing child freedom as a vital learning need, unconstrained by a timetable allowing the child to develop within a community directly related to their own personal development timescale. Neill's writing then possibly illustrates some of the views of the outside educational world that Summerhillian staff and potentially, Summerhill pupils may have held, or been influenced by, at the time of the 1999 OFSTED inspection.

### 2.1.2 Neill and Inspection

Neill (1972) provides reflections of Neill's view of his educational role and relationships with inspection. Neill describes himself:

'I'd like to think of myself as just a simple guy, with little book learning, and an infinite ignorance of life and things, but one who has come power in identifying essentials, the roots of life, believing in life so much that, to me, any attempt to change it by morals and rules and disciplines are crimes against child nature.' (Neill, 1972, p 164/5)

In many senses, this might seem typical of a modest view he held of himself. Yet much of his writing is littered with strongly-held, and often controversial, opinions particularly regarding sexual repression in state education and failings of state education, which coloured the philosophy that Neill proposed as the foundations of Summerhill. Whether the view of himself was a false modesty, or even a feeling of insecurity and a defence is unclear. He provides useful reflections, which provide historical review of the philosophical development of Summerhill. In particular, Neill (1972) illustrates comparisons to educational development in Britain by claiming it 'the freest country in the world' since due to old patriarchal demand for obedience and discipline being as strong as ever in state systems (p186), he believed Summerhill would not be allowed elsewhere (p 53).

In terms of Summerhill's history of inspections, and Neill's views of these prior to OFSTED (Neill was deceased at the time of the 1999 OFSTED inspection), such commentary may add to understanding. It might be drawn consequently also, that some of the defence in Summerhill's appeal against the OFSTED decision was influenced by this mantle of Neill's (1972) strong feelings of the validity of educational inspections. He reflects that from the first big inspection in 1939, HMIs had always been civil and friendly and helpful in their own way but they inspected domestic arrangements and lessons and not happiness, sincerity, balance, tolerance (p 153). As such, he was critical of inspection:

‘I said to another HMI: ‘Your criterion is learning but ours is living. You take a short view...concern because Willie cannot read at twelve ... but we take a long view. I can think of only one old pupil who can’t hold down a job’.

Equally, perceptions of public accountability are included in the analogies of Neill (1972), where he considers that it is the external validity of educational practices which are endorsed by the users and providers of education. Neill (1972) radically suggests that public accountability does not meet the needs of the child but merely the views of the general public. Similarly Neill (1972) fundamentally challenges the approach of inspection of Summerhill suggesting this promotes insincere judgement of educational need insofar as educational accountability for state provision by each government lies with the acceptance of practices through the ballot box. When considering the set up of Summerhill and Neill’s writings, this theme is echoed by Hemmings (1973).

Hemmings (1973) notes the importance of influences from Homer Lane (eminent as an educational thinker in progressive education of 1920s) upon Neill’s Summerhill philosophy and negative views of educational inspection. Hemmings’ (1973) reflections include Neill’s comments of the limited ‘freedom’ in inspectorate reportings of HMI visits. Neill (1972) comments that the Progressive Education School ‘camp’, were not in any part uniform in their views nor in agreement as to educational practice. Therefore, Hemmings (1973) suggests that Neill felt that if leading progressive educationalists could not find common ground, the government educational world of school inspection would fail to embrace progressive ideologies. Hemmings (1973) noted that Neill did, however, make one (last) gesture towards uniting the progressive thinkers by writing an article for *The New Era* on the proposed inspection of private schools (vol 13, No 2, February 1932). Inspection was a threat, Neill (1932) argued, and urged others to close their schools rather than agree to compromise on the basis of an inspector’s recommendations. Yet, Neill suggested Progressive Educationalists were so diverse that there was little prospect of unity (p99).

However, Hemmings (1973) recounts Neill as uncritical of one inspector:

‘...Edmond Holmes, at one point Chief Inspector of Elementary Schools, was a man of vision. At odds with most of the ideas that lay behind the policies of the Board of Education, he must have felt out of place ...Certainly he was no revolutionary in the political sense...He had been deeply influenced from his reading of oriental philosophies...It was this dogma (Christian) he asserted that led to the teacher feeling that they had to coerce their pupils into the ways of right thinking ... he castigated the practice in schools ... that he had watched as an Inspector...’ (p18)

Neill’s view of Holmes, might be contrasted further by Hemmings’ (1973) reflecting upon two government inspectors visiting Summerhill, in 1949. Perhaps this illustrates the differing philosophy of inspection and Summerhill:

‘The inspectors’ criticisms were mainly to do with the conduct of academic work. They were not impressed with the results of the system of optional study but significantly they condemned it not in principle but only in the way it was operated. The main defects they singled out were the lack of a good teacher for the juniors, the surprisingly old-fashioned and formal teaching methods elsewhere in the school, the poor guidance given to the children in planning their studies and the lack of privacy available for study. Neill did not think any of these criticism unfair but the remark he felt betrayed the inspectors’ limitations ... praised him for creating a situation in which ... education could have flourished ... in the inspector’s view such education was not in fact flourishing.’ (p 136),

further

‘In commenting on this, Neill claimed that examination results showed the system worked perfectly well ... but the passing of examinations was surely not the object that the inspectors had in mind ... no doubt they were thinking of the more creative possibilities...’ (p 136)

As such, this suggests that historically Summerhill had a mixed experience of inspection. This seems to be explained by Neill as being largely dependent upon the

individual HMI inspector. At one level, he suggests that the individual inspector might be limited by own culture and intellect versus at another level, that of the inspection regime. Despite the main commentary regarding inspections lying with the deficiencies of teaching practices at Summerhill, by contrast, on the referred occasion, inspectors suggest that the progressive philosophy of Summerhill was appropriate as an educational environment but merely mis-delivered. This suggests a looseness of HMI inspection which facilitated differing views of the standard, or deficiencies of the Summerhill educational experience.

Hemmings (1973) ponders Neill in terms of his philosophical approaches, and any relationship to the current educational thinking which may inform inspection:

‘... His (Neill’s) response to the Inspectors’ criticism on this score was symptomatic: classroom activities related only to examination-passing. This now seems unnecessarily limited: in many state primary schools, ... new approaches to teaching and learning have been making sufficient progress to suggest that ... there is available a mode of learning that would fit well with the more basic principles on which Summerhill rests ...’ (p190/191)

Insight to Neill’s view of the potential validity of inspection of self-funded schools might also be drawn from Neill (1972). There a clear sense of resentment that, despite parental approval of the educational experience of Summerhill, the state would only accept Summerhill’s educational role if it were fully consistent with state educational policy. Perhaps, this identifies the central tenet behind the appeal against OFSTED’s 1997 inspection decisions. Hemmings (1973) cites Neill as noting that in England every private school is registered but to be ‘recognised as efficient’ it has to apply for recognition. Summerhill would not qualify for recognition because of its failure to meet the normal standard in ‘book learning’. Neill summarised that every new pupil drops all school subjects, barring creative ones, proving that lessons were forced upon children. Having abandoned lessons Summerhill pupils often bloom late but a visiting Inspector would class this as ‘failure’ (Hemmings, 1973).

Neill (1944) suggests inspection makes Summerhill insincere. He argues ‘the kids tidy up but they feel self-conscious and unhappy’. He questions why the teaching



profession should tolerate inspection when other professions would not, claiming that for fifty years educated and intelligent parents have sent their children to Summerhill pleased with the results. Why should Summerhill be judged by an official standard that is not appropriate to its philosophy? Neill refused to be judged by a body of people who think of learning and teaching methods and discipline only (p 155). Yet clearly, despite claiming the UK to be 'the freest country in the world', Neill (1944) viewed the role of the state in educational terms as powerful. One to which Summerhill (and Neill) would need to conform sufficiently in order to be able to continue Neill's mission of 'free schooling':

'Alas, I am not brave enough to defy the powers...The Ministry has let me much alone and will do so until I die. What will happen then I cannot guess. Some Minister may say: 'We tolerated that school until the old man died but we cannot go on allowing a school in which children can play all day without learning lessons'.

(Neill A S, 1944, p155)

This quote might also be seen as a prediction of the outcome of OFSTED's inspection. It suggests that Neill viewed Summerhill as 'non-compliant' and suggests that it was merely his international reputation from his writing which allowed Summerhill to 'survive' HMI inspection regimes. One interpretation might be that Neill's strongly held views were of Summerhill's approach as radical and one which educationalists would have difficulty tolerating – rather than a view that Summerhill's philosophy was visionary educational practice, which educational policy may be informed by. Neill (1944) identifies inspectors' views as contradictory to Summerhillian ideals. In essence, this suggests potential conflict between Summerhillian philosophy and inspection, even prior to inspection by OFSTED.

### **2.1.3 Critics of Summerhill**

#### **A background to Educational Views of Neill**

If those Summerhill pupils seeking academic accreditation still achieve their qualifications, does Summerhill need to be compliant in its educational practice? Neill and Summerhill have been both admired and criticised internationally. Much of

Neill's work is considered controversial, particularly as his texts address issues of sexual freedom within schooling as well as religious beliefs and psychological interpretations. Historically, Summerhill has been under worldwide scrutiny by those who were interested by what has been accepted as a unique and possibly pioneering approach to schooling. To present any possible reception of Summerhill by educationalists, review of some of the arguments attracted by Neill might illustrate the emotional reactions that Summerhillian philosophy attracts. Potentially, such literature may have influenced an inspection team (although they may have been unaware of this prior to inspection) since the study of Summerhill has not been an uncommon topic in teacher training and this may have impacted upon their judgements when conducting inspection.

Contributions from the following authors (Ayers, 2003; Barrow, 1978; Culkin, Hechinger, Montagu and Rafferty, 1970; Purdy, 1997) provide some of the arguments surrounding Neill's approaches and present a range of impressions of Summerhill - to include further reflections upon earlier HMI inspection mentioned by Neill in his work. One adverse view of Summerhill was that it was 'old hat' rather than revolutionary. The child as a Noble Savage, needing only to be let alone in order to insure intellectual salvation, or they develop horrid neuroses later on in life. By leaving the kids alone they'll educate themselves was educational 'guff' as old as the human race (Rafferty 1970 p11). By sharp contrast, Montagu (1970) claims that Summerhill made educationalists understand that instead of requiring the child to fit himself to the requirements of the school, schools should adapt to the requirements of the child. By putting the child on an assembly-line, continuing traditional methods of 'education' had really nothing whatever to do with the functions and purposes of a genuine education (Montagu, 1970). For A S Neill and Ena (his partner) 'to bend and break children, hammering to fit cog-like in a mindlessly menacing machine without ability to think or feel could not guide their 'new kind of school'' (Ayers, 2003) What was the need for forceful imposition of standardised 'seeing and knowing' (Ayers, 2003)? Neill allows it to be seen that a teacher should be one who cares for the student ministering to the unique needs and personality of each student toward creativity. The greatest tribute ever paid to Neill, and to Summerhill, was the Report of the British Government Inspectors on the school to the Ministry of Education (Montagu, 1970).

‘These inspectors fully recognised the merits of the school and the principles upon which it was conducted...that the inspectors were above all most impressed by Neill himself constitutes a remarkable tribute to the man’ (Montague, 1970 p51, p55, p 61).

Yet, this contradicts Neill’s earlier views of the same inspectors, who had judged that despite an appropriate learning environment, Summerhill learners failed to maximise potential in the opportunities to learn within Summerhill since the approach had not been fully developed.

Rafferty (1970) argues that by making the school ‘fit the child’, life in later years will not recast its iron imperatives to fit the individual - a human being must come to an arrangement with the world about him (Rafferty, 1970). Traditionalist, modernist criticism of Progressive education is evidenced when lessons are optional. The Progressive Education strand which runs through the tapestry of Summerhill suggests that what is learned is less significant than how it is learned. Nowhere in the Summerhill philosophy does there seem to be the merest hint that children should learn to think and act in an orderly, disciplined manner despite the experience of the great mass of humanity over the centuries which has demonstrated that ‘the easiest, most efficient, and most economical way to learn is in organised classes’ (Rafferty 1970 p16-17). †

Such views appear poignant insofar as the key aspect of Summerhill’s appeal lay with the OFSTED inspection team’s concern with a philosophy of optional pupil attendance. It was on this point that the challenge to the OFSTED inspection was raised by Summerhill. It can be argued it is these critical issues, which were key to the potential educational experience at Summerhill. Culkin (1970), who writes that although he had never visited Summerhill ‘it is a holy place...charged with wisdom, love’ and suggested that the terror of educational critics of the idea is probably the most accurate measure of its validity (Culkin 1970 p27-28). He suggested that the wisdom of Summerhill is exquisitely suited to the needs of the child of the electronic age. It begins with the respect for and love for the child and Neill’s concern for total cognitive and affective growth of the child ‘has never been easier to acknowledge

than in our day when the gravitational pull of the electronic media drags us. Yet, traditional institutions stress the fragmented and compartmentalised style of life' (Culkin, 1970). Purdy (1997) contends that it is the right of the child not to be coerced to attend class since learning is an appetite, that there are few discipline problems in the voluntary classroom simply because the child would not be present if they did not want to study. Purdy (1997) cites the 1949 HMI report where HMI state that it cannot be doubted that Summerhill is fascinating and valuable educational research, which it would do all educationalists good to see.

A more cynical viewing of Summerhill argues against Neill's ideology, suggesting that the underlying dogma of the Summerhill faith is 'that children, if not subjected to any adult pressures or influences are perfect seeds that will turn into beings of predestined goodness' (Herchinger, 1970, p 35). Accepting Summerhill as startlingly successful, it might be questioned as to whether Summerhill would have remained intact if it had many more than 45 youngsters? The great majority of the world's parents would not believe in Neill's basic concepts so there would be no way of setting up Summerhill for great numbers (Herchinger, 1970). As such, this represents a basic conflict for inspection of Summerhill if inspection methodology is formulated by generally accepted educational ideals for educating a nation. Problems of prior inspections of Summerhill might not have lain with Her Majesty's Inspectors ability to appreciate Summerhill but that inspectors could not suppress some honest and professional doubts (Herchinger, 1970). For Neill, such criticism meant that 'even the most sympathetic education officials could not completely 'rise above their academic preoccupations' but that they overlooked the fact that the system does flourish when a child wants an academic education' (Herchinger, 1970 p43). The Summerhillian vision of the child just waiting 'to flower' is criticised as a string of disconnected and dubious pronouncements (Barrow, 1978) as it is not possible to substantiate - innate child goodness is absurd. Neill merely obfuscates issues since there has not been a shred of evidence that Summerhill facilitates 'natural development'. Such term is meaningless and without foundation (Barrow 1978). It is argued that the Summerhill philosophy of self-regulation is problematic as Summerhill cannot sensibly be regarded as neutral foundation territory. The child's immediate happiness subsequent to being given the freedom to attend lessons might not be the most suitable for preparation for their happy adult lives in the wider society. Whilst educational theory

may be tested through practice, any absence of systematic inquiry or due caution leads to inaccurate conclusions (Barrow, 1978). Neill's philosophy, absent of these factors, fail to recognise the nature of children changes as they grow older. Such changes may be the consequences of their schooling, rather than innate qualities (Barrow, 1978). Setting up a school within an ideology does not necessarily prove the wisdom of it. It is the long-term consequences which allow judgements to be made. By presenting 'problems' with Summerhill philosophy, this further unveils problems for inspection. Barrow (1978) contends that simply looking at a school in practice does not allow for judgement of whether a particular system of education is working. Equally, even if Summerhill works in practice does not determine whether it is a good school.

Broadening this, remarks from Summerhill pupils recorded by Walmsley (1969) might assist appreciation of the atmosphere at Summerhill depicted in literature. Further, such remarks might support likely or potential impressions by an inspection team to the school. Excerpts from pupils interviewed within his book portray potentially the likelihood of 'shocking' first impressions. To illustrate:

'There was the day when there was a charabanc load of visitors. The kids hated it, the charabanc coming up to look at them. The dining table was laid out with a beautiful afternoon tea, everything on it. We had a big bell that was used at an emergency to summon people for a special meeting in the hall. Tony rang it ... while they were out of the room the kids cleared everything off the table', Greeba Pilkington, pupil

Consistent with this image portrayed, further impressions might be gained from Walmsley (1969), and by Hemmings (1973) of Summerhill as an 'anti-school' (p194). Equally addressed by these excerpts are concerns surrounding the effective nature of the educational experience of Summerhill:

'People often ask how Summerhill children are able to adapt to the hard outside world after their rather exceptional education. The fact is, they adapt, on the average, considerably better than most, and I believe the reason is that they have lived for years in a small but really functioning society...' A L Morton, (pupil)

‘When the children first come here, one of the first things they go to is the arts or crafts as being something different from sitting in a classroom. Their path back to lessons, if you like, is through the free approach of the art and craft field where they come in and do pretty well what they like’ Simon (teacher)

‘It’s different from other schools, I come from a secondary modern and it’s just like coming out of the dark and into the light. The whole idea of the thing is different. The lessons are different. Summerhill isn’t based on trying to make you learn...you learn from the community, you learn from the meetings...the whole idea is to be yourself... you can be yourself as long as you don’t annoy other people’, Simon (senior).

Whilst it must be accepted that these reflections were recorded in 1969, such excerpts might allow it to be drawn that ‘order’ or compliance to educational ‘norms’ may not be the first impressions of visitors or pupils of the educational experience of Summerhill. Essentially, they offer a picture of an approach that is a radically educationally ‘progressive’ view of whether there is any necessity for control over children’s behaviour. It is possible that such impressions might impact upon government inspectors’ judgement, in terms of the ‘effectiveness’ of the school particularly, given the guidance on behaviour provided by OFSTED.

In summary then, this literature depicts that Summerhill and A S Neill have historically attracted attention for its philosophies, upon which the school claims to be ‘democratic’ or ‘free’. Texts suggest that these ideas and practices may be considered controversial and certainly, Neill, himself, considered Summerhill approaches to be radically apart from educational norms and expectations of state school provision. Despite debate of Summerhill’s critics as to whether the philosophy is generally acceptable, the central argument of this work lies with asking questions about OFSTED and in terms of school effectiveness and improvement, the inspection of Summerhill. It is by the analysis of the outputs of the educational experience which school effectiveness might be assessed and potentially, against which inspection assesses effectiveness. Given this expectation, Bernstein (1967) throws some light on

effectiveness terms, and lie only with traditional inputs-outputs review by OFSTED, which have limitations). Review of OFSTED's role might further explore this.

## **2.2 OFSTED inspections**

The purpose of inspection is principally to report on standards and provide basic information for politicians. However, since the conception of OFSTED in 1993 there has been a notion of improvement through inspection (Snelling, 2002). It is important to note, also perhaps, that the purpose of inspection is further attributed to accountability. Accountability takes a number of forms, ie in terms of whether the educational issue (under scrutiny) is merely problem solving (maintenance) within the education system, or moving towards real quality improvements (Barton et al, 1980). OFSTED was intended in the main for the state sector since government had expressed concerns in the 1980s for the failings of state education. Through the passing of 1992 Education (Schools) Act, and further introduction of a Parent's Charter, the government argued for parental choice and subsequently, that the standard of state education would improve (Snelling, 2002).

School improvement is fundamental to the validity of OFSTED inspection (West-Burnham, 1997). However, the OFSTED judgement process is subject to the highly concentrated and intense nature of inspection. It is a very demanding activity because inspectors are required to take account of so many facets in a brief time period (Ferguson et al, 2000). Equally, a dilemma faces inspectors in that they have to write reports that inform schools, whilst satisfying OFSTED reporting (including potential HMI monitor external quality check) requirements and also the needs of the contracting team to which they belong. This blurs any boundaries of 'fitness for purpose' within OFSTED reporting. Moreover, the time constraints on inspectors inspecting secondary schools are greater than for primary schools since the inspecting team is considerably larger (Summerhill contained both primary and secondary education within its inspection). Training of inspectors equally provides an interesting conundrum. An expensive necessity since the cost of inspection must be controlled, 'standards maintenance' training is problematic. Inspectors have no community of learning from the inspections to share their knowledge arising from inspections undertaken (Burns, 2000). The OFSTED model relies on consistency.

However, inspection 'underperformance' is contractually problematic for contracting inspection teams who want to maximise their revenue. This presents real quality problems in terms of consistency (Stoneham, 2001).

The cost of inspection has been far greater than budgeted for under HMI. By the same token, OFSTED inspection has stimulated greater emphasis on inspection research, which had previously been an under-researched area. However such research tends towards managerial aspects rather than the experiences of the ordinary class teacher (Burns, 2000). Whilst OFSTED inspection draws on qualitative evaluation both the time constraints and reliability of judgement presents issues in terms of interpretation – particularly in the use of a common framework provided by the OFSTED handbook (Ferguson, 2000). These issues may have contributed to the invalidity of the Summerhill inspection since it was unique and the first of its kind in the OFSTED inspection cycle.

To counterbalance, it may be observed that OFSTED claim inspection judgements are 'firmly' based on empirical evidence (Clegg and Billington, 1999). OFSTED's published Arrangements for the Inspection of Schools from September 1997, (12/96 HMI/107) further illuminate this process and provide a background to the inspection of state schools (at the time of the Summerhill 1999 OFSTED visit). The OFSTED system of inspection was introduced in September 1993 for secondary schools. The purpose being to measure the exact levels of performance against preset criteria. Final inspection decisions are made against a 5-point grading scale based upon collaborative discussions between inspectors. One view of the process is that OFSTED inspection is an invitation to treat heads to the best 'free' consultancy they are ever likely to receive (Ormston and Shaw, 1994). Declared as an organic, consultative quality assurance process, OFSTED systematically, with evidence, ensures standards are continually improving rather than acting in the guise of quality control finding fault. Schools know when OFSTED inspection will take place and good schools have been publicly successful in terms of the visible reporting by OFSTED reports (Ormston and Shaw 1994). As a result, inspection acts as a catalyst to improvement taking place. Yet, the resulting appeal within the Summerhill case suggests this was not the Summerhill view of the 'experience'.



Any claims for improvement through inspection warrant cautious examination. The OFSTED criteria for observation may prove problematic given the potential for 'bias'. This criteria takes the form of short descriptive paragraphs, or lists, to judge the 'quality of teaching' which are amplified by the provision of contrasting paragraphs exemplifying 'good' or 'unsatisfactory' features. Inspectors have felt that these are 'woolly' and insufficiently precise (Gray and Wilcox, 1996). From these criteria inspectors apply the five-point scale based upon 'good features' versus 'shortcomings' overview (rather than individual observations based upon the criterion). Potentially, this could result in either totally 'subjective' judgements being (mis)matched to criterion wording or the possibly different judgements against the same criteria (Gray and Wilcox, 1996). It might be argued then, that this could have occurred within the Summerhill inspection.

'Professional judgement', based on limited descriptors, regarding quality of teaching facilitates only a uniform view of good teaching (Wilcox and Gray, 1996). Rather than gaining greater or multiple insights (eg from pluralist post-modernist inquiry, against which actions 'for improvement' might be negotiated with the 'democratic' or progressive education being inspected), as such, the purpose of OFSTED's inspection possibly reinforces compliance rather than improvement. 'Improvement' is a subjective OFSTED term insofar as 'improvement' might be determined, as movement towards 'norms', rather than enhancing the learning experience (Ball, 1990) - unless it is accepted that educational 'norms' are the most desirable enhancer for educational practice.

OFSTED (1994, *Improving Schools*, p 5) states that there is no single route to the improvement of schools, nor any single point on a school's route to improvement at which it can stop and call the process complete. Schools have much in common. However, in the ways they deliver they are infinitely varied. They are also infinitely improvable. OFSTED (1994) suggests that whatever the context may be to improve anything, two conditions are necessary - the existing state of things, its strengths and shortcomings and a clear vision of what it should look like when the 'improvement' has been achieved. Previously, a few pitfalls to prior school improvement were noted by HMI, offer OFSTED (1994) – a failure to move from review and analysis of the process to planned action. OFSTED (1994) suggest that it is always difficult to

match resources to intentions but that the best plans are carefully costed, with economy and efficiency as the other vital yardsticks of value for money. Little can be taken from literature to review whether this would hold true at Summerhill but possibly the stumbling point might lie with a 'vision of improvement' for which historical inspection evidence for Summerhill has focussed upon accommodation facilities (Neill, 1972) rather than a focus upon raising examination results.

Equally, the extent to which OFSTED is perceived as objective or subjective and subsequently, its ability to produce an accurate portrayal of the school inspected emanates from radical departure of OFSTED from HMI models and the size of inspection (all schools inspected on 4 year cycle). OFSTED regard the teaching force as the main contributory factor to the quality of the educational provision focusing upon the quality of education, resulting standards achieved, the efficiency of management of school resources and the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils (Burns, 2000). As a result, the extent to which OFSTED is perceived as a threat or validation of school practice potentially impacts upon the level of (positive or negative) perception as to how the school is functioning and how it will fare in inspection by teaching staff. Many of the negative feelings have been related to stress in terms of workload and staff's commitment to cope in preparation for and during an OFSTED inspection (Burns, 2000). Equally, perceptions by teaching staff of a political agenda behind OFSTED inspectors and the 'potential baggage' that inspectors might bring to the inspection are seen as contributing to the actual inspection process and outcome. Potentially a force at play within Summerhill's inspection?

Some headteachers suggested OFSTED was a 'benchmarking' or 'levelling' exercise as part of a 'government tool'. What is more, that the inspection was like a performance or play which may have been acted rather than the 'real' school (p 26), at best a 'snapshot'. To which the most popular challenge has been that a 'truer picture' might be gained if random inspections were conducted without warnings, in different seasons or possibly using local LEA inspectors who know the schools and the children (Burns, 2000). Clearly, this suggests that the build-up perceptions to inspection are indelibly woven into the preparations for OFSTED inspection and the acceptability of the accuracy of the final report (Burns, 2000). Certainly in the

Summerhillian case, Neill (1944) forecast a government agenda which might predict an emotional reception to inspection as a threat to Summerhill's existence.

Having considered the OFSTED inspection regime, by considering inspection further through School Improvement and Effectiveness Debates perhaps, key issues which concern the Summerhill case can be explored.

### **2.3 Improvement through Inspection**

What is it that OFSTED means by 'improvement'? OFSTED suggests the word is used to describe the ways 'in which schools:

- raise standards
- enhance quality
- increase efficiency
- achieve greater success in promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development ... the ethos of the school' (OFSTED 1994).

#### **2.3.1 The School Improvement and School Effectiveness Debate**

These are the four central themes of the Framework for the Inspection of Schools. Yet, previous generations of school teachers believed they should be left alone to 'get on with the business of teaching behind closed doors' within a tradition of laissez-faire, dependent upon teachers' professional judgements (Ferguson et al, 2000) and clearly, as an independent school, Neill echoes this in his texts for Summerhill. Prior to OFSTED a 'good school' was one with a good reputation in the local community, though the reasons for such trust and support were not always clear (Ferguson et al, 2000). From this, Summerhill might be considered a good school since its global reputation has drawn pupils worldwide.

School Improvement and School Effectiveness are two separate and different approaches to considering educational provision, though often interlinked and confused. To facilitate analysis of OFSTED approach, both areas demand consideration to determine whether the aims of OFSTED are influenced or driven by School Improvement or School Effectiveness ideology. Moreover, such examination

presents a forum to discuss whether OFSTED inspection of Summerhill is potentially capable effecting improvement for Summerhill. Yet there are a number of contrasting views regarding Improvement and Effectiveness yet some background of the British education policy provides explanation as to why it has become of interest. The National Commission on Education under Lord Walton (1993) carried out an independent inquiry into the long-term development of education and training throughout the United Kingdom. The British Association for the Advancement of Science set up the Commission with the support of the Royal Society, The British Academy and the Royal Academy of Engineering. Within which they commented regarding Education and Training in 1993 –

‘A minority of academically able young people receive a good, if narrow, education and, for them, provision is well suited and efficiently run. For a majority of young people, education is of more variable benefit. The talents of many are not valued enough and not developed enough....It is its failure to enable not just a minority but a large majority of young people to obtain as much from their education as they are capable of achieving’ (p1-2)

and formed the following:

#### The Commission's Vision

- 1) In all countries knowledge and applied intelligence have become central to economic success and personal and social well-being
- 2) In the UK much higher achievement in education and training is needed to match world standards
- 3) Everyone must want to learn and have ample opportunity and encouragement to do so
- 4) All children must achieve a good grasp of literacy and basic skills early on as the foundation for learning throughout life
- 5) The full range of people's abilities must be recognised and their development rewarded
- 6) High quality learning depends above all on the knowledge, skill, effort and example of teachers and trainers

7) It is the role of education to interpret and pass on the values of society and to stimulate people to think for themselves and to change the world around them.

The Commission outlined A Framework for Learning (p 47-48) which beheld to motivate pupils towards learning and (Chapter 5 Innovation for Learning) provide 'Better Learning in Schools' (p85-87) by Raising Expectations. In inspection terms, items 2 and 4 may have presented issues at inspection for Summerhill, where non-compulsory attendance of lessons may have been judged as not meeting of the vision. Equally item 7 may prove problematic in terms of interpretation of values, general comparisons might be drawn to the similar nature in spirit to Neill's (1944, 1992) view of 'fitting the child'. This can be illustrated where the Commission noted that:

'people learn in many ways; teachers are powerful 'role models', disaffected students can resist even the best teaching – it is difficult to define effective teaching – the quality of learning can be improved by raising expectations about what can be achieved and paying closer attention to their individual needs. Successful approaches involve greater flexibility about the means, time and place in which learning takes place. Helping pupils to play a greater part in their own learning is important'

With regards to Flexibility in Learning, the Commission identifies that changes in society and in the world of work are making it more important for people to be adaptable and ready to apply their knowledge and skills in many contexts. Having a choice in how they learn may offer pupils a better preparations for such demands than some traditional learning methods do. Pupils can learn at their own pace so as to raise both expectations and the quality of learning in the classroom. Equally importantly, the Commission comments that

'self directed learning does not work with non-self-motivated people' (p 90)

as such the foundations of independent learning are laid even in the pre-school years and there is a need to support independent learning. They suggest confidence in studying independently provides the foundation for successful flexible learning and learning throughout life. 'Supported self-study' complements the use of flexible

learning as well as helping institutions to respond to rising post-16 participation. Better use of this 'non-contact' time enables teachers to make more effective use of 'contact time' (p91). Readers of this might be forgiven for mistaking some of the references to self-directed and flexible learning as being from those views of Neill. The potential of 'making the school fit the child' or freedom in learning outlined appears to echo Summerhill philosophy.

However, when considering the purpose of OFSTED inspection of Summerhill, it might be pointed out that the Commissioner's report was critical of the development of UK educational strategy. The report further detailed the view of national need for greater public accountability and school effectiveness external scrutiny of school performance on examination and test results indicators focusing attention of the idea of the failing school and mechanisms to correct failure (p 169-177). It presents successful schools as those which reflect on their own practice and devise and implement changes in response to the needs of their pupils. It argues that schools need to examine information and data relating to a wide range of indicators not only examination results but information on attendance, behaviour, extra curricular activities and attitudes to school. The main focus is to be upon identifying schools, which are doing a good deal better or worse, and establishing what other schools can learn from them. As a result, the report concluded that there is no single recipe for improvement. †

The Commission addressed the role of the OFSTED inspection cycle within 'The Management of Education and Training (p354-5) by stating that whilst OFSTED see its work as part of a broader framework 'explicitly linked to school improvement through action plans, yet a four-yearly cycle of national inspection was insufficient. They suggested an OFSTED trained local inspector pay regular visits to schools and consider different aspects of the school's work periodically – thus reducing the cost and weight of inspection. Schools could also purchase independent advice to improve. This signified the potential likelihood that OFSTED inspection processes might facilitate school improvement through supplementing inspection regime. Yet, with the 1999 OFSTED inspection model used was not designed for such an inspection of Summerhill. The role of Summerhill in its own evaluation may have been critical in meeting inspection intentions.

Schools need to change if they are to be effective in meeting the needs and aspirations of their clientele. Yet, this poses the question 'Effective for whom?' (Dimmock, 2000) There are 2 approaches to School Effectiveness (Dimmock, 2000):

- '1) Schools which have failed in terms of their main mission to educate students
- 2) Celebration of the achievements of schools in general but recognises that they are increasingly failing to meet new challenges and agendas of future societies and economies.'

The assertion is that an effective school is equally effective for all its students irrespective of ability, gender or age. Many schools seem to be 'effective' in catering for the needs of some of their students but given finite resources, struggle to provide an equally high standard for all – do such schools qualify for the title 'effective'? Moreover, nowhere does school effectiveness debate the educational values against which, indirectly, schools such as Summerhill may be unconsciously judged. Whilst its motivation is that the raising of achievement will enhance competitive economic status of nation state, it under-theorizes and therefore, is bound to fail. Difference is to be valued and not to be closed down by straightforward recipes and as such calls for more careful robust responses (Slee, 1998). General conclusions are that schools make some difference to student achievement but due to the consequent need to re-emphasise the social limits of school reform, this is likely to be smaller than typically assumed by Effectiveness and Improvement literature.

School reform has frequently failed in the past because educators and policy makers are reluctant to acknowledge the nature of education problems and willing to accept partial answers. Governments need to take a more balanced policy approach to assessing school performance and making them accountable. Even using a value-added analysis, schools will not perform at the same level (Thrupp, 1999). Good policy would acknowledge that schools will be more or less effective but will also be realistic about the nature of the students (whilst typically this argument refers to equality in state schools, this can be equal to the uniqueness of Summerhill). When policymakers are reluctant to discard raw exam results and favour 'rigorous' quantitative research, the changes of differentials being taken into account seem slim

as this would bring an unwelcome complexity to educational marketplace models (Thrupp, 1999).

Strategies for school improvement, which focus solely upon whole school processes, without substantive content or which address single curriculum innovations, rather than whole school development, are doomed as 'tinkering' (Hopkins, 1993). School Improvement has the twin goals of enhancing student outcomes as well as strengthening the school's capacity for managing change. Successful innovation is usually linked to strategies that incorporate fundamental organisational change and directly address the culture of the school. Two of the most favoured strategies for school improvement - linking curriculum and organisational change - are school self evaluation and school development planning. School improvement approaches to educational change embody the long term goal of moving towards the vision of the 'problem solving' or 'thinking' or 'relatively autonomous' school (Hopkins, 1993 p26-28). In School Improvement thinking, the work of schools has common patterns. The more open and democratic the school climate, the more effective it is (Hopkins 1993). Yet then, it might be that the Summerhill democratic foundations are consistent with improvement thinking and might facilitate conclusions of Summerhill as an 'effective school'?

Education in Britain has been a turnstile for employment or academic success. Historically, truancy amongst girls was allowed and not seen as an educational problem since they might service the home – arguably a 'backdoor' Summerhill-style philosophy for non-compulsory lesson attendance. It is only the labour market crisis for skilled labour, that mass compulsory education has marched forward in terms of ensuring educational provision is achieved via marketisation, report competition and league tables. As such, school effectiveness and improvement schools might be thought of as a manufactured crisis drawn from 'common sense' goals (Slee et al, 1998). Post 1988 Education policy is mounted from dangerously narrow platforms of educational research into school effectiveness and improvement. Effective schooling, being essentially functionalist, steers away from difficult questions surrounding the purpose of schooling by considering relationship to the crudest forms of human capital theory. School effectiveness bleaches context from its analytic frame and is silent about the relative performance of government policies. Schools



can be pathologized as good or bad based upon a narrow and fragmented test criteria stemming from public policy. Teachers are adjudicated according to their adherence to disconnected criteria, and school administrators are celebrated by the level of embracing effective schools models, consistent with an extremely costly and punitive educational inspection agency (OFSTED). Given a general failure to provide contextualised analysis of schools, effectiveness models potentially favour the privileged and punish the disadvantaged. There is a naïve and disingenuous claim that by behaving like an effective school, a school might be 'normalised' or successful (Slee et al 1998).

Deliberately, as a political strategy, the central English and Welsh government have contained School Effectiveness within certain definitions, overlooking the contested nature of successful schools in terms of their socio-political and ideological dynamics (Busher 2001). Further, school inspections have been used as a powerful political strategy to put into place particular models for schools investing in a framework of control against which schools may be judged. A multiplicity of factors located outside of schools affect how schools and staff interact with external pressures and values yet school improvement research has been largely constructed on a traditional-rationalist base. Consequently, it overlooks the unequal nature of relationships in the socio-political dynamics of promoting or resisting change (Busher, 2001). A fundamental weakness of school effectiveness is that it ignores context and fails to improve practice or teacher morale at a wider level by allowing best practitioners to 'score over' their less skilled colleagues (Rea and Weiner, 1998).

It is interesting to reflect then that the disciplines of school effectiveness are very young – 15/20 years - in comparison to educational policy research, psychology or sociology (Reynolds, 2001) yet are still central to many countries' policies. Further, school effectiveness provides a development of 'theoretical' explanations for different outcomes between students, classrooms, schools and contexts (Reynolds, 2001). It claims a valid knowledge base, which suggests that home and school have additive effects upon the potential constraints or advances of pupils. However, there is no evidence from Reynolds of school effective thinking in terms of a democratic school, in a boarding school context, such as Summerhill.

School improvement thinking approaches long-term goals of the self-renewing school with a number of assumptions:

- 1) school as a 'centre of change' – external reforms cannot assume all schools are the same – a classroom 'exceeding' perspective is required
- 2) a systematic approach to change carefully planned over years
- 3) change of 'internal conditions' to include role allocations, procedures and resources that support teaching-learning.
- 4) Educational goals – broader definition of outcomes than achievement tests – serve the general development of schools, professional needs and teachers and needs of its community
- 5) A multilevel perspective recognising school embedded within an educational system – roles in system require definition to be harnessed and committed to school improvement
- 6) Integrated implementation strategies both bottom-up linked to top-down
- 7) Change must become the natural behaviour of teachers – implementation alone is inadequate

Source: Reynolds D (2001) *Beyond School Effectiveness and School Improvement?* Continuum, p28

From 1990s, Reynolds (2001) claims there has been a convergence between two paradigms to recognise that:

- 1) pupil outcomes have been key success criteria rather than teacher perception of the historical innovations
- 2) outcomes assessed by 'hard' quantitative data to gain confidence to measure success or failure of project
- 3) problem-centred orientation rather than philosophical judgement of appropriate strategies suspended by a 'what works' non-denominational approach
- 4) Previous policy discourse at school level rather than classroom level – in UK no recent knowledge base about teacher effectiveness at classroom level which would lead to balance previous 'school level' – the neglect of classroom level for celebration of school level may have cost valuable teacher commitment
- 5) Improvement programmes have not been organisationally-tight – most programmes 'voluntaristic' – school effectiveness requires organisational cohesion, consistency and constancy – differential take-up of improvement activities could adversely affect quality, therefore fidelity in implementation is seen as critical.

Both School improvement and effectiveness studied 1970s 'well' schools and simply proposed that the 'sick' adopt the characteristics of the former (Reynolds, 2001). Yet effective schools are already effective! It is not known what made them effective over time and simply, the distance of practice of one school and another may be too great to be bridged. An educational audit for abnormality may throw up very different thinking since 'abnormal organisational functioning' may not be a concern of an effective school – recognition of a need to focus upon 'remediation' for the sick, rather than further advancement of 'healing' schools (Reynolds, 2001). While all reviews assume that effective schools can be differentiated from ineffective ones, there is no consensus on what constitutes an effective school (Reid, Hopkins and Holly, 1987).

Most school effectiveness studies have focused upon academic achievement in terms of basic skills in reading and mathematics, or examinations results. However, a few have also provided evidence of important differences in social/ affective outcomes

such as attendance, attitudes and behaviour. Yet, in terms of Summerhill, if the models are based with from this narrow definition, a 'unique' institution presents difficulty for analysis unless it foregoes its unique qualities.

Fundamentally, rather than improvement, since organisational dynamics are so complex these paradigms lead to a 'cul de sac'. Thinking about the social world is notoriously difficult and serious reflection offers that there is no single way which portrays reality – if a series of uni-dimensional perspectives are used to build a holistic picture, then differing lens should be demanded (Fidler, 2001). Equally, dynamic processes engaging staff and students may provide 'messy complexity' within schools, which school effectiveness fails to understand (Jamieson and Wikely, 2001). Given the democratic processes of Summerhill 'messy complexity' may be found, thus rendering school effectiveness problematic especially if inspection is based in school effectiveness/improvement paradigms. This is because School effectiveness is a narrowly defined orthodoxy focussed 'upon means rather than ends' (Bennett and Harris, 2001). An uncritical acceptance of externally defined and interpreted measures of effectiveness does not help schools. As a simplistic linear model, school effectiveness fails to recognise a more complex association between teaching and learning (Bennett and Harris, 2001). Differing communities of practice, even within the same school, may have quite different perceptions of what counts as 'best' or 'good' practice. As such, the pursuit of imposed goals or outcomes may be difficult to achieve and prove to be unsound aims for school improvement. Despite any achievements of school effectiveness and improvement, their shortcomings will dismiss them as 'the academic equivalent of the 'emperor's new clothes'' (Bennett and Harris, 2001 p183). Therefore, a more powerful set of strategies based in organisational theory and management is necessary to secure real, enhanced school effectiveness and improvement eg through inspection (Bennett and Harris, 2001).

As stated, principal issues of school effectiveness lie with starting definitions for effectiveness and then measures for effectiveness. Critically then, where outcomes are difficult to specify, 'easier' approaches to measure in the short-term may be used and sacrifice long term effectiveness eg GCSE results considered, whilst neglecting the broader aims of schooling. A 'slippery concept' (Fidler 2001, p 55), that the assessment of 'effectiveness' may be measured through relative effectiveness of other

schools. It is not possible for all schools to be 'effective'. Therefore, any change in effectiveness of one school may be incorrectly calculated as a reduction of effectiveness for another, even though the school may not have changed any of its 'effective practices'. Equally, despite recognition of inaccuracy of individual child performance, little is identified in terms of measurement errors. This can be highlighted where the difference in performance between the top effective schools and bottom are small. School effectiveness thinking is fundamentally flawed by its generalities (Fidler, 2001). Further implicit assumptions are open to challenge within school effectiveness - that all schools have the same priorities (are interests of society, parents and children the same?) and that effectiveness in one aspect of schooling implies universal effectiveness. As a democratic free school, simply, Summerhill presents very different assumptions to traditional independent or state schooling.

School improvement manifests control perspectives by requiring the school to respond to external requirements, irrespective of its own requirements and may have contributed to Summerhill 'failing'. Alternative approaches, namely transformative education could be developed, which connect more explicitly and imaginatively with the possibilities facing education at the end of the twentieth century (Fielding, 1997). Whilst school improvement is conceived as more complex, largely due to school effectiveness reductionist view of teaching, which advocates that 'that which cannot be measured is not worthwhile', both effectiveness and improvement require radical re-thinking. Further, notions of added value superficially portray what constitutes an effective school (Fielding, 1997 p10).

Effectiveness and efficiency are not neutral notions. School effectiveness is a deeply political process within the safe confines of a severely constrained debate dislocated from education's resourcing. It perpetuates the notion that if only teachers could get a 'proper', 'professional grip on themselves' it would reverse any trends of declining national economic competitiveness, which is the responsibility of schools – irrespective of circumstances. Perhaps, this alludes to perceptions of 'poor' schooling from progressive practices such as Summerhill models (Ball, 1990). School improvement is too closely linked to school effectiveness (through inspection) to actually serve its purpose (Fielding, 1997). An alternative approach to school improvement and effectiveness might lie with mapping change and overlaying of

'maps' to provide a richer picture of the institutional, departmental and individual realities. Transformative Education is then characterised by asking hard questions about the limitations of such schooling and the purpose of education in an unjust society. Again, perhaps, the reader might draw that some of the views of A S Neill do not appear at odds with Transformative Education.

OFSTED's review of school effectiveness research in 1994 (Sammons, Hillman and Mortimore 1994) implied there was a need for caution in interpreting findings of school effectiveness research. Whilst OFSTED espoused a straightforward linear model of causality, the Institute of Education reviews recognised that schooling is multivariate, non-linear and therefore not statistically straightforward. Where OFSTED presumed that causal factors do not interfere with each other nor are influenced by context, their simplifying aspirations became self-defeating. The Institute of Education reviewers seemed to accept that school effectiveness debates are liable to disagreement yet failed to insert this caveat into their analysis. Despite the limited number of empirical studies and weak theoretical base to support this, it seems a 'feel good' of reciprocity of characteristics, such as professional leadership and strong input from staff with purposeful output from staff provides a collegial model of school effectiveness. School effectiveness became an ethnocentric pseudo-science, which mystifies and marginalises in order to provide social engineered solutions to technical problems as part of a national efficiency package including aggregate measures (examination scores, class sizes, attendance figures). Aggregate measures suffer from a reconciliation problem insofar as they apply to populations and not individuals (Hamilton, 1998).

To conclude, 'School improvement' may be driven by a political agenda linked to a model of 'effective schooling'. This foregoes any understanding of issues of power and authority and individual interaction or transformation to allow researchers appreciate how schools function and then reflect upon how to bring about change and enact 'school improvement' (Busher, 2001). Perhaps wider considerations of the Effectiveness and Improvement paradigms might further unlock dynamics of this and potentially of the OFSTED inspection of Summerhill.

### **2.3.2 Wider considerations of Effectiveness and Improvement Paradigms**

The central orthodoxy of school effectiveness and school improvement contains an assumption of consistency of environment and systems and this may be challenged (Jamieson and Wikely, 2001). Different clusters of subjects are quite different from one another requiring different pedagogies and this does not fit with the homogenising tendencies of school effectiveness thinking. Further complexities of class, gender or ethnicity in terms of differential schooling present needs that a Tayloristic 'one best way' model from school effectiveness would fail to address (Jamieson and Wikely, 2001). Summerhill as an independent school is selective in terms of its pupil population and generally, as it is self-funding, pupils would tend to be from middle-income earners. However, since Summerhill attracts learners globally, ethnicity might be a factor for the school. Yet the Summerhill philosophy treats them as 'the same' – one best way? Pupil motivation is largely neglected by school effectiveness research, providing only a tacit assumption that school populations are homogenous for teaching purposes. If schools could be selective in their intake, with the resulting of no particular variations in the pupil groupings, a school-wide approach might be appropriate. Yet, issues of motivation are key themes of Neill's criticism of educational provision and areas that Summerhill philosophy is 'held out' to address.

School effectiveness has been influential in presenting reasons, whereas school improvement has academic adherents. Neither approach is sufficient to underpin practices for a teaching profession (Bottery, 2001). A radical look at education today and a strategy for the future reviewing the better ways of learning, preparation for the work of tomorrow and effective schooling for the 21<sup>st</sup> century was spearheaded by Paul Hamlyn Foundation National Commission on Education in 1993. This offered that successful schooling should be based upon the best of current practice. The subsequent publication of the Learning to Succeed report identified that 'schools of the future may have be very different in order to prepare young people for life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century' (p187) with pupils working in small self-supporting groups where age would be irrelevant as learners shared classes according to each level they had reached. The vision offered being that such learning would embed an enthusiasm for learning that would carry on throughout the learner's life and lead to a national high skills equilibrium. This would certainly prove contrary to the 'whole school'

approaches of school effectiveness models and moreover, possibly more aligned to the ideas of A S Neill, who advocated that the school should 'fit the child'.

One opportunity cost of OFSTED inspection has been that teachers have little time for renewal or development and need to preserve stability and conserve the time and emotional energy to cope with their daily demands. Heads and teachers give priority to defending themselves against damaging inspection consequences rather than target improving the school – particularly when reinspected (Ferguson et al 2000). One of the main criticisms of the OFSTED system of school inspection is that it can be extremely stressful for teachers and added to their already heavy workload. The following were also identified:

- Deprofessionalisation – 'tarred with same brush'
- Labelling – 'naming and shaming' 'public humiliation' the stigma of teachers who do not want to admit they come from a 'failing school' as they may be seen as 'failing teachers'.
- Increased workload and type of work – paperwork for paperwork's sake if placed on special measures
- Teachers felt they were being blamed for the school's failure – scapegoats'

(Scanlon, 1999)

Are inspection and development then so separated by the OFSTED model that it impacts upon potential school improvement. Possibly, the OFSTED model attempts 'evaluation for improvement' to stimulate further development via the issuing of a report. However, whilst recognising the absence of any dialogue with teachers in this action, OFSTED consider that historical evaluation via public accountability in a competitive, consumer driven education market would be enough to drive improvement (Burns, 2000).

Any perception of OFSTED, in terms of external accountability, presents an imbalance against professional or moral accountability to parents, colleagues and children. Moreover, a danger of relying upon external inspection lies with contrasting philosophies between a school and the inspection team and the inspection



team's view of 'value added' – which may well have been a key feature of the Summerhill inspection. There appears to be an apparent need for a balance of accountabilities via a partnership between teachers and inspectors. This should be based in dialogue to facilitate OFSTED as a catalyst for change. Yet, is it possible for OFSTED teams to work more effectively for school improvement without sacrificing the fundamental accountability role of OFSTED? Recipients of inspection, to include head teachers feel that school improvement is not high enough on the OFSTED agenda and that sacrifices would have to be made (Ferguson et al 2000). Radical solutions such as replacing of inspection with self-evaluation or importing quality assurance/development from outside education would be unlikely to be well received.

The second cycle of inspections might provide clearer viewing of OFSTED's 'improvement through inspection' remit (first round of inspections completed by 1998) which has not yet proved measurable (Burns, 2000). Given these problems, some evaluation of the demonstrable impact of inspection would facilitate whether improvement is a possible consequence of inspection.

### **2.3.3 The Impact of OFSTED inspections**

Is improvement after inspection even possible? Schools, already under pressure, may encounter unforeseen difficulties and subsequently progress will be slow. Yet, those under special measures gain additional support and it is easier to make significant progress from post-inspection action plans (Ferguson et al, 2000). If it is accepted that Summerhill is unique as a democratic free school, to which there is no evidence of comparative schools, looking to case studies of schools subject to special measures following inspection may provide insights to inspection impact.

In 1998, the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) was commissioned by the National Union of Teachers (NUT) to undertake a research project on 'failing' schools. It was felt that although a substantial amount of research had been carried out on the conduct and effects of inspection, a comparatively small proportion of this research had been based on case studies of special measures schools (Scanlon, 1999). Overall findings of the research have been that headteachers are

consistently more positive about inspection, compared with teaching staff. Due to the predominance of what is termed as the 'cold-eyed, scientific approach' based on traditionalist middle class, male values, teachers' emotions have hardly figured in educational research. Since the Education Reform Act of 1988 government policy of market-oriented, managerialist, technical-rationalist change can be seen via OFSTED's aims and modes of procedure where inspectors make no allowances for emotional responses to either inspection or teaching and learning. Yet teaching is a strongly emotional business (Jeffrey and Woods, 1996). Equally, relationships between different groups change even before the inspection process began (Busher, 2001). Overall, they were more likely to have improved rather than deteriorated, though a sizeable minority have reported deterioration between staff and management. A failed inspection may cause divisions amongst the teaching staff themselves where some departments/teachers are seen to have passed whilst others failed.

NFER (1998) research also identified two areas seem to have improved most – Quality of education, Standards achieved by pupils. There was a statistically significant link between type of school and effects of inspection with primary and special schools more likely to report improvements in quality of education. Respondents were in favour of an inspection which would provide more than a snapshot of the school and that period of notice of inspection should be shorter to reduce anticipation eg 6 to 10 weeks. Most interviewees preferred the HMI system which offers advice and support whereas OFSTED offered surveillance without support. Self-evaluation should play a greater part in school improvement – there should be prevention rather than cure – schools should be offered support before rather than after inspection.

Teachers remain deeply suspicious of OFSTED's purpose and whilst Headteachers found inspection useful bringing staff together and providing a focus for building teams for middle managers. Heads of Department experienced the most stress. There was improvement in post-inspection sense of achievement where departments achieved a favourable outcome. Whilst by contrast, classroom teachers held generally negative antagonistic views and expressed fear of humiliation if they failed

and frustration at the lack of personalised feedback offering that OFSTED offered limited constructive impact for their school (Collins, 1996).

Five from six schools studied in Leicestershire recognised 'improvement' from OFSTED post-inspection action planning. Teaching staff suggested that (there had been) 'more changes in six months than in the previous ten years' as a result of LEA support and it was 'probably the only way that improvement could have happened so rapidly' resulted from adverse inspection. One school commented that 'The inspection report was totally justified and very accurate' 'a long overdue process' (Coulson, 1998). However, OFSTED inspection may prevent attention being paid to school improvement outside schools not found to be weak or failing (Ferguson et al, 2000).

A further six school study concluded that improvement in failing schools can happen following an adverse inspection as a result of subsequent help given by HMIs and LEAs - at a cost to staff health and self-esteem. Such definitions of success presented by OFSTED in 1998 included a turn around in teaching culture and style or behaviour problems (Wilson, 2001). To be removed from special measures or come out of serious weaknesses, the study suggested that the school has to produce two years of consecutive rising results in public examinations as part of the exit package (Wilson, 2001). Strong links between the staff development programme and whole school key issues made significant progress from removal. Yet lack of credit given by HMI to the progress made by the school itself based on its own starting point rather than the constant reference to a national picture suggesting that improvement is actually about moving to 'norms' rather than real improvement (Wilson, 2001). An additional school analysis of 1993/94 inspections with 1997/1998 inspections evidenced 'improvements' but noted that in the first round of inspections advice was not always provided by OFSTED as to how to sort problems. The full impact of changes is not easily evaluated although for one school it was apparent that the school had moved toward OFSTED's required vision (Sterne, 1999).

The conflict between external inspection's focus upon accountability and internal inspection leading to school initiated development is questioned since OFSTED claims to do both. OFSTED argue that a move from the quality control OFSTED

model towards quality assurance is best illustrated by the framework for re-inspection, where the school places greater emphasis on the school's ability to manage change (Brown, 1999). Case studies of three Leicestershire High Schools showed strong criticism by teaching staff that OFSTED judgements were based solely on readily available 'evidence' where institutions had to flaunt attributes of the school or inspection missed the breadth or diversity of the school. The case studies conclude that whilst inspection is part of the process of moving towards greater accountability, this would not bring about school improvement alone (Brown, 1999).

Such case studies indicate doubts of whether the inspection process leads to improvement. Lack of impact appears to relate to little time for feedback and that feedback provided no new insights. Whilst inspection fulfilled its purpose of providing an account to the public, since ownership of the process did not lie with staff, the second purpose of supporting improvement was more doubtful (Lumby, 2001). The link between self-assessment and inspection is critical. Where internal evaluation and quality systems are effective then inspection can provide an additional validation of that process providing a point of comparison on perceptions of the priorities for improvement and sometime additional insights into areas of development. The attitude of the staff is also important. Time spent assuring staff that the process is positive which could be approached with confidence and seen within the overall quality approach of the institution was likely to lead to inspection being less stressful and having greater impact on improvement (Lumby, 2001). If the state and the public have a right to an account, then the professional role of school, college and university leaders must be to utilise the process of providing an account through inspection in order for it to be as productive as possible for staff and learners (Lumby, 2001).

There is evidence in contradiction to the view that schools inspections have not brought about positive change in Hong Kong. There, in 1998 the majority of schools offered that the findings of QA inspection teams helped to affirm the schools' attainment and achievements and boost staff morale (Lumby 2001). Other systems of inspection may go some way to involve the school in identifying aims against which progress will be measured and incorporate some self-evaluation. Schools in South Australia are required to provide three year plans that include a shorter term one-year

action plan. It is the issues that are identified by the school within the plan that 'provide the focus for external inspection' (Coleman, 2000, p 17) The approach adopted by the European Council of international Schools means that the evaluation and accreditation process is based on self-study which is followed by a visit from a team of administrators and teachers from other schools to view the school on its own philosophy and objectives and seek ways to helpfully realise potentials. Equally, in terms of links with improvement and accountability that one of the implications of evaluation is that it would lead to change. Whatever the aims for improvement of a school, the improvement in quality must be measured and monitored as part of the overall management and planning processes of the institution. Evaluation is an essential part of management which is often neglected, underused or misused. The importance of ownership from evaluation findings calls into question the use of externally driven inspection (Coleman, 2000).

#### **2.3.4 Optional lessons – a Summerhill Fundamental**

A final aspect which might prove insightful, perhaps, would be to identify that an interim report on the relationship between the length of the taught week and the quality and standard of pupils' work (OFSTED, January 1994) offered that HMCI's Annual report, (November 1993) referred to an unacceptably wide variation in the amount of teaching time in primary and secondary schools. As a result, the Secretary of State for Education requested OFSTED to investigate the relationship between taught time and results of student work. Whilst cautioning that findings were provisional, and issues were complex, OFSTED (1994b) found that over 80% of schools had increased the length of taught week since 1989. The relationship between length of taught week and standards of achievement was weak. However, because of the shortness of taught week, some schools were not covering the National Curriculum. Moreover, 80% of schools reported that neither parents nor governors had been involved in decisions surrounding the length of the taught week or that time spent on non-teaching activities varied significantly within and between schools. There was little evidence of any audit of the efficiency to which time was used in lessons. The report offered that OFSTED should accumulate inspection evidence for this purpose to consider the relationship of taught time and 'adding value'. Possibly, this suggests an agenda underpinning any 'raising' of standards for Summerhill.

Summerhill's philosophy not to attend lessons falls counter to these concerns and possibly 'flew in the face' of OFSTED inspection teams reporting in this area.

In conclusion, it is clear that the initial inspection regime did not set out to inspect independent schools such as Summerhill. However, it was within this same inspection regime that the Summerhill appeal case arose and in its intention to 'raise standards', Summerhill was threatened with closure.

## 2.4 Summary of Literature

What are the arguments presented by this literature? The philosophy of Summerhill might be considered controversial but at best, 'out of sync' with School Effectiveness ideas of the 'Effective School'. Neill's opinions may have impact upon any potential inspection of Summerhill as his opinions potentially sub-consciously coloured the inspection team and presented a strong pre-condition for the school of inspection as a negative activity.

In viewing the School Effectiveness and Improvement Debate through the illustrated processes of OFSTED inspection, it might be concluded that the political forces of the UK government in the 1990s were heavily influenced by school effectiveness research. Rather than constructing an inspection process from any transformational educational paradigm, an inspection regime which aimed to rectify problems in the state sector brought with it a framework which judged the independent sector by 'same' thinking. Since the training and framework for the inspectors appeared to be driven by an agenda surrounding school effectiveness, it would appear that the OFSTED approach may have been constrained when viewing models of schooling outside the norms of effective schools or state provision (Slee 1998, Thrupp 1999, Fielding 1997).<sup>4</sup>

Further, it might be possible to consider that the 'messy complexity' (Jamieson and Wikely, 2001) of Summerhill were more difficult to tackle than school effectiveness models for behaviour. Whilst OFSTED recognise the problems of the framework in this area, a traditional-rational Taylorist 'one best way' model (Jamieson and Wikely, 2001) seems present in the guidance to inspectors. Yet, this appears to suggest that some of the philosophies espoused by Neill in terms of curriculum needs of young people might fall closer to raising standards for 21<sup>st</sup> century. School effectiveness models for inspection will not provide the government with the economic solutions that it seeks (Bottery, 2001) but may merely emasculate the teaching profession. However, this statement recognises that the aims of the government may in fact lie in central control rather than meeting the needs of the nation's human resource capital in economic terms.

Summerhill is acclaimed as unique. Existing case studies reviewing improvement through inspection do not consider this model and largely investigate the impact of inspection on state provision. Thus, absent of any consideration for the philosophical principles of educational freedom. Equally, whilst cases detailed provide illustration of and/or the modification of practices in the alignment with effective schools, they do not contain the insights of the impact upon pupils of a court appeal. The modernist inquiry approaches of OFSTED fail to sufficiently reflect the impact of inspection or whether inspection can even unwittingly, if not by design, effect school improvement. As such, a conclusion of the literature is that a case study of the Summerhill inspection may provide opportunity to gain such new insights.



## 3.0 Methodology

### 3.1 Research Aim of the Thesis

This chapter discusses the issues which were considered prior to developing the research design and methodology. This work investigates the impact of OFSTED's 1999 inspection upon Summerhill. Given the context, the methodology of this thesis, derived from the Literature Review, aims to establish the extent to which OFSTED's inspection of Summerhill School facilitated 'improvement by inspection'. By considering this, in terms of the methodological approach used by the OFSTED inspection team through the OFSTED inspection process, it investigates whether the inspection of Summerhill resulted in any contradiction of OFSTED claims to improvement. Further, it looks to identify the differences between the OFSTED inspection and an independent inquiry undertaken as part of the successful appeal against the OFSTED Notice of Closure. The thesis examines the impact that the OFSTED inspection upon Summerhill School made in terms of any subsequent change, (whether consciously or unconsciously effected).

In order to undertake this, this thesis asks key questions:

- *What was the government/OFSTED inspection criteria for inspecting independent schools?*
- *What was the OFSTED schema for improvement through inspection of individual schools?*
- *What were the findings of the OFSTED inspection at Summerhill?*
- *How was the inspection carried out by the OFSTED inspection team?*
- *What were the findings of the Independent Inquiry into the OFSTED inspection of Summerhill?*
- *How was the independent inquiry carried out? How did it differ from the OFSTED inspection?*
- *What was the immediate and subsequent impact of the inspection upon the organisation (Summerhill), its pupils and their families? Did this impact result in improvement in OFSTED terminology?*

### **3.2 Approach to research**

The research approach adopts a post-modernist stance to engage and gain insights into the impact of the inspection upon Summerhill via a case study. The reasoning behind this is that, it is offered, that the depth of inquiry and insight would be sacrificed if a modernist/interpretive, positivist or critical theory approach was used for the collection and analysis of data. Summerhill is an example, in many aspects, of a post-modern organisation. It is argued then that the validity of using other approaches lies with imperial validity. Other research approaches are more accepted as trustworthy (constructs of the truth). However, this work suggests that such constructs of validity are merely masks which hide the 'sameness' within philosophical arguments surrounding 'acceptable' research methods (Scheurich, 1997). By recognising the methodological arguments presented within this chapter, this work attempts to present material as closely to a post-modernist account as thesis constraints might allow. For the purpose of a thesis, it is recognised that there are limitations upon the approach. In particular, given the need for analysis, this chapter does not fully embrace raw post-modernism. That is, a need to reach closure and facilitate comparison with literature reviewed within the work does not allow data to be presented, absent of interpretation. In recognising a need to present readings, analysing the overall work in light of literature presented, a framework to allow the data collection to fall towards a post-modernist approach is adopted.

If the purpose of a thesis was to find simple value free, objective truths (answers or solutions to questions), this work recognises that a post-modernist stance presents a number of difficulties for analysis. Given the purpose of this work was to gain insight into the phenomena of inspection in a democratic, free school, this chapter argues that this not achievable by other methods. These decisions have been informed in the light of texts surrounding Summerhill appeal, the school's philosophy and by the review of school improvement and effectiveness educational research within the Literature Review. This section offers that a post-modernist case study may provide fuller insight into the Summerhill case, than might be gained by a modernist review of what

took place using ethnographic, qualitative constructs for comparison by recognising the weaknesses, in particular, of school effectiveness' generalisations (Fidler, 2001). However, it is equally recognised that for the purposes of this work, imperial validity of the research is gained by placing boundaries - specifically a boundary between that material which is acceptable (from a post-modern perspective) and that which is considered raw and unacceptable within the data gathered and its subsequent presentation (Scheurich, 1997). However, in accepting a postmodern stance for data collection, this work accepts also that it may be (mis)read and be (mis)appropriated by each reader (Scheurich, 1997). By providing a framework of literature and methodological debate, possible (mis)readings of the presented material are offered merely to facilitate the analysis of the research as a thesis. To allow reader appreciation for the arguments of this approach - and the reasons for not using other approaches within this study - there is a need to consider the surrounding philosophical arguments of each tradition:

### **3.2.1 Analysis**

#### **a) Positivist**

Advantage – validity, rigour - reference

The value of educational research is its ability to provide dependable solutions. Positivism is often the philosophy illustrated by those defending other approaches (Scheurich, 1997). Positivism is the argument of theoretical dominance of one best way of presenting research. The Positivist approach to collating empirical pre-inspection statistics may seem easily defended in terms of the 'thoroughness' (Thomas, 1998) since the perspective provides a framework of clear rules from which all investigations can be logically judged. Investigations which do not conform to its 'logic' can be rejected as lacking rigour as positivism lies with the need to assure validity of any investigation.

In research 'law' the term validity asserts that any research investigation must ensure that the approach adopted by the researcher is a valid test of the problem which it sets out to investigate. The limits of the positivist approach in understanding the human

world in action lie with rationalisation. Positivism is founded on the assumption that 'the world is a single system which can be described and explained by rational methods' (Thomas, 1998). Interpretative approaches are equally flawed if a formulaic model is followed in the research inquiry.

By asking the question as to whether sociology is a science prefaces the positivist perspective (Giddens, 1990). Positivism requires 'scientific' research to conform to systematic methods of investigation and a logical assessment of arguments to invalidate hypothesis or theory (Giddens, 1990). The study of humans may demand a framework, which will produce meaningful investigations, which are not possible through a positivist stance. Interpretive approaches are undermined through criticism from Positivists that they lack objectivity. Yet Positivist thinking might be challenged given that the quantitative research process overstates the centrality of theory (Robertson, 1999). Research is rarely as linear and orderly as positivist quantitative methods suggest. It is the absence or omission of data, through rejection on the grounds of relevance or validity that this undermines the value of the findings and further observation and interpretation cannot be separated (Robertson, 1999). Summerhill, unique, may be statistically discarded as 'outlier' data, yet its value to any sample may be to facilitate enquiry not possible had other (quantitative) methods been applied.

By its inherent nature, development of empirical data in educational research is problematic. Post-modern educational realists (who have rejected empiricism) find the absence of a framework upon which to build understanding (Garratt, 1998). If the researcher has been already exposed to 'relevant literature', or through the discovery of a 'dramatic metaphor', serendipity might offer insight (and an origination of ideas) since any 'regime of truth' sought lies within society's general politics of 'truth'. Yet, that is solely dependant upon the mechanisms within human society which distinguish true and false statements (Garratt, 1998). This suggests that even the outcome of examination of raw data, or observations, may rely upon an empiricist or positivist view. If such reasoning is accepted, the political nature of the results of data gained in the positivist vein provides a clear foundation for defence of post-modernist approach to this work.

## **b) Interpretive**

(Positivist) reporting practices lead inadvertently to concealing 'the real inner drama'. Being overly concerned by inductivist procedures eludes researchers of any 'true discovery' (Robson, 1993). By contrast to deterministic, positivist approaches (cause and effect), the interpretative approach lies with voluntarism (Busher, 1998). Generic the term 'normative' suggests that human behaviour is essentially rule-governed and should be investigated by the methods of natural science (Cohen and Manion, 1994). Or, interpretive, which characterises the individual and tends to be anti-positivist. Central to interpretive paradigm is the need to understand the subjective human world. If the positivist viewpoint is rejected given the detached, objective observer is 'fraudulent', or lying within abstract - the problems associated with interpretive perspectives of naturalist enquiry throw up equally as many difficulties in attaining a 'true' view of social reality. Whilst positivism is based upon empirical scrutiny, qualitative inquiry is largely regarded as an 'exploratory' approach. The central tenet of the qualitative is to keep an open mind so that the research may evolve. The main criticisms of qualitative approaches are that they are impressionistic and unverifiable. As a result, concerns always lie with the rigour of the qualitative thread. If a researcher adopts triangulation, the results may be considered more dependable. Triangulation may equally, however, provide the reverse result to its intended outcome (Allan, 1991).

Debate of the relevance of the qualitative strand (versus a positivist or quantitative approach) may be of little value since the distinctions between the approaches are possibly invented for academic debate. Whether data is valid depends on how it is perceived (Allan, 1991). While widely different kinds of validity have been delineated across a growing array of research paradigms, the central point is that, despite ostensible difference, the myriad kinds of validity conceal a profound sameness and would appear to be like each other with different masks to conceal any singularity of purpose or function (Scheurich, 1997).

The validity of research data means a test holds valid if it measures what it is supposed to test. If there is no validity then no truth but this assumes that value-free, objective truth can be established. This is fraught with problems insofar as truth is a social construction. Successor validity, in opposition to conventional notions, recognises that social construction may change with time and is no longer related to establishing historical truth. Validity may be likened to trustworthiness, whether the reader feels comfortable trusting the methods. Therefore, there is a need for a boundary line as a judgement of what is acceptable social construction. Imperial validity provides a 'truth' map, which separates two sides of truth from not true and establishes a territory. In essence, by determining what data/research method is valid, the raw and untamed versus accepted is determined (Scheurich, 1997). By contrast, although Interrogated validity might have a post modernist 'feel', this stance falls in line with the defences of triangulating research. The interrogation proceeds from multiple viewpoints and arrives at ten statements, which characteristics point in one direction – discourses of construct validity. Yet, the overall function of validity is that it serves a power function of a boundary line or policing practice. Without a boundary there would be no way to prevent acceptance of poor quality or untrustworthy work (Scheurich, 1997). As such, the error of the interpretive then is that it is limited by its boundaries. A further paradigm, Critical Theory seeks to address such misgivings.

### **c) Critical Theory**

Critical theory challenges both the positivist and interpretive paradigms by detecting and unmasking the beliefs and practices that limit these approaches (Usher and Edwards, 1994). Empirical positivism is linked with prediction and control, interpretive with enlightenment, yet both maintain a status quo. Critical Theory rejects the assumption that there can be neutral, objective knowledge. The Critical theory tradition starts with a precept of having the 'right arguments' and being prepared to subject them to scrutiny through critical dialogue. That dialogue must be free and unconstrained (which is not the case for Interpretive enquiry) otherwise, it is only a condition of enslaved action (Usher and Edwards, 1994). Yet, in itself, Critical Theory and its approach may be oppressive in its 'self-proclaimed commitment to an emancipatory project posited as a universal value' (Usher and Edwards, 1994, p25).

Whilst research of the critical theory tradition can be subjected to scrutiny (as to whether the dialogue is meaningful, true, sincere and justified by what is said) rather than produce undistorted research, it is still subject to a conception of what is 'truth'. Postmodernist thinking challenges Critical Theory by suggesting that it fails to be reflexive. Whilst Critical Theory is possibly closer to post-modernism, in that positivist and interpretive stances seek 'reasoned' accounts of the world, Critical Theory is not free since it also attempts to reconstruct social reality (Usher, 1994).

### **3.2.2 Thesis Framework - A Post-modernist Model?**

'Postmodernism' is not a term which designates a systematic theory or comprehensive philosophy and is a contested terrain - a loose umbrella term which encompasses a different position from the traditional (Usher and Edwards, 1994). The 'message' of postmodernism is that knowledge cannot be systemised or totalised into a singular all encompassing framework. It is a tolerance of plurality and difference rather than a construction through 'modern practices of education'. Post-modernity lies with the fragmented, changing commercial world from the 1970s (Usher and Edwards, 1994). Increasing complexity or turbulence led to recognition of the limitations of modernist traditions in understanding these. For Summerhill - though 80 years old - as a 'post modern' model 'modern practices of education' are limited in their ability to embrace it. A post modernist stance of inquiry may tolerate differences in the Summerhill educational provision and any plurality of issues surrounding its inspection. The limitations of modernist inquiry can be illustrated by considering modernist ideas surrounding possible achievement of objectivity. Feminist argument presents that claims to objectivity are mere disguises for male subjectivity since feminists argue that all knowledge is subjective (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989). The postmodernist perspective is also cynical of interpretist 'objectivity' and attempts to deconstruct research traditions and recognise any new social totality, which is frequently disorganised (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989). By recognising this, the case study design considers OFSTED's claims for systematic, objective judgements based in empirical research. OFSTED's claimed purpose as to measure the exact levels of performance against set criteria (Clegg and Billington 1999, Cullingford, 1999), which may lie with an attempt to impose educational 'norms'. Replicating an

interpretive approach to this research design would merely reinforce flaws of OFSTED's research approach that the debate surrounding claims for objectivity presents .

In explanation, it may be useful to explore the arguments surrounding modernism. Late modernism is characterised by a rejection of the notion that the cultural form should realistically represent what it portrays that emphasis should lie with a 'problem-solving' approach – a process of 'hyper-rationalisation' (Usher and Edwards 1994, p 14). Modernism seeks to establish a representation relationship, whereas post-modernism questions this notion of representation. It questions the concept that reality is constructed by representations to which there is a political cultural representation affected by power and domination. Modernism, which lies within a historical development founded within industrial capitalism, relies upon constructs of a social totality. Postmodernity, does not fit easily within educational theory since educational practice is founded within the modernist 'Enlightenment' tradition (Usher and Edwards 1994). Where Modernism lies with a representation of reality, it may be considered that this merely results in an imposition of cultural authority rather than any 'innocent' presentation (Stronach and MacLure, 1997). Rather than allowing educational research to inform educational policy, it surrenders itself to populist educational rhetoric. There is a need for 'departure' in order to question assumptions, which the educational field accepts as self-evident. The educational field is modernist, founded upon social science and a practical activity claiming a common sense 'true' picture based in psychology (Usher and Edwards, 1994) offering a centrality against which the regulations may be maintained.

The argument and language of postmodernism seems esoteric. The reflexivity that postmodernism may offer this work, provides methodological advantage by 'rescuing' findings from any 'false' consciousness (Stronach and MacLure, 1997). Post-modernism raises concerns to its critics since it presents 'issues' such as its boundaries and its plural nature. This work - in its argument for postmodernity includes poststructuralism or deconstruction but hastens to clarify that these terms are not the same (Stronach and MacLure, 1997). Post-modernism differs from post-structuralism insofar as post-modernism is multi-paradigmatic and suggests there is



no criteria which are appropriate for the study of the social world. Post-structuralism is uni-paradigmatic by its presenting that new criteria should be developed, which are appropriate for all forms of research. This identifies a tension (Scott, 1996), a 'crisis of legitimation', by recognising that it is no longer readily accepted that there is no one way of knowing the world (Usher, 1996). Postmodernity expresses this in ways of knowing and emphasises the need to be reflexive. It challenges observation as value-neutral and atheoretical, experience as a 'given', univocal language as possible, data as independent of its interpretation and that there might be universal conditions of knowledge and criteria for deciding between theories. It seeks to radically challenge and subvert the dichotomy of positivist or interpretive traditions.

By not approaching educational practice from a modernist 'frame of interpretation' presents problems in that there may be no assumption of 'solving' educational problems. Post-modernist deconstruction may not provide 'truth' but facilitate ways of looking at things differently (Usher and Edwards, 1994). This presents 'problems' by a lack of beginning and ending. Post-modernity suggests that education does not begin or end within the school. Education is endless. The goal of education cannot be reached in schooling. In terms of judging educational provision then such debate presents potential difficulties for ascertaining educational attainment (Usher and Edwards, 1994). A reader might be forgiven for recognising that this statement marries well with the view of Neill presented in the Literature Review, his interest in a student's life (rather than exams). This work looks to consider the research questions by embracing the plurality of postmodernist research (in challenge to any assumptions that underlie other research approaches eg interpretist, positivist, critical theory (Scott and Usher, 1996)). It seeks to build images within a case study format. From which the effects of the OFSTED inspection, and how it was carried out, might be conveyed to facilitate democratic interpretation by readers.

It is recognised that the research questions attempt to reveal whether any improvement or change took place at Summerhill as a direct result or impact of the OFSTED inspection. A post-modern approach presents difficulty in making such comparison insofar as the post-modern approach, adopted in recognition of the complexity and dynamics of the case, argues judgement is not appropriate. However, this inquiry is based within a thesis, it is recognised that there will be a need to

consider research questions in light of the evidence collated and offer some analysis with regards to the material collated within the primary data. How might this be attempted then? The following consideration of case study explores its value in researching the Summerhill case.

### **3.2.2 Research Design - A Post-modernist Case Study**

#### **Research Instruments**

Using case study with a post-modernist stance for data collection has been opened (rather than constructed) and in light of research methodology texts (Anderson and Arsenault, 1998; Bell, 1993; Burgess, 1985; Cohen and Manion, 1994; Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1996; Johnson, 1994; Moser and Kalton, 1979; Robson, 1993; Scheurich, 1997, Verma and Mallick, 1999, Yin 1994) the arguments for the inappropriate nature of other approaches are discussed further.

Initially the reasoning for adopting case study lies with the contention that case study 'facilitates depth within a limited time scale' (Bell, 1993) and quintessentially is research in depth rather than in breadth (Velma and Mallick, 1999). Like post modernity, case study 'is an umbrella term' for a whole range of research techniques (Velma and Mallick, 1999 p114). Case study is primarily concerned with the interactions between various events and situations allowing concentration on the interactive processes (Bell, 1993). The distinguishing characteristic of case study is that it treats each unit (group, institution etc) separately but attempts to retain a unitary nature to emphasise the relationship between various attributes (Moser and Kalton, 1979). This is achieved by 'writing up' in a non-quantified form. By emphasising the importance of theory at the design phase (as it may be essential for latter theory development) analytical generalisations may be facilitated, regardless of the purpose of the case study (Yin, 1994 p27). However, traditional researchers criticise case study submitting that it 'lacks rigour' (Yin, 1994, p9). This is only because it does not incorporate statistics or readily permit generalisation. Triangulation may be utilised to interpret findings, test ideas and gain conclusions based upon the evidence from the case study (Anderson and Arsenault, 1998). Triangulated research may be considered more dependable since concerns always lie with the rigour of the qualitative thread. Employing triangulation cannot satisfy

criticism (Rose 1991) as identified earlier as flaws of interpretism (Scheurich, 1997). Given the unique nature of a case, an evidence audit trail provides the defence for the internal validity of a case study and external validity is not appropriate.

The research aims of this work – to gain insights into the differences between the OFSTED inspection and the independent inspection in terms of purposes, context/constraints, process (what counts as evidence), intention and philosophy; and further, the impact of the inspection upon the organisation, pupils and their families; portrays that this work is seeking a depth primarily concerned with interactions. Analysis through survey and statistical scrutiny would not facilitate this. Ethnography, qualitative research and case study are referred to by research authors as if they were interchangeable. Yet, these are differing approaches. Ethnographic study being unlike case study in that ethnographic study is a holistic approach to direct observation, often based within a hypothesis (Verma and Mallick, 1999). As a result, an ethnographic or qualitative investigation would not provide the depth of insights this study hopes to gain. The work therefore has significant attributes associated with case study investigations.

Central to this work is that the reader may make personal judgements of the material, rather than be presented with a subjective ‘truth’ as to what took place, because there is no explicit hypothesis. Since Education is a process, there is an inherent need for flexibility and adaptability within case study design used for educational research (Verma and Mallick, 1999). If case study was undertaken systematically, the interactive processes it reveals can be generalized (Verma and Mallick, 1999). This work does not seek to generalise for future educational practice nor comparability. Its purpose solely is to gain greater insight into dynamics and impact of Summerhill OFSTED inspection, which is unique insofar as it is the inspection of a ‘free school’, for which Summerhill claim uniqueness of practice.

There is ‘no book of rules’ for case study, it is dependent upon the individual phenomenon investigated. One view is it is important to relate the case study to existing theory since the rounded picture is not sufficient in itself (Johnson, 1994). Whilst existing theory is available surrounding school improvement and inspection, it should be clarified that this is the first OFSTED inspection of a unique establishment

and as such, existing theory may limit the investigation. Case studies can be approached in a variety of ways from loose and unstructured to tight and heavily pre-structured, dependant upon whether you wish to undertake an exploratory study (with little to base the conceptual framework around) or a confirmatory study (where prior work allows the adoption of well-defined conceptual structure) (Robson, 1993). A loose and unstructured case study would facilitate an exploratory study in line with the research aims of this work. Holistic case studies are only possible if the critical case is clear (which is rare) or an extreme case where the case is unique and offers ideal circumstances (Robson 1993). In the case of Summerhill, the critical case is unclear insofar no previous study has sought to investigate the component factors which both contributed to the outcome of an inspection of a democratic school and any subsequent impact upon the school community.

The use of case study within this research design underlies an epistemological, philosophical stance. It recognises the ‘problems’ of research methodology which lie within a unitary, modernist view of social totality as meeting only the anxieties of methodological critics in terms of demands for research validity. Developing a modernist construct for purposes of comparison, generalisation or validity would be to meet the needs of such critics rather than recognise the purpose of the research. It might be suggested that multiple case studies may be needed (as for multiple experiments where statistical generalisation is possible), since it may facilitate analytical generalisation from findings. However, this may lead to oversimplification since case studies are multi-faceted and it is difficult to capture a simple theory (Robson, 1993). Piloting a case study does allow the investigator to refine their research (in relation to a theoretical model) and in particular the research instruments (Robson, 1993). Whilst pilot case study is a useful approach at the beginning of a study allowing the researcher to identify a clear position of what research methodology fits best in meeting the needs of the research question, it is essential to identify that the purpose of this work is largely exploratory. It does not intend to take a pre-constructed view of the findings or interpret them from a pre-constructed school of thought. Therefore, it is intended that there should be an absence of conceptual model against which this research is to be compared. As such, piloting the research instruments would be equally inappropriate since this produces a judgement as to a refined approach resulting from a constructed model (Robson, 1993). (This

underpinning philosophy is further explained in the debate surrounding a post-modern approach.) Whilst data will be collected from differing cohorts affected by the inspection ie parents, pupils, staff; the sample to be used the case is largely constrained by problems of access (discussed later).

Case study as a holistic research method uses multiple sources to analyse or evaluate a specific contemporary phenomenon, and with an emphasis on understanding, strives for the same degree of reliability and validity as any 'good' research (Anderson and Arsenault, 1998). The real difficulty of case study lies with the defining of the case and its focus since case study is often confused with historical research or evaluation research. However, the greatest problems may lie with the volume of data for a case study and often what is considered to be a scant theoretical underpinning (Anderson and Arsenault 1998). This work argues that the anxieties of the inadequacy of 'a scant theoretical underpinning' in fact lie with the school of thought within which the research is viewed. By addressing (previously) the positivist and interpretive thinking surrounding research, it is recognised that this aspect might appear critical in undermining the value of this research. However, in presenting a post-modern case for this work, it is argued that such concern lies firstly with methodological purism (Hammersley, 1998) and secondly, political constructs of views of the world or truth (Scott and Usher, 1996). Both of which, the argument for a post-modernist approach offers as being flawed research arguments that deny the problems beset for positivist, interpretive or critical theory stances surrounding the validity of research.

It might also be considered that case study should be applied when the boundaries between context and phenomena are not clearly evident but common sense perceived boundaries to case studies are not 'ring fences' (Johnson, 1994). As the case study progresses, the boundaries will appear increasingly permeable and that the case study will hold a property of 'relatability' (Johnson, 1994).

Defining case study in any formal sense is unsatisfactory since it results in closure rather than a recognition of the potential variety and diversity of the approach. Case study can be a longitudinal study or a snapshot. The sole propensity of using multiple methods is towards multiple triangulation to address problems of validity and bias (Rose, 1991). Rather than paradigmatic methodological principles, the conduct of

case study in a self-critical manner is essential – a reflexive approach (Rose, 1991). There is some antipathy towards statistical-experimental paradigms, which resulted in wide use of case study (Cohen and Manion, 1994). Since case studies recognise the complexity of the case in its own right and ‘embeddedness’ of social ‘truths’, case study data is ‘strong in reality’ but it is difficult to organise. Other research data is often ‘weak in reality’. Case studies begin in a world of action and may contribute to a ‘democratisation’ of knowledge since they may serve many audiences and allow readers to judge the implications of studies. It is this ‘democraticisation’ of knowledge that this work seeks to achieve through post-modern inquiry attempting to address the complexity of ‘reality’ (Cohen and Manion, 1994). Scientific sampling and statistical inference simply fail to recognise adequately the complexity, richness and subtlety of the world examined (Rose, 1991).

#### **3.2.4 Research Techniques**

Rather than providing only comparison against pre-constructed models for school improvement, effectiveness or prior inspection visits of Summerhill, this work sets out to explore the dynamics of the inspection process upon Summerhill. Whilst concepts will be contained within the debate, rather than examine the inspection process in isolation of its effect, the intention is to gain fuller insight of the impact upon the institution of the inspection process. Therefore, it is useful, at this point, to consider the instruments that the proposed Case Study will use and essentially, why it does not intend to embrace other data collection methods:

##### **1) Survey Method:**

Surveys elicit information from identified population samples from which generalisations can be identified or trends established. They may document and interpret past or present attitudes or behaviour using a standard instrument (Snelling, 2002).

In general, two methods constitute survey data:

i) **Questionnaires - strengths and weakness**

Questionnaires can offer a relatively simple and straightforward approach to the study of attitudes, values, beliefs and motives which may be easily adapted to collect information from any human population. They are often the easiest way to retrieve information about past history from a set of people and facilitate anonymity, encourage frankness when sensitive areas are involved and may be efficient as low cost providers of data in a short period of time. Yet, the data may be biased or superficial insofar as respondents may not accurately report their beliefs or attitudes (Robson, 1993). It may be unclear whether the sample is representative of the views of the wider population. There may be ambiguities and misunderstandings and the level of commitment to the correctness of answers may not be detectable and typically there is a low response rate to questionnaire surveys. Open-ended questions demand time in analysis whereas potentially, non-directive interviews may offer greater opportunity to analyse emergent views or feelings.

At the time of the appeal case, questionnaires were provided to Summerhill students but the purpose of such survey was in appeal to the inspection and its approach was possibly biased to that outcome. However, whilst it may have provided a source of comparability to apply the survey again, recognition of potential bias coupled with difficulties of response for this work was contemplated. Questionnaire survey may have offered some indications to the impact upon Summerhill but would be limited both in its pre-construction around existing theory and limitations to depth. As a result, would be unlikely to fulfil the objectives of this project. Given the post-modernist stance that this work intended to pursue, the general need to construct a questionnaire around pre-constructed theory (to produce a trend analysis) suggests a potential for superficial responses to a questionnaire, as already stated. This would lead to an inability of questionnaire survey to provide the required exploratory approach (through unwitting testimony of the Summerhill case) intended by this study. Moreover, that its use may lie solely with an anxiety to triangulate by

attaining trends and for 'methodological purity'(Hammersley, 1998). As a result, questionnaire was discarded in favour of non-directive interviews to facilitate emergent views or feelings of the Summerhill case and rather than analysing interview responses with regards to a pre-constructed model.

## **ii) Interviews - strengths and weakness**

Interviews can clarify questions for respondents and that the presence of the interviewer encourages participation and involvement (interviewer can judge whether respondent is treating the characteristics of the interviewers). Yet through verbal or non-verbal cues and the interactions of the interviewer and respondent, interviewers may bias results by influencing interviewee responses. Unlike questionnaires, respondents may feel their answers are not anonymous and be less open (Robson, 1993).

A focussed interview can investigate a particular phenomenon facilitating a situational analysis of the important aspects and relate meaning to those involved and the effects that they have. Non-directive interviews (where the direction of the interview is totally in the control of the informant) allow respondent's views and feelings to emerge. Equally, non-directive interviews may lessen the bias of the interviewer in terms of the direction of the questions posed. However, interviews are strong on content but weak on reliability or trustworthiness from interpretation (Robson, 1993).

## **2) Documentary analysis - strengths and weakness**

Generally, the strength of documentary analysis is that it is a low cost, unobtrusive, non-reactive method and permanent form of collecting data. However, documents are generally not structured for the needs of the analyst observer. Documents contain both witting evidence that the author intended to impart and unwitting evidence, which might be gleaned from scrutiny of the document (Robson, 1993). A further strength is its supplementary use with multi-method study. Documentary analysis can provide longitudinal dimensions to a case study or facilitate triangulation and enables enquiry into past events, where there is no access to contemporary participants. Documents produced by governments such as OFSTED inspection reports often



present researchers with the largest pool of documents available and are low cost. They may bring together previously unrelated material or material not previously in circulation (Snelling, 2002). They may be representative of the 'official view' of teaching or other policy documents produced by schools or Local Education policies at the time which the study focuses around (Coleman, 1999).

Weakness of this approach lies with the authenticity and credibility of documents, the representative nature or why documents were written. The documents may be biased or distorted. The intention of documentary analysis identified within this work is not for the purpose of triangulation through multi-method study. It provides supplementary evidence, which may inform data collection from the remaining sources during the period studied, which may not be gained from interviewee memory or current observations. Access is limited. The OFSTED reports, publications and handbooks supplemented by the independent inquiry report allow scrutiny for interpretive content analysis which may not be available through other sources (CLMS, 2002) in terms of lack of access to OFSTED inspectors (see Ethics section).

### **3) Naturalistic observation** (produced to provide inner depth and background to material presented visits to Summerhill) – **strengths and weaknesses**

A clear strength is directness and versatility, the ability to collect data in natural settings (which facilitate the contextual background of behaviour). Frantfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1996), state simply that

'social science research is rooted in observation' (p 206), 'the archetypical method of scientific research'. If you want to understand, explain, and predict what exists, you can simply go and observe it'(p 220).

Observations are not an easy option since observation only reveals what observers perceive to have taken place. This is a weakness (Bell, 1993). Observers have their own focus and interpret events in their own way. Interpretation may be wholly dependent upon the purpose of the observation (ie to formulate hypothesis, the direction that the attention is focused). Researchers cannot record 'everything'. The selective nature of recording contributes bias (Bell, 1993). Croll (1986) suggests that all observations are 'abstracts from the totality' of the social world - all observers

make selections or assumptions. All observation is 'theory-laden', whatever methodology is employed.

Participant observation allows the investigator to attain some close attachment to those studied (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1996). A disadvantage of observation is the presence of observer affecting the behaviour that is occurring (EDMU, 2000). As a result, this work intends to undertake naturalistic observation from a covert position. Whilst this creates ethical dilemma (see ethics section – particularly in light of Croll's (1986) view above), the work attempts to recognise a criticism raised in the Summerhill appeal subsequent to OFSTED inspection that inspectors were 'mis-led' by pupils who did not 'enjoy' observation and 'acted' for the inspectors – a Pygmalion effect. A strength in Summerhill studies would be that Summerhill are well-documented for their philosophies of privacy and history of observation scrutiny.

To gain approval to undertake both observation and interviews may not be possible. To select only one method may limit the potential data available to a case study. In an attempt to reduce this potential and embrace exploratory post-modernist approach rather than theory testing or construction, the use of covert observation in this work is to supplement non-directed interviews. The observation schedule will be to undertake covert observations of Summerhill staff and pupils within their daily activities during Visitor Days or when visiting to undertake interview-based research surrounding the research questions. By undertaking unstructured observation, it is intended to record behaviour as it occurs (see data analysis strategy ethics re accuracy and bias), to pick up features that the interview process would miss and to record the behaviour of Summerhillians who do not wish to describe it (EDMU, 2000).

This work recognises that this is time-consuming and unpredictable. There is an element of events not accessible to observation which may affect the validity or accuracy of this observation activity. The data will be rich but its single-handed nature may be challenged both in terms of the length of observed periods to discrimination of 'dross' from valuable data. This is proposed in the spirit of post-modernism to facilitate an exploratory approach that structured, constructivist observations would

not facilitate but issues surrounding its analysis are considered further within the data analysis strategy (and findings within Chapter 5).

### **3.3 Data Analysis Strategy**

#### **3.3.1 Interview schedule design**

Data for this work was collected by interviewing staff, students and parents from a post-modern perspective recording the personal impact upon them of the OFSTED visit. Interviewing was limited to the constraints of access. Whilst interviews were collected from staff, parents, past students and current students attempting a representative sample, a convenience sample was used based solely upon those who were available to contribute. It is recognised that this limitation presents bias to any interpretation of the data. However, by collecting the data from a post-modernist stance, absent of pre-constructed structure, the data is rich to counter-balance some of the limitations of the sample set. Equally, adopting case study provides a diverse tool to gain insights. Experimental, quantitative methods would not represent the complexity of the relationships or interactions observed (Wragg, 1999).

Naturalist Observation – Observation was to be undertaken of the activities of Summerhill on Visitor Days in an attempt to consider the nature of observations which may have been undertaken by both the OFSTED inspection team and the independent inquiry. Recognising potential problems which might be associated with the framework constraints of the OFSTED observation, and that the purpose of observations of the independent inquiry, naturalist, free observation based from the postmodern tradition was to planned by the author to gain further insight to the nature of Summerhill. This might inform the case study, and latter analysis of findings, in terms of the judgements of the OFSTED inspection team. The potential concern for bias and validity of the data collection is recognised but Naturalist Observation was included to facilitate fuller analysis of the emerging case study (and is further considered within the ethical argument).

### **3.3.2 Use of Documentary Evidence**

Documentary sources are considered to build the case study of the Summerhill/OFSTED inspection as incorporating the ‘unwitting testimony’ to historical views regarding the values and attitudes surrounding the OFSTED inspection (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989). Where possible, insights into the research questions (What were the findings of the OFSTED inspection at Summerhill? How was the inspection carried out by the OFSTED inspection team? What were the findings of the Independent Inquiry into the inspection of Summerhill? What was the impact of the inspection upon the organisation (Summerhill), its pupils and their families? How was the independent inquiry carried out? What was the government’s/OFSTED’s inspection criteria for independent schools?) can be considered by review the following documents - the OFSTED report, the independent inquiry report, questions posed to the House of Lords subsequent to the inspection and a statement of intent, drafted subsequent to the March 2000 tribunal held by the Independent School Inspectorate as a result of Summerhill’s appeal to the Notice of Complaint.

### **3.4 Reliability and Validity**

In a broad sense, validity means the data and methods are right insofar as the data reflects the ‘truth’, reflects reality and covers crucial matters. Validity hinges around whether the data and the methods for obtaining the data are accurate, honest and on target (Denscombe, 2003). Many of the issues of validity of the research design lie with ‘methodological purism’ (Hammersley, 1998). Quantitative methodological literature often treats reliability and validity as the same by fragmenting this into face validity, content validity, construct validity or predictive validity. By failing to distinguish between theoretical inference and empirical generalisation, distinctions between internal and external validity become misrepresentations (Hammersley, 1998). ‘Accepted wisdom’ surrounding qualitative research is confused due to anxiety of methodological purists. Since general agreement between differing schools about validity is impossible, there is a need to temper research ideals with practical realism (although standards should not be sacrificed for expediency) (Hammersley, 1998). ‘Externalism’ may be criticised as ‘commonsensical plausibility’ (Hughes 1990, p

154). Yet, any 'internalistic' position - that empirical inquiry can be viewed independent of the world (within which the participants of the observation reside) - is absurd since the epistemological basis of research is philosophical (despite the priority of the research being placed with problems within social science). The engagement of postmodernism is argued for this work that its intent of viewing Summerhill – an essentially post modern institution – and to gain 'honest' data by 'freeing' it from constructs. Moreover, this attempts to assure that the research instrument will assure reliability insofar as any variation in data collated will come from changes in the views of the interviewed rather than fluctuations of the research instrument (Denscombe, 2003).

### **3.5 Ethical Issues**

Whilst this work sets out simply to inform, in order to fulfil ethical considerations, at the commencement of this work, the Statement of Ethical Principles and Their Application to Sociological Practice determined by the British Sociological Association 1973 is considered in light of the methodological proposals made:

Access to Summerhill staff was sought through the approval of the Head Teacher and then by the consent of those taking part. The respondents to interviews were informed of the aims, objectives of the work, treated as fairly and with respect as possible and material collated in the spirit of voluntarism. Generally, this work is not sponsored and whilst part of a Doctoral programme of study, it remains the sole ownership of the author and no other rights exist with regards to the finished research. The pupils interviewed are former and current Summerhill pupils, who were pupils at the time of the inspection but at time of this research, some are post-18. It is considered that they will be free to give informed consent to the research (Robson, 1993). The identities of respondents of non-directed interviews remain anonymous, being identified only as a member of Summerhill Staff, a pupil or a parent.

Ethically, this research presents some dilemma insofar as there are constraints to access through the agreed contact to Summerhill staff. As stated, covert naturalistic observation was intended to supplement interview data from of Summerhill. Interview subjects have been given the right to refuse to take part, yet it is recognised

that some of the covert observation may result in reflections which the observed may not have given full consent to. As a result, when seeking access, a copy of this proposal was not imparted (Cohen and Manion, 1991). It is recognised that covert observation provides particular ethical concern as it does represent 'half-informed consent' by subjects with whom confidence and trust is obtained but it is argued that the respondents will be advised that the intention of the research is to inform and to be exploratory, subjects will be treated sensitively rather than present 'a one-sided' view and it is in this spirit that covert undertaking is made (Allan and Skinner, 1991).

The cost-benefit ratio presented is that the likely social benefits against the personal costs to subjects of covert observation is that not undertaking the covert observation may undermine the potential contribution to this work in achieving its aim and objectives. However, the potential cost to participants is intended to be reduced by clarifying the intention of this exploratory work and general respect for anonymity and confidentiality. Further, covert study will reduce disruption to subjects during the period of study (Cohen and Manion, 1994).

If any part of this work is to be published in the future it will be undertaken only with the prior consent of all parties interviewed/observed. It is judged that any 'deception' undertaken will be justified by the research value of the final report. This work recognises that Rosenthal's (1968) 'Pygmalion effect' potentially may impact upon observations and therefore, an intention of covert observations is to minimise the impact of researcher presence, their values or expectations being projected to subjects observed or the 'taking of sides'. It was considered whether alternative methods might be employed but the potential level of feelings expressed in texts surrounding Summerhill and prior studies, and further the nature of inspection (coupled with this Pygmalion effect), led to the conclusion that covert observations were the most appropriate instrument. Yet, it must be recognised as 'problematic' in terms of methodological ('purist') criticism surrounding validity and reliability (Hammersley, 1998).

In terms of wider ethical matters, the work takes a Relativist position - as opposed to an Absolutist position - to adopt the approach that clear, set principles would determine the work and constrain its exploratory nature (Cohen and Manion, 1991).

The inability to gain official permission for and to gain access to OFSTED inspectors taking part in the inspection is recognised as a bias to the research findings. The researcher is within full-time employment and this investigation is time constrained. It is recognised these limitations will impact upon the depth of enquiry of the case study and the final 'pictures' presented as a result.

The bias of research is recognised as a complex debate as to the 'objective nature' of research and freedom from bias (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989). This work recognises that the values of the researcher always contaminates testimony even where the conscience of the researcher is used to confer significance to events. Denzin (1970) argues that the political and social environment within which research is conducted inhibits any claim to objectivity – or value freedom. It is argued that positivist, interpretative, critical theory approaches provide no further guarantee for neutrality – moreover the feminist view is that objectivity is a masculine perception of knowledge. This work adopts Denzin's (1970) enlightenment argument of the researcher to 'pursue one's activities as one sees fit', whilst acknowledging the political/moral nature of research. The post-modernist presentation of the work belies the reader to democratically ascertain own viewing of the testimony provided insofar as doctoral work will facilitate. By abrogating sentimentality in the presentation of the research in a post-modernist medium, it is intended that notions of 'taking sides' are addressed. The research remains sensitive to maintaining ethical practices when working with Summerhill in order to maintain good relations for future researchers and research activities (Allan and Skinner, 1991). To avoid those researched bestowing bias to the data after the thesis is presented to subjects, whilst problematic ethically, it is recognised work was not edited/verified by subjects further to 'writing up' of interviews. By adopting a post-modernist stance, the work sets out to eliminate or minimise any betrayal of trust or deception in its undertaking (Cohen and Manion, 1991) and it is intended that as part of the debriefing post-interview, the sincere approach of this work was emphasised to subjects.

## 4.0 Presentation of Findings – an Exploratory Case Study

### 4.1 Introduction

Arguments surrounding the research design and philosophy of the research were presented in the Methodology chapter. It is important to remember that the final design was arrived at largely due to the constraints concerning the work and context encountered at the outset. Access to Summerhill was constrained by Summerhill School in terms of restricting numbers of (and the pre-set agenda of) Summerhill Visitor days. Equally, despite several attempts to gain contact with staff to facilitate the undertaking of a survey of sample groups, Summerhill did not initially respond to requests. This may have been indicative of an institutional emotional exhaustion subsequent to the attention drawn by the OFSTED inspection appeal and court case. Further, both students and staff had participated already in interviews that formed the independent inquiry set up in appeal of the OFSTED Notice of Closure, potentially resulting in a limited desire to participate in further research into the area of enquiry or a suspicion of research. It should be clarified that both the OFSTED inspection and subsequent court case were concluded prior to the commence of this research and the work does not seek to analyse these but to ask research questions with a view to consider their impact upon Summerhill in 2004.

Data from the achievements of pupils from 1999 was not available to the author, although the OFSTED report facilitates some analysis of performance, as it may represent similar data which informed the inspection judgement process. Separate contact was made with OFSTED and a response was received that it was not possible to discuss inspections with individual members of HMI. OFSTED noted that the inspection report was available from Summerhill but direct access to the inspection team was not allowed. As a result, initial attempts to consider survey and triangulation of data with OFSTED sources for this work were frustrated. Equally, attempt to gain a transcription from the court of the appeal has not been successful at the time of writing since response from OFSTED identified that this has been identified as confidential to the two parties and not generally available.

In the context of the methodological debate already outlined, at one level the postmodernist tradition was adopted. However, it should also be noted that



Summerhill is subject to many research requests and political interest. If the research topic had been approached from a modernist interpretive stance, based on pre-constructed theory and questions based deriving from existing literature, then co-operation from Summerhill students would have proved philosophically unacceptable to them. On contacting Summerhill, this was discussed and this feature is further reviewed in commentary surrounding the students' stories in the next section. It might also be inferred that within the staff of Summerhill, there are differences of perception regarding the value that doctoral research might bring to both individual staff and the wider school and its community. Therefore, it was only after attending one of the Visitor days and meeting a member of staff, who was willing to facilitate research, that progress in surveying the students and staff was possible at all. Given such problems, it was very clear there was a need to be particularly sensitive to the concerns of the participating staff and students. Any attempt to undertake observations using a systematic observation instrument, or interview from a pre-constructed model, potentially would have led to the withdrawing of participation. Those sampled felt great anxiety concerning how they might be represented as a result of being judged by pre-constructed models previously.

The use of different methods for data collection are central to this study insofar as they should lead to greater validity and reliability and further, overcoming any bias of single-method approach and as a result, offer some opportunity for triangulation. However, given constraints identified, reliability becomes problematic as the conditions under which research was undertaken would be hard to reproduce. There is acknowledgement of the particularistic nature of the study (Bell, 1993) therefore. Data was collected at different times from different sources in fulfilling longitudinal needs and therefore, further triangulation of data does exist. It should also be recognised that within the analysis chapter – whilst the interviews contained fall within the post-modern tradition – theory taken from one discipline can be used to explain phenomena in another discipline. This presents opportunity for a type of triangulation within this study (Easterby-Smith et al, 1994). As such, the external validity of this work might be considered as strengthened in that the internal validity was addressed through data source triangulation.

In terms of the development of the emerging case study, not only did the philosophical stance need to consider the needs of the respondents to the research, but the integrity of the data demanded sensitivity. The research design recognised that in striving for 'truth', closure and violence to reality is thrust upon the environment by modernity. That this should be rejected in favour of personal accounts and stories (from Summerhill), whilst recognising that reality and 'truth' can never be a shared experience but is the property of those engaged in the research process (Armitage, 2003). It might also prove useful to point out that Summerhill falls towards the categorisation of a postmodernist organisation insofar that it constantly changes the boundaries created by the school community through its democratic construction. It might be likened to 'quicksilver' insofar as it would appear that as a finger is 'poked into it' it changes shape (this is drawn from interview findings from both pupils and staff – see Chapter 5). As a result, the initial visits to Summerhill were conducted as observation of the establishment in action insofar as they were undertaken on Visitor Days with clear agreement of Summerhill to allow attendance at Visitor events.

Given early difficulties of access, initial attendance of Visitor Days formed a pilot approach to ascertain the most appropriate methodology for the research. Discussion with students escorting during the visit and Zoe Redhead (the headteacher and daughter of A S Neill) during time reserved for questions to the Head Teacher were covert insofar as the purpose was not made known to them at the time of the observation. The covert nature of this was to consider, as an outsider, possible impressions to an inspection team by visiting Summerhill. Despite an attempt to free, and not constrain, such observation as far as possible and record events as they occurred, it is recognised that in undertaking this, some influence from readings about Summerhill prior to the visit would have informed and possibly biased observations. However, whilst the research intended to be exploratory, given methodological assumptions, literature was used inductively and not used to direct questions or answers that might be sought from during this data collection. Again, within the methodology, the debate surrounding rigour and validity of such undertaking as an emerging, exploratory case study is discussed in terms of views of objectivity.

## 4.2 Documentary Evidence

Whilst the introduction provides some context to the 1999 inspection, findings of the documentary sources provide some ‘answer’ to research questions posed:

- *What were the findings of the OFSTED inspection at Summerhill?*
- *How was the inspection carried out by the OFSTED inspection team?*
- *What were the findings of the Independent Inquiry into the OFSTED inspection of Summerhill?*
- *How was the independent inquiry carried out? How did it differ from the OFSTED inspection?*

Documentary evidence was taken from the OFSTED 1999 inspection report, House of Lords Questions, (30 June 1999), report from Independent Inquiry and subsequent Statement of Intent; from the Summerhill website ‘Argument for Education for Democratic Citizenship’; newspaper articles reporting the Independent Schools Inspection Tribunal, High Court case at the Royal Courts of Justice London in March 2000 where the OFSTED Notice of Closure was repealed on the 3 areas contested by Summerhill. However, already noted, court transcript was not available as it had been embargoed for release only under the agreement of both OFSTED and Summerhill, which had not been obtained within the time constraint of this work

In order to establish the approach of the case study, as part of the initial methodological development, documents were reviewed in advance of observation and interview activity. A summary of these are provided in the findings to provide an historical account of events and further, provide anchors for some of the stories which are presented in the interviews with parents, staff and students of Summerhill.

### 4.2.1 The OFSTED Inspection Report

The 1999 OFSTED inspection report’s main findings conclude that Summerhill was ‘not providing an adequate education for its pupils’ (p3) since the achievement of each pupil was left to their inclination. The inspectors recognised strengths in standards of speaking, reading and listening and that pupils ‘inclined to learn’ enjoyed

(and benefited from) English and mathematics, if they attended lessons. Pupils were considered 'foul mouthed' but otherwise well behaved and demonstrated practical understanding of citizenship. However, the inspectors judged little had improved since prior HMI inspection and felt that strengths did not compensate for judged weaknesses of underachievement. OFSTED directly related weaknesses to non-attendance of lessons. OFSTED judged this was compounded by a teaching staff failure to plan to accommodate student needs, resulting in a fragmented, disjointed, narrow curriculum (p 4). OFSTED judged that this 'amounts to an abrogation of educational responsibility and a failure of management'. The report notes that the provision at all stages was neither broad nor balanced (point 46).

OFSTED noted that previously, HMI had significant concerns and full inspections had been undertaken in May 1990 and June 1993. The May 1990 inspection resulted in a Notice of Complaint which was lifted further to Summerhill's intention to undertake remedial actions. However, HMI visited the school in 1998 and found that previously identified weaknesses had been planned only for address. Further, they identified that whilst constructive discussion had emanated from 1998 HMI visit to school, only limited implementation by way of plans. This left major areas of unresolved difficulties, where Summerhill claimed their philosophy conflicted with HMI recommendations. The 1999 report expressed that it was unable to judge Summerhill's philosophy and recognised the Summerhill stated principle that assessment should not be imposed on children. However, OFSTED focussed upon whether the quality of education was effective. With regards to the quality of Education, the report judges quality to be uneven. The report identified that 16% of teaching was very good or better and 75% satisfactory or better (p 5) but that standards of writing were generally below the national expectations at all ages, with poor presentation and structure. The inspectors judged that there were serious gaps in background knowledge with some students within mathematics relying heavily on calculators.

The report provides clear indication as to OFSTED judgements of 'good teaching'. It details the virtues of carefully planned work with a range of teaching strategies and importance of records of pupil progress. Inspectors were particularly concerned by coherence in documentation and the organisation of work within pupils' folders.

Attainment in history and geography was satisfactory but ‘attainment’ and ‘progress’ in art was patchy. However, the comments and judgements of OFSTED in terms of attainment and progress generally centred around the attendance of lessons by pupils (points 21-29) concluding that non-attendance resulted in a failure to meet the requirements of the Education Act 1996. This theme was pursued again by judgements surrounding attitudes, behaviour and personal development. Whilst recognising good relationships within the school and stimulating, demanding teaching, OFSTED judged that in spite of a school ethos of self-regulated learning, individual study was not well supported and thus, doubly disadvantaged pupils whose attendance and efforts were sporadic (points 30-37).

OFSTED expressed concern in terms of child protection with regards to the resources for boarding pupils or the fitness of teaching staff to teach children citing that the school had rejected social services previous recommendations as ‘against the school philosophy’. It was further identified that overnight accommodation was unsupervised and considered not to meet modern security expectations. In particular, the report detailed observations of safety concerns claimed as ‘symptomatic of lack of supervision’ and concerns for gender-shared toilet facilities and inadequate reading resources. The Inspectors were particularly disturbed that there was no identification of pupils with special needs or qualified special needs teachers. Further, no formal needs assessment was identified, which OFSTED judged as leaving pupils with unmet needs. The report further identified that parents who choose to place their children with Summerhill were strongly supportive but OFSTED expressed concern to how well parents were informed. Further, OFSTED judged that whilst the Principal of Summerhill gave strong leadership to the school’s philosophy as ‘guardian of the founding principles’ (p 10, point 58), they took no lead in curriculum management. Inspectors concluded this resulted in disjointed, haphazard curriculum development.

Whilst summary of the documentary evidence is detailed, a critical issue for the two reports lies with their purpose. It should be remembered that the latter report was prepared primarily as a rebuttal of the OFSTED inspection findings. However, the independent report provides insights into the latter Independent Inspectorate Tribunal’s drafting of a Statement of Intent for future inspection and Summerhill

activities. Given these points outlined then, how did this evaluation compare to the findings of the Independent report?

#### 4.2.2 **The Independent Inquiry**

The Independent Inquiry presented that the OFSTED allegation of 'drift' did not support how Summerhill school had 'drifted' in standards in a 28-page report. It argued that despite claims that 'drift' was evidenced by HMI inspections of the school over the years, a prior Summerhill inspection report indicated the school had changed little since 1990 (Cunningham, 2000). The inquiry suggested that the OFSTED inspectors:

'had arrived at Summerhill with a predetermined template as to how schools must operate assessment irrespective of the philosophy ... of a school' (p13).

The inquiry had undertaken questionnaire survey of 40 ex-pupils who had attended from 1930s to 1990s, all experiencing non-compulsory lessons and additionally 19 most recent leavers plus interviews with existing students. None saw the Summerhill policy of non-compulsory lessons a disadvantage. In defence of Summerhill's philosophy, the inquiry further collated evidence on the children's future options from the sample survey. From this it identified that 97.6% progressed to take significant examinations, to include degrees and followed satisfying careers. The inquiry interviewed parents from both UK and abroad and the teachers from the school. It identified only one teacher who found variable attendance a problem (p 16). The report claimed that all pupils were regularly engaged in learning but the Secretary of State's assumptions about learning were limited to timetabled lessons. The report asserts that Chris Woodhead, Chief Inspector, indicated inspectors had gathered information on informal learning outside the classroom through discussions with pupils but that the staff and children disputed the interpretation of the discussions (p19).

This report detailed the pursuit of 2 girls by inspectors as a key piece of evidence of pupils judged 'idle' during a school day. It claims these girls had been avoiding classes as a direct result of earlier treatment by an inspector during the visit (the pupil

claim is verified by interview findings in next chapter). However, the thrust of this aspect lies with the independent inquiry's attack that the inspection dismissed learning outside the classroom (p17) and that 'learning by immersion' was a method by which many Summerhill pupils became bi-lingual during OFSTED-claimed 'idle' pupil conversations. The report further claimed that OFSTED failed to understand the children's right of freedom to do nothing if that is what they chose.

It claimed also that the OFSTED inspection, by a notion of appropriate curriculum as 'an agglomeration of subjects tied together in a timetable' (p20), made inappropriate conclusions. It stated that the existence of a syllabus is not an objectively right curriculum for all children, particularly as the majority of Summerhill students would not remain in the UK. This was considered critical where the notice of complaint referred to the need for learning to be in line with national expectations. The Secretary of State does not explicitly define these but the report claims that the inspection focused upon the attainment of Key Stages as 'national expectations', despite that Summerhill does not work towards Key Stages (p21). The report identified that both the Secretary of State's 'Learning to Succeed' (June 1999) and the development plan of Learndirect (1999) defines processes and structures for post-16 learning consistent with the practices of Summerhillian teaching. It argued that the parents hold a strong antipathy to traditional schooling. Without Summerhill, parents would provide home education but learners would be denied opportunity to participate within a community. As such, closing the school would have contravened Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child for 59 current pupils. As for parental rights, Article 2 of protocol No 1 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Freedom would be contravened by not allowing them to educate their children within their philosophical convictions.

The OFSTED standard survey of Parental Questionnaire undertaken within OFSTED's inspection was rebuffed by the report. It claimed the OFSTED questionnaire showed significant parental satisfaction, despite OFSTED interpretation that it attracted less parental satisfaction in comparison with other schools. In the appendices, the report further outlines examples of state-funded schools where lesson attendance is not compulsory.

In summary, the report argued that, as any school, Summerhill had its shortcomings but that its principles were inappropriately considered if it was implied to be ill organised, unstructured or anarchic. Whilst informal, its distinctive culture was to be valued as part of educational diversity and that the rights of the children were protected through the processes and structure of the school. The independent report recommended the Notice of Complaint should be withdrawn and that future inspections should respect Summerhill's nature.

#### **4.2.3 Summerhill Website – Summerhill v HMI Inspectors**

The good researcher should always ask 'Have I evaluated the documents rather than accepted them at face value' (Denscombe 2003). Perhaps, it is essential to recognise that the prior documents, which are publicly available, may have separately 'massaged' a version of reality to meet public expectations. However, when viewing websites it is important to conclude that the credibility of the content lies, in the main, with 'unpacking' perceptions indicated by the authors. Zoe Readhead, Summerhill Principal and daughter of A S Neill prepared a webpage entitled Summerhill v HMI Inspectors (<http://www.s-hill.demon.co.uk/hmi/zoecomments.htm>) which provides further insights to her thoughts surrounding the case. Whilst the date of authorship is unclear, it appears to respond to post-inspection concerns. She claims that 'Just because an attitude is accepted as a 'norm' does not necessarily make it right', which is possibly aimed at perceptions of inspectors. She writes that the school ethos is about freedom and treating the children as individuals with rights, that the children are not poorly disadvantaged as portrayed by OFSTED inspectors. Zoe identifies Summerhill pupils as strong, happy individuals with a great sense of self-worth, who expect to take a responsible part in running their own community, and understand learning as their responsibility if they are to achieve exams which affect their future in work.

The page argues that alternatives must be available to see that there is another approach to education rather than seeing children as helpless and needing constant adult intervention in order to 'learn'. The article then progresses to a Support Alternative Values in Education (S.A.V.E. Summerhill Campaign) webpage response to the inspection. It presents a response to 4 points drawn from the inspection report



suggesting that the language of the report was emotive and unprofessional, biased and prejudicial claiming that it used superlatives and lacked supporting evidence. The article claims that the safety matters were exaggerated and reported in a sensational manner and were not supported by the 1997 bi-annual Social Services report. Equally, it states that OFSTED's report implies only partial implementation of action to address HMI improvements but this was incorrect since only those suggestions that conflict its philosophy have not been addressed. Finally, the item claims that despite the Notice of Complaint not being received by the school until a month later, OFSTED report findings were leaked to The Guardian before official publication. The article questions the integrity and motives of the government by this action.

A further webpage entitled 'Summerhill: Myths and Realities' addresses a 'myth' that 'the government is not threatening Summerhill with closure and does not pass judgement on its unique philosophy' by claiming that the action required by the Notice of Complaint would undermine the school and as such, illustrates that either the inspectorate had not understood the school's philosophy or were simply disregarding it. The page progresses to additionally to respond to the serious Health and Safety concerns, outlining 'facts' in defence of Summerhill and notes that due to a misleading and sensational OFSTED report, it wants a withdrawal of Notice of Complaint. It states that Summerhill sought a commitment from the government that future inspections would be carried out in a co-operative manner.

#### **4.2.4 House of Lords Questions**

The House of Lords questions undertaken in June 1999 included debate of the duty to ensure that independent schools reach and maintain minimum standards laid down in the 1996 Education Act (Lord Hunt of Kings Heath) and that the inspection was carried out properly and the public was supportive of this. The claim was countered by the argument that the levels of achievement at Summerhill were above national average (Baroness Blatch) and that it was merely that Summerhill standards and philosophy were different from the Chief Inspector, Mr Chris Woodhead (Lord Glenamara).

However, clearly, any debate of the intentions of the government perhaps is finally concluded by the Statement of Intent which formally defends any intention to close down Summerhill due to philosophical differences.

#### **4.2.5 Statement of Intent**

The Statement of Intent dated 23 March 2000 emanated from the appeal by Summerhill against the Secretary of State, heard by an Independent Schools Tribunal on 20 March 2000. This agreement was reached in light of evidence provided by ex-pupils, parents and an independent inquiry which showed that there was no longer a factual base from which a Notice of Complaint might be served. It states that Complaints 4, regarding lesson attendance, and 6, concerning assessment, were agreed by parties as annulled at convening of the tribunal. Through oral evidence, the Secretary of State, confirmed that the striking of Summerhill off the Register was unwanted. Further, it was accepted by the appellant (Summerhill) that the respondent (the Secretary of State) did not wish to compel students to attend lessons or restrain the philosophy of the school. Complaint 2 relating to toilets was annulled also by the tribunal on 20 March 2000.

In this undertaking further agreement between the parties stated that future inspection should take into account that Summerhill is an international free school. It concluded that Summerhill should provide a stimulating learning environment but no further full OFSTED inspections should take place prior to 2004. OFSTED were to provide a monitoring inspection in 2001/2. To facilitate any subsequent issues between Summerhill and the Secretary of State, each would appoint an expert to liaise with the assistance of a lay person, if Summerhill wished. The school would be further entitled to submit their own expert report to the Secretary of State at the time of any OFSTED report of the school. The views expressed in the independent report would be taken into account and the pupils' voice to be fully represented in any evaluation of the quality of education at Summerhill. The agreement further states that learning is not confined to lessons and future inspections must consider the full

breadth of learning at Summerhill and the freedom of children to attend classroom lessons or not.

In summary then, the documentary evidence reviewed begins to provide material for the research questions posed. Whilst further analysis of this is considered in light of the interview data in the Analysis Chapter, essentially, the research considers the impact of the inspection. Whilst the documents provide some account for actions surrounding the inspection, final research questions through the interviewing of staff, parents and students might facilitate insights to the potential impact of the inspection might be derived.

## **Chapter 5.0 Presentation of Findings – Case Study Observation and Interviews**

### **5.1 Naturalistic Observation**

In collating case study evidence, as explained in the methodology, participant observation was undertaken by ‘walking in the footsteps’ of the inspectors to gain some impressions of OFSTED inspector team (see Observation July 2003, appendix one and analysis within Chapter 6) and as a pilot to the research design (see Observation, May 2001, appendix one). In considering the observation schedule, and by recognising potential for contamination of data, it was decided to use Visitor Days only for participant observation since latter visits to Summerhill to interview staff developed a familiarity and attachment impacts any ‘goal-free’ unstructured approach to the observations. The visitor days were thought to prove similar to the events staged for inspection. By attending the Visitor Day as a visitor, it was recognised that the observation fell into participant observation in that any visitor attending might have impact upon the event. It was also judged that subjectivity informs perceptions of the social world (CLMS, 2002). Therefore, providing reflexivity was applied to the data collection, rigour was maintained. Given discussed access constraints, which did not facilitate other approaches, it was judged that gaining data drawn from observation of Head Teacher’s question time, pupil testimony and a community meeting may prove valuable in discussing the limitations of data available to OFSTED’s modernist, systematic observations.

In terms of naturalness, to gain a representative picture, the intention was to fade into the background and not disrupt the event or have discernable impact by interacting (Denscombe, 2003). Arguments countering this approach could be compared with the complaints of Summerhill pupils that other aspects of learning taking place were not considered within OFSTED inspection due to tensions for validity through systematic rigour. Whilst there is recognition of the concerns for bias or rigour of observation data, (Stronach and Maclure, 1997), postmodernistic approach to this observation was attempted to ‘free’ the observation and allow the reader to judge the content as one impression of Summerhill which provides ‘thick’ descriptions

(Hammersley 1990). These might then support later analysis of the interview and documentary evidence.

It is recognised that personal factors and relative selective perception might influence data collection and as a result, the data be considered unreliable. However, there is interpretation in any observation method (Denscombe, 2003). As an exploratory case study, it was essential to approach investigations without blinkers from concepts derived from previous research. The need to be sensitive to the attention placed upon Summerhill and the view of the microscope forced upon them by the attentions of the OFSTED case and limit of access would have made observation based upon constructs, such as Interaction Process Analysis (Bales, 1976) both philosophically problematic and inappropriate to the purpose of this research. There is no single 'best way' to carry out observation as it is dependent upon the purpose of the research (Croll, 1986). Whilst systematic observation will produce explicit descriptions, 'free' from 'subjectivity', which may be expressed in exact quantitative terms, it attracts criticism as a biased, inflexible research instrument, (which provides only a partial view of observed activities) (Croll, 1986). Concern for deficit of 'totality' need not invalidate the descriptions within the systematic observation but at the heart of classroom observation is a set of beliefs surrounding educational practice (Wragg, 1999). The set of values driving the merits of any insights gained through qualitative observation fundamentally differ from quantitative approaches insofar as precision and accuracy of recording sacrifices 'greater' understanding of classroom life (Wragg, 1999). Quantitative observation is predominated by a rational 'a priori' view, worked out carefully in advance of the observation. Given the purpose of this thesis as an exploratory case study and that systematic observation would be further practically problematic insofar as Summerhill would not have accommodated pre-constructs to interviews, naturalistic observation was undertaken.

## **5.2 Visits and Interviews**

In addition to presented documentary sources and further, to explore research questions: '*What was the immediate and subsequent impact of the inspection upon the organisation (Summerhill), its pupils and their families? Did this impact result in improvement in OFSTED terminology?*', interviews were undertaken in the

postmodernist tradition. Problems of access resulted in 2 members of current staff, 4 parents and past/current students forming the interviewees sampled. The limitations of this sample are recognised. However, 'thick' descriptions available via post-modernist stories facilitated the uncovering of perceptions attached to the events by the individual interviewees which may not have been attained by using approaches which constrains the richness of the data.

A number of themes 'fell' from the stories that interviewees told. Interviewees were not prompted other than to be aware that the content of their interviews would be confidential, anonymous and to staff, used only for this doctoral research purpose. It was agreed that any use of their statements for publication would require their further approval. A copy of the interview was separately recorded by Summerhill for their archive records of Summerhill students and potentially will be used as evidence in the event of future inspections. Students were aware of the Summerhill recording although no explicit reason was made known to them at time of interview.

### **5.2.1 Findings - interviews**

Analysis is the separation into component parts. To trace things back to their underlying sources by probing beneath the surface appearance to discover the elements which have come together to produce the phenomena (Denscombe 2003). However, solely, to facilitate analysis in following section, the individual stories of candidates are collated into themes to provide the reader with some of the strands of memories and opinions expressed. Whilst generally, respondents were asked to just tell their stories some of the pupils did receive prompts which were not intended to direct the interview but simply, practically, to allow the respondent to continue speaking with confidence. The problematic nature of this and the interpretive nature of reviewing this data in themes is recognised as potentially introducing researcher bias and that a post-modernistic approach would have been to provide solely the data. It should be acknowledged that to analyse qualitative data attempts to oversimplify observations and the danger of over-simplifying the explanation in an attempt to develop generalisations is to underplay data that does not appear 'to fit' (Denscombe, 2003). Social phenomena is complex and in terms of the post-modernist approach to collecting the interview data, it is already explained, was undertaken to assure

integrity of the 'unwitting testimony' of the those interviewed. As such, transcripts of interviews are attached (in appendix one) and it is argued any analysis of postmodernist interviews is provided only due to the thesis requirements of this work. The framework of doctoral thesis needs require academic consideration of findings and as such, the author offers that the analysis provides only some possible views of the data collated.

### **5.2.2 Themes expressed within interviews**

Recognising potential concerns for (incorrect) interpretation of post modernist data, without prompting, recurrent themes were expressed by the individuals' stories, which were highly consistent. These themes are not those set by the researcher but ideas which respondents presented as these were repeated by fellow respondents without guidance. As such, the themes possibly present potential lens for what was expressed by respondents and facilitate comparison. Therefore themes are categorised into those expressed by type of respondents - those by parents, by staff or by students and those expressed by more than one type of respondent eg parents and staff. Potentially, they provide images of the nature of Summerhill post-inspection to allow some illustration of any impact that the inspection and subsequent appeal process held for the school.

To commence, themes expressed by more than one type of respondent:

**'Summerhill always changing'** Parents, staff and students identified a changing nature of Summerhill, as an educational institution, which was attributed to its nature as a democratic community. It was not clear from the statements of each party what had changed. This contrasts with the independent schools appeal case hearing, where a prior HMI reported was cited as it evidenced that little had changed at Summerhill between inspections.

Equally, there was possibly evidence of factions within Summerhill or perhaps less than conciliatory 'differences of view'. The potential fluid nature of communication and participation in decision making might be illustrated from this comment:

**‘a lot of staff would think there wasn’t a campaign there was no committee at the start**

**I was choosing**

**Kids were complaining why can’t I come down why don’t you choose me**

**Elected 12 person campaign committee which didn’t include staff**

**Staff don’t always get informed’**

possibly suggesting social processes, which was perceived as micro-political, rather than democratic in the community.

**‘Hands off management’** Staff and parents both referred to the educational leadership of Summerhill as being ‘hands off’, which relates closely to comments made by the inspectorate in the OFSTED report. Whilst the report refers to strong leadership by the Principal, the views of staff and parents expressed in the interview stories provided possibly suggest a concurrence with the OFSTED inspectors in terms of the curriculum management being absent of leadership. However, it might be recognised that, within the philosophy of Neill, this would be entirely appropriate.

**‘...Zoe is not a classroom teacher and is hands off**

**When the barristers/solicitors asked how do you know what goes on in the classrooms?**

**Do you go in and see No**

**Do you actively criticise No**

**Do you manage the teachers No**

**Teachers manage themselves...’**

One parent comments

**‘3-4 years when Zoe started to take more interest started to really take over similar because basic principles haven’t changed she did do certain things like get rid of the gardener’**

**and**

**‘Zoe was not the political animal her father was**

**Inspection had to come up with**

**Zoe didn’t have any credibility with the education system she didn’t write things’**

The experimental nature of the Summerhill philosophy of freedom for the child suggests that the child drives their learning. Subsequently, within the democratic



process the appropriate nature of curriculum activities are reviewed through discussions within the school meetings. This self-regulating component as paramount to a philosophy of the school 'fitting the child', rather than a curriculum planned by teaching staff further to direction by a teaching head. This practice suggests that the principle was that the Summerhill community did not need to be informed of curriculum models practiced in the wider national educational community since the individual child would be able to democratically identify if the provision was suitable based on their experience of lessons attended.

**'Opportunity to review workings in light of an external observation'** A theme expressed by both the staff and parents was that the inspection provided a useful review of Summerhill practices. One student identified this as 'beneficial' in terms of the resources, which in absence of an inspection, would have continued to be neglected from financial investment.

A parent noted the initial reaction was of humour to the Notice of Closure by Summerhill, in terms of the resource implications – humour being one way of offsetting shock:

**'...In the early days - the joke was  
They needed toilets everywhere you know...'**

This was further repeated by pupil commentary:

**'better (more) toilets/accommodation'**

One student claimed that a direct result of the inspection was better facilities, another student agreed with this and felt that the consequence of inspection was a more comfortable life in Summerhill accommodation through investment which may have not been made without OFSTED criticism.

Perhaps, the parental commentary surrounding Summerhill's resources and its appointment of Zoe to Principal provides some emotional backdrop explanation of the

impact of inspectors concerns of resourcing. It should be remembered that Summerhill is entirely independently financed and the parents comments regarding Zoe taking over Summerhill recognised that there had been considerable lack of long term investment into the accommodation and facilities, which Zoe had tackled only recently before inspection:

**‘...I got impression that they did in fact invest some of the profits of farm or family  
Zoe and Tony put a sound business footing into what was happening the school...’**

Yet, particularly in OFSTED’s report, comments surrounding action plans which had been unsuccessful by their non-implementation, suggests inspectors failed to recognise attempts to progress the institution or any problems of limited funding. Perhaps, it might be argued that their position was to judge quality of provision and not the difficulties surrounding these. However, it might be considered in some way ‘unfair’ to an independent institution to judge them so shortly after moving towards ‘a sound business footing’.

Generally, parents and staff views fell between 2 camps of the value of inspection. There were those who felt that the inspection facilitated a useful review of practices, which may have previously lacked critical appraisal and as a result, benefited from such activity:

**‘...I actually think that with hindsight now the OFSTED inspection probably did you a lot of good**

**It always does because it gets you to focus upon ‘What you are all about’  
Summerhill has been going for 80something years  
No I don’t think OFSTED impact was what they intended to do  
They didn’t understand  
It didn’t fit into their boxes, their categories they didn’t know how to deal with it...’**

Alternatively, the view that such criticism resulted in Summerhill recognising the importance of Summerhillian approach, and reinforcing views of failings of OFSTED educational philosophy.

Regardless of the level of emphasis those interviewed gave to these views, each finally, unanimously, concluded that the result of OFSTED observation was a strengthening of the commitment to Summerhill educational philosophy and a movement towards strongly-held belief that Summerhillian educational practices were both unique and more valuable than educational requirements being suggested by inspectors. Concluding possible impact was a reinforcement of Summerhill value, illustrated by this comment:

### **Staff member - level of 'fight' in Summerhill**

**others said don't believe in politicians  
we were for negotiation  
and the whole process began  
let's phone him up – I said no no he said it in public  
then we received letter of complaint – where was the room for negotiation**

**we challenged Chris Woodhead we met up with him personally with the  
secretary of education  
the one thing I wanted for the government no where at no time forget  
Summerhill was on the agenda**

### **Impact of inspection**

Views of the impact of the inspection upon Summerhill and its community 4 years after the inspection and appeal case seemed to differ between the different groups interviewed

#### **1) Students –**

**Most forgot** – Within the interviews both past students and current students forgot large details of the inspection. Yet, the resilience of the children is typified possibly by statements and their lack of memory of events:

**'...It made the school stronger  
We kind of know what might happen if it happened again  
We were always close to staff I haven't heard of anyone who liked the  
inspectors but no one ever talks about it anymore...'**

**'...After the court case, not negative relief  
I can't really remember, just a feeling  
Carried on as normal  
Summerhill changes all the time...'**

And another:

**‘...We are not getting inspected every year  
I’ve been here for quite a few inspections  
I don’t know if I remember them  
No impact not that I can think of**

**I think it was quite negative...’**

Another claimed ‘not to forget’ the overall providing an emotional reaction to return to ‘normality’ after the invasion of the 1999 inspection:

**‘...Overall it didn’t change the school on a practical basis I think  
You don’t forget about it it becomes  
Its history  
We worked really hard for that  
I just wanted to get back to normal  
Everyone wanted to get school back to its normal to its normal daily life  
that took some time...’**

Students expressed that they had forgotten the events, they had ‘moved on’ in their Summerhill life and generally expressed they were unaffected by the process. Yet pupil commentary captured very specific memories and feelings surrounding incidents when there was a heightened level of emotion attached. They also clearly identified that it was not the processes of inspection that caused them concern but the conduct of inspection – this can be seen by one pupil who alleged:

**‘...it was the way they asked questions  
They all asked questions like  
like how many lessons do you go to a week  
I would give them yes or no to questions  
I don’t think it was the age that they were a lot older than us it was the  
way they asked questions and looked at us...’**

Another held:

**‘...The actual inspection it was intimidating – it was how I felt when they  
arrived  
Previous inspections  
  
When they came the manner was not friendly  
A couple seemed quite genuine and friendly...’**

This is further reinforced by another pupil

**'...I can remember one inspector**

**Interested in what I was doing and stuff like that  
She was friendly  
She was impressed by what I was doing  
Every day (for a week) when I went into woodwork she was always there  
There was one in the art room he did speak to me for a bit  
He would ask what is it you do in here  
He was less friendly  
Negative...'**

Another recounted:

**'...Yes there was build up on it, you felt there was a lot of emotional tension and also kind of the whole idea of you're being inspected and might be closed  
That kind of hung in the air  
We'd had inspections before that  
You know, 8 of them (inspectors)  
it was everyone was sort of in turmoil as everyone felt this was make or break  
everyone put a lot of effort in that day  
It was very scary you felt that you were part of something that was jeopardising...'**

Another pupil narrates the judgemental nature of the process and raises questions as to whether this facilitated accurate judgement of pupil abilities:

**'...I was quieter and nervous  
I don't normally  
I wouldn't go into the woodwork class when the inspector was there  
I did attend a couple of classes and there was only one inspector in class  
but I didn't attend as much as normally because I didn't want to be asked questions that I couldn't answer and I was a bit worried about...'**

This aspect is repeated by another:

**'...About the day?**

**I remember one thing  
I was in class 2 with another friend I was on the computer with another friend called XXX we were playing this game and people from OFSTED came they asked us a question can you spell something and then they gave us something to spell and I said ok yeah I can spell it but my friend couldn't spell it they had this really weird expression  
They didn't seem to be happy about it...'**

The feelings of suspicion are raised again by one pupil. Yet, it is not possible to maintain whether this was part of Summerhillian 'culture' or the process of inspection:

**'...I watched the other inspectors going round  
There were 8 inspectors  
I felt worried  
I had been inspected at other schools previously  
But previously inspectors have been friendly  
I had this funny feeling that they don't understand what's going on here  
I remember on a bit of the woodwork day and the artwork day because I  
was worried about it because I thought Summerhill was going to have  
problems  
The government don't particularly like schools like this  
I have been reading it in the newspapers...'**

This was further echoed by another pupil:

**'...I think they were trying to close it down because  
When they were here  
I heard from a lot of people that they were, that they obviously didn't like  
this place  
in newspaper, on the news, on the Channel 4 news that they didn't like  
this place you just know that they were trying to close this place down  
Because I think they want kids to not to have to the choice of going to  
lessons or not and they don't like the idea that kids make their own rules  
up and no adults take charge/over...'**

Such testimony further provides some indication as to how pupils might review inspection and the personal attachment they place upon Summerhill. However, aside from their words, it should be reflected that it is not possible to measure what may have influenced their views.

There was evidence of a 'pygmalion effect' insofar as pupils reacted to inspector presence:

Another pupil said:

**'...Bad memory anyway  
  
I can remember seeing the inspectors walking around and staying out of  
their way  
I think I was 11 in 1999**

**I didn't shout directly at them (as previous inspectors) I was careful not to swear and walk past them... It's not only inspectors I try to avoid, I personally don't like to get in the way of policemen either  
Try to avoid Babylon authority whole fucking lot of them...'**

The latter part of the statement may further indicate the level of suspicion of the pupils of the intentions of inspection. However, the lack of consideration by inspectors of the children's reactions might particularly be amplified by the comments of 2 girls who were identified as 'idle' in the OFSTED report and that the independent inquiry argued had avoided inspectors. They commented:

**'...One day we were they came in and started talking to us about work and stuff**

**Before that it was really horrible as we were like reading and stuff, on the same day**

**Some of the words were quite big and quite hard to read obviously ...'**

of the 'historical' incident of the inspectors following 2 girls identified in the independent inquiry report:

**'...We got upset and we got really worried about it**

**It was one of the books from the classroom  
a book that they gave you**

**We got really down about it it seemed we were not any good at reading so we decided to leave the lesson**

**And we decided to walk out**

**We were walking in the woods and we heard some noises like shuffling kind of stuff we were not quite sure what it was and we were talking about private stuff**

**We went to lunch afterwards and we heard that they were following us we were a bit shocked and felt upset  
it was really horrible as well  
They had no right to do it**

**They said that we weren't doing anything  
And that we were just not effective with our time  
We were saying we do is what we do**

**If you hadn't had lesson interrupted you would not have gone off to do something else  
You were exercising your right  
At Summerhill we say you have got your freedom  
To do what you what you want to do  
We were doing what we want to do  
That's how it works at Summerhill...'**

which further raises not only the problem of impact of inspection at time of judgement within the 1999 OFSTED inspection but also the concepts of rights of pupils during inspection. Covert observation as part of inspection was used as evidence of problems of non-compulsory lessons but it is unclear whether it was intended to be included as an assessment of the learning which took place outside of the classroom. Such activity being both presents, possibly, an idea that those being observed within inspection have a right to consent, a feature which does not seem to prevail from inspections of state schools.

With regards to the specific aspects of the inspection, there was limited detail in terms of descriptions of particular inspectors or events in the initial inspection activity. One pupil claimed the impact of OFSTED inspection was nil:

**'...No effect  
Not in lessons week before  
Not in lessons week after  
Not in lessons during inspection...'**

By contrast, students gave detailed accounts of their feelings surrounding the appeal case, preparation for the campaign for appeal and winning the court case.

**'...I started to cry in the court room  
I thought they could make up some reasons to close the school down  
I thought it would be really stupid if they closed the school down  
I could have just been paranoid  
I don't know  
if I was being accurate or not  
  
There was a good atmosphere for everyone going down to (court case)  
And before that protesting outside No 10  
afterwards  
There was a strong feeling going around...'**



Two students expressed their serious fears during the time preceding the court case.

**‘...What change?’**

**After the court case, life in Summerhill hasn’t changed at all I think  
I feel a lot more safer kind of thing as I know that we won the court case  
easily and we are not going to get closed down  
I remember when we were going to have to court case, I was actually  
really scared that we going to get closed down...’**

**‘...During the court case it was a lot more, it was the same, the same sort  
of un(real), very surreal sort of tension you felt like you were on edge you  
didn’t know why part of you thought they were never going to close us  
down but the other part was what would happen if we do  
There was a lot of things preying...’**

and that the impact of inspection seemed to be negligible in their eyes. This is reverberated by another pupil, who contends:

**‘...Nothing major (change)**

**I think I probably went to class after inspection  
Probably didn’t go to class around time of inspection  
Don’t think I went to class as a result of inspection was something else it  
was a good couple of years afterwards and nothing**

**Everything changes always changing  
I don’t think anything changed for inspectors  
I don’t know...’**

possibly providing further reinforcement of a postmodern theme of continuous change at Summerhill. As such, HMI report of ‘little change’ might depict that there was no change in the nature of Summerhill ie a place of continuous change.

Pupils stated they believed that should Summerhill close they would be unable to adjust to a traditional state school (which they saw as their only option if Summerhill closed) as they would be behind other pupils in their work:

**‘...If this place did get closed down and if I had to go to other schools I  
was quite late in education  
It would took me a while to catch up  
And I wouldn’t be able to put up with the education at other schools...’**

**‘Pride in Summerhill – feeling that they were stronger – pulled together by the conflict’** Current students interviewed felt the court case was a good activity insofar as it was a real world experience and pulled together the community of Summerhill:

**‘...I am a lot stronger  
was that the intention of the inspectors no...’**

Students expressed their concerns for Zoe at the time of the court case and generally expressed resentment or humour for the purposes of the inspection process. Students expressed a unity which the ‘common enemy’ of the OFSTED notice of closure had facilitated in the campaign prior to the appeal and during the court case. They articulated feelings of subsequent relief and victory at the closure of the appeal case.

**‘More pupils at Summerhill’** One pupil felt that a direct consequence of the inspection was that, globally, potentially Summerhillians may have not enrolled as they had not been aware that the school was in current operation. One pupil claimed that a direct result of the case media was a global re-awareness of Summerhill and an increasing in the number of pupils and subsequent sustainability of Summerhill. Whilst one member of staff did not agree in their story that this was a consequence of the inspection, pupils and staff confirmed an increase in pupil numbers in their interviews.

**Of the approach of the inspectors to the pupils,** one pupil highlighted clear differences of approach from OFSTED inspectors in terms of clear ideas of the ‘place’ of children in the school and behaviour, which clearly conflicted with the views of Summerhillian pupils:

**‘...respecting - they saw you as children you didn’t and did not need to  
have an opinion  
everyone has an opinion at Summerhill...’**

2) **Staff:**

**‘emotionally draining’ – ‘student suffering’** By contrast to the students, who generally expressed that they had forgotten about the events and positive views of the strengthening of the Summerhill community, staff interviewed expressed considerable concern regarding the direct impact upon the pupils both at the time of the inspection and court case and subsequently:

**‘...Absolutely drained the school for 2 years afterwards during and afterwards  
There was no energy left  
Fight fight fight  
Tried to maintain some general life for the kids here  
Amazing highlights Zoe would say  
We are doing pretty good on so and so  
A huge cheer of relief recognise that something was right ...’**

Judgements were expressed in terms of concerns that the pupils had adversely experienced political activity, which may have been either innocent of or ignorant to previously. The staff strongly implicated that the pupils had been emotionally ‘harmed’ by the inspection process.

**‘...They had learned so much bitterness which was not part  
In my eyes which had not been part of their lives before  
They had also learnt  
Resentfulness...’**

It was not clear from the stories whether these judgements had been reached from observing the pupils over the period since inspection or whether these statements reflected the concerns the staff held themselves over the inspection process and subsequent nature of an appeal action.

**Feeling that there had been a prior agenda for Summerhill regarding inspection**  
Staff identified Summerhill as the ‘most inspected school in Britain’ and claimed that it had been on a government list which had been confirmed during the court case. One member of staff clarified that Summerhill had felt in a particularly strong position prior to this inspection, given the selection of the Leading Inspector and level of preparation the school had undertaken:

**‘...The inspection led before was Neville Grenier  
We asked that he lead the 1999 inspection  
The kids called him Father Christmas  
He was overweight and had a beard and appeared quite jovial  
And he discussed with us about the need for evidence that Summerhill  
worked  
And he seemed to be agreeing that we couldn’t provide the kind of  
evidence of other schools normally provide...’**

**‘... He even bought a tee shirt  
The Summerhill t shirt was ‘Summerhill the most inspected school in the  
world...’**

A comparison was made with previous inspection teams to evidence reasons for institutional confidence in the 1999 inspection team:

**‘...Before that there was an inspection, Sophie had asked a question and  
inspectors made her burst into tears  
The inspectors would argue with you...’**

There was also a recognition that Summerhill had been hostile to inspection prior to the inspection and as a result, historically, had not provided evidence other than Neill’s philosophy. Staff felt the provision of evidence may have compromised Summerhill’s position.

**‘A 3 year plan, policy documents so we realised that the hostility of the  
inspectors of the past had partly been our fault in the sense that we  
hadn’t provided documentation that really stated what the school was  
about’**

**‘...We had a sense that they had a very fixed agenda  
They ignored the social committee  
They ignored the art and the woodwork  
Anything outside the classroom  
Anything that wasn’t seen to be an academic lesson...’**

**‘...As the inspection went on we realised that  
They were totally focussing on classrooms and lessons  
They had a meeting with Zoe  
The 2 inspectors wanted to talk about the Management process  
And Action plan and me and XXX member of staff who had been  
involved in this...’**

**‘Feeling de-professionalised’**

Staff expressed concerns as to the level of recognition inspectors gave to their efforts to prepare material or present learning activities during inspection. One claimed

**‘We felt the staff felt completely knocked on the head dysfunctional  
All the hard work we had done  
Still inspecting a state school  
Not inspecting an individual school  
That had been running for 70 years  
We were featured in the history of Britain’**

**‘Inspectors did not intend to attempt to understand Summerhill and that preparation of evidence was a mistake, as previously inspectors had not been able to judge’** This is evidenced by a staff member who said:

**‘...The impact of all of that was that paper was being gathered  
Before there had been no paper the only information  
All that was known was Neill’s books  
And whatever Zoe said there was very little written information...’**

**‘...The annoying thing was according to the secretary and Zoe who were in the office when the inspectors were reading  
Slipping through these documents as if they had little importance  
It wasn’t down to them to learn how this school worked...’**

One member of staff interviewed outlined the level of preparation prior to the inspection and reflected that, rather than correct the inspection standing of Summerhill, by preparing educational material in line with inspection guidance, in fact OFSTED undermined the value of the Summerhillian work by constraining it by flawed educational models. Rather than strengthening the political standing of Summerhill in OFSTED terms it merely robbed the integrity of their philosophy. The staff member says

**‘...And I did that I brought a lot of people into the school rightly or wrongly  
At the time I thought rightly because we all felt shit scared frightened that if we didn’t do something along the same vein as the state system we would not get any recognition for the work that was being done here**

**Criteria - We needed to put something on paper out – although we'd gathered a different - criteria meets the same end...'**

Another staff member supports this comment by their statements -

**'...One other thing we changed our action plan  
We had people from outside  
An OFSTED inspector local to Suffolk a friend of XXX member of staff  
who came in about 4 or 5 times to form our action plan meetings  
He was like inputting the language  
Reviewing how people would respond to this  
And he would keep on saying you have to say certain words in like  
Progress  
Tracking  
And we kept fighting this  
Saying if you track, if you monitor...  
If it is about progress  
What happens to child who decides not to go to lessons for a term  
They may have gone backwards  
If he or she forgets  
How does our action plan deal with this if  
Progress is one of our objectives  
If we don't judge the negative things...'**

**'A 3 year plan, policy documents so we realised that the hostility of the  
inspectors of the past had partly been our fault in the sense that we  
hadn't provided documentation that really stated what the school was  
about  
The only document had been the Summerhill book  
So we had a working party set up and a full staff meeting to discuss**

**Should we write policies  
How should we write them  
Let's look at other schools and their policy statements  
What is the function of a policy  
Is it to describe is it a practical document  
Is it to constrain, is it to dictate what we do  
A varied discussion  
Some staff thought we shouldn't have policy documents  
Most staff had worked here for more than 8 years  
Even so some came up with policy documents which were totally off the  
Summerhill philosophy**

**I was involved collective views of staff re policies towards literacy and  
numeracy  
After quite a few months the working party created these documents  
ready for the 1999 inspection  
Not only were they ready, they had been reviewed they had been revised  
by the community  
Quite a fighting process really'**

By these comments there can be drawn a genuine feeling by Summerhill, in earnest, at attempting to meet the needs of OFSTED and a recognition of their philosophical stubbornness, which possibly was derived from Neill's view of authority and likelihood of closure for the school after his death. Yet the completion of the act of preparation presented other philosophical challenges in terms of the expected models of good practice that OFSTED anticipated versus the earnest approaches of Summerhill. This is evidenced by the member of staff who notes that the documents prepared:

**'...They reflect what school does and therefore they change  
They are responsive to what school is doing  
Rather than a document that lies  
A stationary document that doesn't reflect practice  
So they took that as a criticism...'**

**'...It was really important that whatever we did with the action plan  
reflected the philosophy of the school...'**

The 'game of inspection' was perhaps also naively addressed by Summerhill prior to the 1999 inspection and can be seen by a potentially 'ethical' lack of preparation of the teaching areas to facilitate a true picture of Summerhill for inspectors:

**'...It meant that No time to prepare anything special which I wasn't going  
to do anyway  
but  
I spent that morning tidying up the lab so that it fulfilled health and  
safety  
I had the sense that we were the best prepared that we had ever been...'**

and presents a sense that if they adopted their prior strategy of presenting A S Neill's books only, they may have still achieved a similar outcome from the inspection (and having saved the professional time lost by staff in preparing documentation).

**'Fragmented curriculum versus broad curriculum of National Curriculum'**  
Staff claimed that the key criticism levelled at Summerhill by inspectors was that the pupils' curriculum was fragmented by the non-compulsory attendance of lessons. They claimed that in the court it was upheld that this was 'the broadest curriculum

heard of' and that the fragmented curriculum view was based in a classroom-learning model and historical failure by DFEE/OFSTED to consider a holistic learning model which Summerhill embraced:

**'...I personally think there had been a build up if you read from the court case  
Continuously we were a school that didn't responded  
Narrow and fragmented curriculum  
To do with narrow and fragmented curriculum due to attendance of lessons...'**

**One of the boys said What is a broad and balanced curriculum  
This woman Said of the inspection team 'the National Curriculum'  
And I said how can you say the National Curriculum?  
And then Paul Hirst, independent DFEE Advisor, and he was asked what he thinks  
And he said he was not an inspector  
Look if what I saw over last 2 days is the broadest curriculum I ever saw  
Judges were clear that the National Curriculum is not the only broad and balanced curriculum and monopolised  
They kept saying why are you referencing the National Curriculum?  
So it is strange at the end of that people prophetically say we are going to close you down  
We are going to force you to have compulsory lessons**

One member of staff claimed that this was despite prior HMI guidance to educators to view the Summerhill experiment.

**'...Basically the inspectors feedback was an hour long basically saying  
We recommend that you have compulsory lessons  
Do you realise that if that is what you are going to do  
You are going to close this place down  
Because the philosophy of this place is  
I said to NG  
Neill's bust in the room - Why 1949 did HMI say that educationalists should come and visit Summerhill to see what experiment...'**

If OFSTED intended to improve learning in the curriculum, the Summerhill staff member asks where was the guidance to Summerhill in terms of how best to address their weaknesses?



**‘...Third report you think where are they actually helping the school they keep saying the same thing  
No way do they say what the school can do about it...’**

**‘One ...that the national curriculum wasn’t referenced because the whole point was that OFSTED couldn’t mention the NC because we were independent but this is what NG referring to’**

### **3) Parents**

By contrast to the pupil views, the parents interviewed echoed views expressed by the staff of the effect upon the pupils of the inspection. In particular, perhaps, this parent reinforces a view of naivety to inspection prior to 1999 indicated by staff’s testimony:

**‘...School was in a comfy place  
The inspection It came back into the public eye and it wasn’t used to that and you had...’**

**‘Trashed the family’ for the children** Parents explained that for 80 years Summerhill had been seen by past and present students as their primary family. Invasions by Channel 4 earlier, and then OFSTED were deeply disturbing to pupils as incomplete, negative evaluations which potentially damaged the individual’s self image in terms of the sanctity of their upbringing:

**‘...Summerhill is their family  
Their family has been trashed basically  
That’s what I don’t think they realised  
And also for Ex-Summerhillians too, people in their 40s and 50s, felt their home had been betrayed because that’s where their childhood was...’**

**‘...When someone trashes your foundation whatever age you are it destroys you or has a major impact then as it goes on it’s going to be whatever goes on...’**

and further concerns for the children expressed by staff were repeated:

**‘...Emotionally it did affect the children They did feel threatened  
Always this feeling surrounding at Summerhill  
Came from way back in Neill’s day  
Always this feeling that they were going to close the school**

**Under threat all the time  
That they were going to close the school**

**Always been that fear if you read any of Neill's books  
Fear of the authorities some one would come and you know...'**

However, perhaps this quotation suggests that it is unclear whether it was the culture of school which led to a 'culture of fear' for the inspection process.

**'Brought school closer together after court case – sit up and united itself'**

Consistent with others interviewed, parents saw the primary impact of the inspection as emanating a 'Phoenix-style' re-emergence of Summerhillian spirit. A parent noted:

**'...It made Summerhill sit up and unite itself**

**Until critically examine it  
Pulled a whole lot of its basic principles apart  
It questioned what it was doing in its methodology  
Which then made them re-look at it  
In doing that they realised the importance of the  
Freedom of attending lessons a critical one  
And a number of the Social issues that were raised the  
Younger kids being in a mixed dormitory - resourcing  
That was A key point...'**

Another reinforced this perception by avowing:

**'...This freedom of choice  
Something the inspectors didn't like  
Summerhill had to stand up and unite and...'**

Perhaps, also supporting an adversarial view perceived, as being that of OFSTED inspectors.

**'Allowed them to realise importance of freedom over lessons a critical philosophy'** The fear of closure and potential consequences allowed the school community to evaluate the importance of Summerhillian philosophy and re-examine their valuing of non-compulsory lesson attendance. One parent:

**'...Gave them the feeling they can cope**

**Benefits of being pulled apart is to think again  
To validate things  
Most important changes and considered what need to be changed...'**

The outcome of the court case re-engaged a 'fervour' for commitment to the Neill thinking surrounding freedom of the child:

**'...The OFSTED saying they should have compulsory lessons in some form  
That was taken to the community and voted on  
It was discussed in their meetings which they have  
Their regular meetings  
The kids discussed and said no  
The whole ethos of the school  
That freedom of choice  
If you change that aspect of lessons that basic aspect of Summerhill  
that basic principle of Summerhill  
If you change that aspect of lessons you have changed the whole ethos of  
the school forget it you might as well shut the school  
If that was what was going to happen that will happen  
You had to stand up for that basic principle, as everyone saw it, which  
makes Summerhill...'**

**'Betrayal'** – Having cooperated with the inspection process it reinforced the deep betrayal felt from earlier channel 4 programme and continued a sensationalist negative view of Summerhillian existence as is evidenced by one parent who states:

**'...There was one programme  
Channel 4 Cutting Edge most emotional and most despicable in lots of  
ways  
They were duped terribly the kids  
  
What they did get was students from it  
  
From an emotional point of view the school felt totally betrayed  
The whole of the community of Summerhill felt totally betrayed  
By that tv programme...'**

This opinion perhaps further reinforces the suspicion and concern of the outside world by Summerhill which was already expressed by one student who referred to newspaper reporting of the Summerhill case.

**‘Appraisal of school to consider resourcing = positive’** Investment, which may not have been made without inspection, had been a direct result which parents felt pupils could only benefit from.

One parent commented

**‘...It was very traumatic for the students  
But it was very good for the school as it opened up a lot of things  
It make it look at itself and be less insular...’**

**‘...I feel changes have been beneficial to the school  
Everything, resources  
Contact with the Outside world ...’**

and that

**‘...The impact was to expand it – they’ve really tried to positively build  
on Summerhill  
There were things that needed improvement – pastoral care – they’d got  
stuck in their ways...’**

Another parent supported this view and their comments show positive impact in this respect:

**‘....also the Resourcing of the school  
Whether they were keeping up to date, if you like, with classroom  
technology  
Teaching methodology, the domestic arrangements and all that sort of  
thing  
Since the OFSTED inspectors if you stand back  
You can see quite a change in the school  
in the physical appearance of the school,  
partly to do with that and part to do with funding and commitment  
there were whole range of things which came together then  
When someone looks at you critically it does question a whole lot  
Of what you are doing in other areas**

**From any point of view someone comes along and critically appraises  
what you are doing covers a whole lot of things  
Some of which you know and some of which you think...’**

**‘Mixed dormitories, small children’s play lost integrative nature’** The inspectors made recommendations in light of current Social Services thinking surrounding the protection of children ie separation of dormitory sleeping by gender. Consequently, Summerhill experienced gender discrimination between the play of the small children with bonding taking place intra-gender rather than the ‘community of play’ observed

previously. As a result, Summerhill returned to Summerhillian philosophy of gender intergration arguing that the benefits to learning and the community outweighed the need to protect children through preventing mixed gender sleeping provisions. This is evidenced in parental commentary:

**‘...The house kids/cottage kids, the young ones, boys and girls live together same dormitories if you like  
there is no sort of distinction there they all play together  
boys and girls play together  
there wouldn’t be a set gender bias  
what happened when OFSTED said they had to be separated  
Summerhill did comply this  
When they were separated  
What they found - it didn’t work  
The boys weren’t playing with girls  
True Equality issues the modern aspect of emphasis on equal opportunities...’**

With reference to the longevity of the Summerhill experiment, or potential succession planning for Summerhill, one parents asserts:

**‘...He always said that he expected the school to close when he died...’**

Was this a reference to an anti-Summerhill agenda within the state which Neill perceived that his successors would not be as politically able to defend?

### **5.2.3 Summary of Observation and Interview Findings**

In summary, one possible ‘mis-reading’ of the interview data themes is to reveal a suspicion of the inspection processes, potential for a ‘pygmalion effect’ within observation and the variation between pupil and staff/parental views of the value of the inspection. Pupils largely suggest little change at Summerhill subsequent to inspection, which may possibly be as a result of achievement at the court case. There is also a resounding view of beneficial unity in Summerhillian philosophy and practices reinforced by the advent of the threats of inspection by all respondents.

Dissection of Observation and Interview data alongside documentary sources are, in the following analysis chapter, further considered in light of research questions.

Analysis of these themes provides further debate of the overall factors which inspection comprises. Scrutiny of Summerhill can be undertaken by considering its dimensions of leadership, structure and philosophy to facilitate judgement of the nature of the impact post inspection and considered in light of what inspection sets out to achieve ie raising standards.

## **6.0 Analysis - Alternative readings of the Case Study**

This chapter considers the research questions originally posed. Within the case study emerging data collection has thrown up a number of themes and issues. Some possible (mis)readings of the data are presented by the use of filters providing alternative views of the findings. 'Filters' provide some analysis to consider Summerhill as an ambiguity organisation – by its leadership, internal/external features; of OFSTED Summerhill inspection activity against school effectiveness model and the 'deprofessionalisation' of staff via the impact of inspection. By applying such filters, observation and interview data is re-analysed and complemented by material contained within documentary evidence.

### **6.1 The Ambiguity Model**

Following Bush (1995), in terms of his theory surrounding an ambiguity model for analysing the school as an organisation, Summerhill's internal and external projections are considered. The ambiguity model portrays an organisation composed of an aggregation of loosely coupled subunits, which are subject to change (Bush, 1995). The relevance to Summerhill is clearly evidenced by testimony both from students and staff of Summerhill. Students claimed Summerhill as constantly changing. Further, staff interviews indicate that much of the preparation for the 1999 inspection was problematic. Problems may have arisen by the demands of a democratic culture, which loads consensual agreement, upon possible factions or subunits of Summerhill staff. Educational professional 'freedom', and deeply held anarchical teaching philosophies, may have hampered the consensus required, in terms of time span, for agreement of staff to work towards many of the preparations for inspection offered by 'friends' advising Summerhill.

Within an ambiguity school, there is uncertainty over the relative power of parts of the organisation and power varies dependent upon the levels of fluid staff participation. As an analytical model, the ambiguity organisation assumes a 'problematic' technology insofar, generally, the processes are not properly understood. However, loose coupling translates into groups based on common values

(Bush, 1995). The unplanned decisions emanating from a 'fluid democracy' depicted in both Neill's writing, and the testimony of Summerhill staff, and students, stresses the decentralisation of Summerhill. It also illustrates potentially the difficulties of accountability faced by Summerhill. This was evidenced particularly where the leadership was under scrutiny by OFSTED in terms negotiating the inspection agenda and outcome. The observation of the community meeting from this research provides evidence of the levels of participation, which can be equally supported by the observation of the post-meeting discussion with pupils in the café on the second Visitor Day. Pupils stressed that not all the community attended meetings. Further, they recounted the subsequent responsibility to assure democracy of debate between the full community and the nature of the role of chairperson. Yet, it might be drawn that due to sheer volume, at least some of the operational decisions in Summerhill are not decided within community meetings, that a level of authority is given to the Head Teacher to act on their behalf, in good faith. This would impose an ambiguity as to how far this authority spans and how far it may be extended to what decisions - in terms of the inspection - may have been undertaken without full consensual discussion within community meetings.

Within the ambiguity model, vague and unclear objectives provide inadequate guides for institutional behaviour. Rather than pre-determined objectives determining practice, decision making represents an opportunity for discovering goals (Bush, 1995). This might be consistent with the democratic processes of Summerhill since the lengthy pre-inspection staff discussions appear to suggest a review of teaching practices by staff, assisted by externals, leading to a discovery of the varied translations of Neill's philosophy by staff's own interpretive classroom practices. Zoe, head teacher, claimed 240 laws are reviewed by Friday's meetings (Appendix One). However, it may not be the volume of rules which contribute to whether the organisation is ambiguous. Moreover, Neill's writing (1962, 1972, 1992) provide only guidance for the management of the child and their subsequent freedom within a community. It abdicates on specific guidance in operational pedagogic terms by suggesting that negotiation within the community is where the child might resolve any issues that arise.



The rules for the decision making process of Summerhill are clearly defined by the 'democracy' advocated by Neill's work. This contrasts against any possible lack of definition for decision making within the ambiguous structure. Yet, issues surrounding the extent of staff participation reflect the ambiguity model. This is evidenced particularly through the interview with member of staff, who noted that Summerhill staff meetings do not translate into full staff attendance and may be 'dysfunctional' and staff 'don't see it relevant'. Yet, research into other institutions may reflect similar staff attitudes. Where Summerhill differs, perhaps, lies with the delegation, or potential abdication, by the management translating educational practices from Neill's philosophy and allowing freedom of attendance to staff. This 'freedom' dictates a fluid participation and fundamental ambiguity. Equally, the staff member interviewed confessed 'staff don't always get informed', suggesting further ambiguity of purpose and practice. A further feature of the ambiguity model is the formation of cliques or factions who attempt to rationalise the environment to translate its practices (Bush, 1995) and possibly judgements of 'dysfunctional' lie with the perceptions of insiders or outsiders of such groups.

Within the ambiguity model, specific goals may be unclear but teachers accept the broad aims of education. There are predictable features which serve to clarify expected behaviour in accordance with 'rules'. The professional socialisation of staff assimilates the expected patterns through re-mentoring and reduces the uncertainty and unpredictability of education (Bush, 1995). The member of staff discussing the static nature of policy documents, and changing view of OFSTED inspection teams from 1999 inspection to later inspection views, possibly reflects the ambiguity of Summerhill documentation in detailing specific organisational goals. Possibly this suggests that documentation provided predictable features of 'broad brush' Neill educational philosophy and these provided general rules for staff behaviour.

Since much of Neill's work is composed as an antidote to the inadequacy of other educational provision, it may be inferred that Summerhill sought to 'cut itself off' as a sanctuary from state educational provision. In isolating itself from the outside world, despite still admitting pupils internationally, it may be interpreted that Summerhill produced a stable environment for its democratic community. The parent interview which claims Summerhill had become 'stuck in their ways' possibly illustrates this

internal stability. It might be considered that Neill's philosophy sought to provide impervious boundaries for Summerhill. Interviews with staff suggested that educational practice lay with Neill philosophy – even if this might be considered as 'bad' practice. Yet, ambiguity models are not appropriate for stable environments (Bush 1995). By asserting a self-made stability, if Summerhill was an ambiguous organisation, would present itself with difficulties insofar as ambiguous models offer little practical guidance for leadership (Bush, 1995). Parents' interviews suggested OFSTED inspection provided Summerhill with the opportunity to review itself. Possibly, this is indicative of some prior absence of practical application of Neill's educational philosophy outside the micro-child management techniques or the macro-democratic communal freedom through community meetings. Potentially a 'timeless' stable internal Summerhill environment presented weakness for Summerhill in dealing with its external environment. Yet, rather than an isolated secret garden within which ambiguous educational practice might fester, two students claim that Summerhill is 'always changing', this might also be interpreted as a continuous unstable internal Summerhillian environment.

Fluid participation in decision making is further evidenced by the student demands on the institution by their community meetings. Dependant upon the weekly needs of the community, decision-making becomes unplanned by the staff or its leadership without logical sequence. The showing of Neill films to reinforce community understanding of Neill principles, was suggested by a pupil hosting the second Visitor Day. By advocating Neill philosophy, broad aims were 'indoctrinated' within the community so as to 'discover' goals or possibly implement 'slippery' organisational goals potentially through processes akin to a political organisational model. Yet, Political models assume that the organisation emerges from bargaining and negotiation through jockeying for position (Bush, 1995). Whilst the nature of the community meeting is potentially political, despite evidence of some factions or fluid participation, Summerhill does not appear consistent with a political model. There was no evidence within the data collected of 'battlegrounds' or continuing conflicts between participants. Nor was there evidence of current external political influence affecting Summerhillian philosophy or practice (outside preparation through prior production of documentation for OFSTED inspection). However, if the notion of

democratic community meetings is about consensual 'law making', by contrast to the Ambiguity model should Summerhill be considered a collegial model?

Collegial models emphasize that power and decision-making should be shared within the organisation (Bush, 1995). As such, Summerhill might be depicted as purely collegial. There is a common set of values through Neill's philosophies and these lead to shared educational objectives between both staff and students. Size is a feature of Neill philosophy. Popenoe (1970) argues that Neill would have been upset if Summerhill operated on too big a size as it would be impersonal. This might be consistent with the difficulty of lengthy decision-making to avoid contrived collegiality. Equally, collegial models present ambiguity for external accountability. In the case of Summerhill inspection process, the collegial nature of debating all matters within the community led to conflict in terms of the expectations of inspectors of their educational leader. This is possibly illustrated by a staff member's testimony that inspectors did not visit the social committee. Whilst it is claimed OFSTED later apologised that this was due to a lack of inspection time, another interpretation suggested by the staff interviewed might be OFSTED lack of valuing of the democratic or collegial processes in Summerhill. This is exemplified by another staff interview which criticised a pre-occupation with a meeting with Head Teacher and pre-inspection documentation.

A feature of collegial models is that the structure is an objective fact, which has clear meanings for all members of the institution (Bush, 1995). Yet, the pupil view that Summerhill was always changing and the staff indication that staff were changing, might suggest that this is not the case. Summerhill does not provide clear meaning for all members. It might be considered there is a lateral structure for Summerhill. The leader does not strongly influence decisions. This is consistent with a collegial model. However, this leads to tension of leadership conflicting between accountability and participation. Possibly, this could be countered at Summerhill by the upbringing of Zoe as a Summerhillian, in that possibly her natural instincts lie with collegial approaches rather than being the 'first among equals'. However, one feature of the collegial model leadership is that of leadership credibility for staff. Whilst Zoe's credibility in terms of Neill's philosophy is indisputable, that she is not a

trained teacher possibly lends her role closer to the leader of the ambiguity model than then necessary leadership demanded within collegiality?

Whilst consensual decision making seems to lie at Summerhill's heart, fluid participation may mean that the effectiveness of a collegial model is either undermined or its collegial nature forfeited to ambiguity insofar as apathy by staff, or pupils to attend meetings, fails any collegial model. It might be reflected that problems of access in this research may be attributable to factions or internal conflict within Summerhill teaching staff (hinted at by staff interview defending the initial campaign post inspection, where staff felt they were not involved). This may have resulted in constraint as to who would agree to be interviewed. Summerhill might wish to project a collegial, democratic organisation, and this may be true for pupils, any staff agenda might be obscured by community meetings and effectively only evidenced through 'dysfunctional' staff meetings or staff turnover.

Within the constraints of this research, it is not possible effectively to judge this but it is a projection which might facilitate judgement of Summerhill as an ambiguous organisation. Equally, such ambiguity may lie with Summerhillian post-modernist absence of educational or organisational boundaries. An interesting perspective might be that should Summerhill prove to be collegial, then it should be applauded as a 'preferred' model to be aimed for by educational preference (Bush 1995) by contrast to an ambiguous model, which might be judged as chaotic and unstable by OFSTED. The inspection report suggests that inspectors perceived a chaotic educational freedom. Whereas, the court appeal case appears to have perceived Summerhill as collegial and as such, a valid philosophy to delivery of a broad and full curriculum at parent's choice. Perhaps, the leadership of Summerhill provides further evidence of whether Summerhill aligns more closely to collegial or ambiguity models.

### **6.1.1 Leadership of Summerhill**

The educational leadership of Summerhill, in many senses, appears to remain with Neill's advocacy. The current Head, Zoe Redhead, Neill's daughter, declares that she had not expected to lead the organisation. Through her own testimony on first Visitor Day and parent interview, it seems that Zoe's succession from Ena was not

planned insofar as Neill expected Summerhill to close at his death. Further, parental evidence indicates that it was only because emotionally Ena could not close the school that the headship progressed and she was succeeded by Zoe. Zoe, an ex-Summerhillian, is confirmed by one parent as not having the correspondence skills of Neill and there is differing levels of affection for her leadership depicted by parents, staff and students. One interviewed parent confessed that she did not like Zoe but admired her as a supportive Head Teacher at times of personal parental difficulties. Another parent claimed that Zoe was not the 'political animal her father was' and 'didn't have any credibility with the education system' but had inherited a financial problem through lack of investment. This depicts a leader whose main priority, prior to the inspection, was to address financial weaknesses. The parental evidence suggests that inspection occurred too soon in Zoe's time of leadership.

The indistinctness of power and purpose within the Ambiguous Model creates difficulties for leadership. It suggests a need for a different approach to leadership since decisions emerge from a complex process of interaction with leaders as participants in the decision process (Bush, 1995). Zoe, (by her own testimony on first visitor day and observed performance on second visitor day), participates in community meetings but does not take a formal leadership. She implements Neill's democratic philosophy by joining in community debate and voting. This would be consistent with leadership model in the climate of ambiguity and, possibly, imply a 'failure' to control the institution, at least in a manner consistent with formal organisations.

The last chapter identified the 'hands off' management of Zoe. Further, potential for perceived leadership abdication since a member of staff recounts the court case stating 'staff manage themselves' and that the children would raise issues through the community meetings if they were unhappy with staff. Equally, the staff interview recognises the problematic nature of pupil policing staff performance, reflecting that criticism of staff is considered damning insofar as pupils consider Summerhill teaching staff as their friends. From this analysis of the internal dimensions of Summerhill leadership, perhaps, it is difficult to ascertain a clear model. Therefore, discussion of the external elements may provide further analysis.

### 6.1.2 Ambiguity Model - The External Environment

Potentially, external issues for inspection arise for Summerhill, if drawn as an ambiguous organisation in the expectations of inspectors. The ambiguity model is much represented in terms of problems for its sustainability in meeting the needs of their environments (Bush, 1995). The externally generated turbulence of UK education is a feature historically recognised as the product of a 'market economy' provision by state education. By its independence, Summerhill wanted to 'opt out' of domestic educational demands. Yet, OFSTED inspection processes sought to view Summerhill via a modernist educational construct influenced by the external educational environment. As such, potential judgement of the ambiguous organisation is hazardous and irrational activity attempting to reconcile external influences (Bush 1995). The external environment might be a source of ambiguity and unpredictability. Staff interview data suggests that Summerhill fought to curtail its involvement from external environments by basing its inspection preparations in interpretations of Neill's philosophy. Wording was prepared and the vague nature of democratic principles possibly presented a 'confused' pattern for the outside world. This was judged by OFSTED via straightforward assumptions, which might be attributed to formal models. Potentially, internal ambiguity and unpredictable features of curriculum planning, judged as 'non-compliance' to inspectors expectations, may have led to Summerhill into not meeting its UK educational external environment. Pupil interviews of unplanned student-managed 'learning' taking place outside classroom at the will of the child or staff concern of the educational constraint of producing policies at Summerhill and the inability of policy documents in reflecting Neill's educational freedoms probably illustrate this.

Yet, positively, the ambiguous organisation might be recognised as a counter to the unpredictability of educational turbulence which might be failed by rational processes of problem solving (Bush, 1995). However, the notions of planning anticipated by OFSTED lie within 'rational' responses by schools post inspection. Summerhill's post-HMI actions may have been judged as 'chaotic' or 'unstable'. If Summerhill is viewed as an ambiguous organisation, its inability to reconcile inspection customary structures potentially might have led to OFSTED's lack of understanding of Summerhill, (claimed by staff and student interviews). Yet, the ambiguity model

offers valuable insights for schools if assessed alongside other theories of educational management. Alone, it is insufficient to explain behaviour and its relevance may appear over-stated by its advocates (Bush, 1995). An external weakness for Summerhill facing inspection may lie with its consistence to an ambiguity model, and by virtue of that nature may lead to inspection judgement as inadequate educational provision.

Given the constraints of the evidence provided though perhaps it would be a matter for interpretation whether Summerhill fell more to an ambiguous, collegial model. The conclusion from such analysis, perhaps, could be that OFSTED's judgements in 1999 were based by the potential responses of a formal organisation. Therefore, the collegial's normative values obscuring reactions to inspection may equally have presented conflict for Summerhill at inspection.

## **6.2 School Effectiveness and Improvement**

Both in its preparation for inspection and its subsequent post-inspection action planning or implementation, the organisational model analysis depicts some of the issues for Summerhill. It is OFSTED judgement of whether Summerhill provided 'effective' education or whether educational provision might be improved through inspection, which provides a further filter to analyse and consider research questions of this thesis:

*Q What was the government/OFSTED inspection criteria for inspecting independent schools?*

*Q What was the OFSTED schema for improvement through inspection of individual schools?*

In light of the School effectiveness/improvement debate introduced in the Literature Review, staff interviews claimed a lack of interest by inspectors in learning outside the classroom and a focus on classroom observation and lessons. This reflects the perceived process by Summerhill of the validity of OFSTED judgement surrounding both effective schooling and improvement in the inspection. It is the 'linchpin' of the

debate of the appeal and court case that the OFSTED inspection failed to assess the educational provision adequately in terms of the failing to consider learning which was not graded within OFSTED observation criteria. Further, OFSTED failed (without reference to the National Curriculum, which applied only to the state sector), to provide guidance to Summerhill in their failure to impart a broad and balanced curriculum. A key argument of the debate, it might be argued, that it was the constraints of a systematic observation schedule and OFSTED reporting that undermined OFSTED in defending their approach in court. Perhaps, the appeal case turned on an argument of words rather than a fundamental discussion of whether the OFSTED judgements were appropriate in light of their governmental remit of providing information for politicians (Snelling, 2002) and improvement through inspection.

Inspectors are required to make multi-factor accounts (Ferguson et al, 2002) despite consistent time and cost constraints (Stoneham 2001). The Summerhill data suggests that OFSTED apology of lack of time was contributory to inspection judgements and the schools acceptance of their findings. Pupil recollections of the differing personal approaches of inspectors from friendly to intimidating and staff pre-conceptions of the lead inspector as 'jolly' 'Father Christmas' 'with a sense of humour', coupled with pupil and staff pre-dispositions of inspection and potential hostility, impacted upon the acceptance of validity of the inspection judgements as any exact measure of performance. It is apparent from staff interview that one member of staff viewed inspection as a direct threat to the organisation. This motivated documentation preparations. Another staff member, who had participated in prior inspection, felt Summerhill was well-prepared and that it was Summerhill's hostility to inspection which had previously left Summerhill vulnerable to inspection. Concern as to prior 'over inspection' of Summerhill was also voiced by the staff member and echoed by pupil perception that the inspection was intended to close down Summerhill.

However, what might be drawn from both the generic inspection processes detailed in the Literature Review, and then the judgements of the Summerhill OFSTED report, is that potentially there were multiple themes leading to inspectors' concerns surrounding Summerhill. However, the report and appeal case focused upon non-attendance of lessons. It had been beliefs surrounding the value of Neill's



philosophies and Summerhill practices which fundamentally resulted in the production of the Notice of Closure and subsequently, those beliefs which were reviewed within the appeal case.

The methodology for measuring pupil progress in key stages based in age stems from the reductionist school effectiveness inputs model. Rather than free consultancy advocated by Ormston and Shaw (1994), one Summerhill staff complained that inspectors failed to identify how the school might improve. By contrast, the inspection report offers a failing by the school to implement previous inspection action points or perhaps, a failing by inspection to improve the school through inspection action points. There is an inference (1999 OFSTED inspection report) that inspectors judged that Neill's philosophies were 'held out' as a smoke screen to avoid inspectors directing the organisation to educational improvement. Certainly, the account in the literature review by Walmsley (1969) presented that progressive inspectors had been historically willing to accommodate Neill's approaches but that, within that philosophy, the Summerhill standards for pedagogical practice lacked fulfilment. Yet, equally, the inspection report and appeal case argument focussed around a 'broad and balanced curriculum'. This presented difficulties since the school effectiveness debate includes the assessment of learning. The Summerhill reponse to this, (OFSTED report and identified within a staff interview), was not accepting assessment as part of the Summerhill curriculum. They asserted that the assessment lay with the child's judgements rather than part of the analysis of the performance of the educational provision by teaching staff or outsiders. Further, key issues with regards to what is to be assessed were fundamentally different insofar as the OFSTED 1999 inspection clearly groups pupil progression into categories (for example attainment in subjects such as mathematics, english, citizenship, history and art based upon course work evidence and oral interviews). Whereas, both Neill philosophy and Summerhill practice seems to concentrate upon 'freedom' and individual's integration into the Summerhill community with preparation for life as the educational goal. Interestingly, the National Commission suggested:

'it is the role of education to interpret and pass on the values of society and stimulate people to think for themselves and to change the world around them'  
(National Commission on Education 1993)

which potentially is OFSTED's remit, to interpret education in terms of 'good practice' values. Summerhill claims to stimulate pupils to think for themselves and to change the world.

The conflict between OFSTED and Summerhill approaches provides interesting debate then, if reflected against Lord Walton's (1993) independent inquiry into UK long-term education development. Yet Walton (1993) additionally suggested literacy and basic skills as essential pre-requisites. The Commission's Framework for Learning also suggested greater flexibility in how learning takes place and pupil's own role in their learning as essential if societal and work changes are to be met. Further advocacy for schools to reflect upon own practice and implement change to the needs of their pupils of the report to raise performance moves away from OFSTED comparative exercises with other schools to judge performance is offered. Yet, this is contradicted by Walton's (1993) demanding of greater public accountability through scrutiny of results indicators to 'correct' failure. Possibly this reflects a 'catch all' philosophy from which OFSTED inspection processes selected parts of governmental agenda for their criteria against which they judged Summerhill as failing. Sammons, Hillman, Mortimore (1995) conducted a review of school effectiveness research and identified Key Characteristics of Effective Schools:

Eleven factors for Effective Schools (p8)

1. Professional Leadership
2. Shared vision and goals
3. A learning environment
4. Concentration on teaching and learning
5. Purposeful teaching
6. High expectations
7. Positive reinforcement
8. Monitoring progress
9. Pupil rights and responsibilities
10. Home-school partnership
11. A learning organisation

It might be concluded that it was against this criteria that OFSTED judged Summerhill. Potentially, the report suggests this could have been the focus. However, such prescriptive, modernist construct of the 'effective school' would mean that a democratic school might be unlikely to meet all criteria eg item 8 monitoring progress? This is particularly referenced by the staff interview which annotates the discussion with inspectors about pupils whose progression is backwards. Absence of documentation recording processes to support evidence of meeting this model might also have served Summerhill historically with prospects of further inspections insofar as a failure to adhere to the model. Equally failure to provide documents which supported adherence to this model may have left Summerhill vulnerable despite any pre-inspection staff debate to the content which might appropriately reflect philosophically the democratic nature of schooling within Summerhill.

Dimmock (2000) argues that school effectiveness is essentially reviewing 'failings' by schools. Therefore, judgements of Summerhill pupil attainment at key stages in core subjects would lead OFSTED to perceptions of failure, despite Summerhill appeal defence that final examination results did not support judgements of educational failing. Unfortunate wording in the OFSTED report that Summerhill was 'drifting' led to the direct claim that this could not be substantiated within the appeal. Essentially, may have been functionalist school effectiveness steering OFSTED judgements towards popular 1999 political values for accountability. Or possibly, genuine professional concern by inspectors of a 'failing school' resulting from an inspection model which copes only with the rational approaches of formal organisations coupled with 1999 educational intolerance of progressive educational approaches. Staff and pupils interviewed reflected a view of intolerance towards Summerhill but the absence of OFSTED participation within this research, does not allow for defence in terms of any sincere views. Their judgements are represented only through the public reporting of the inspection report and the subsequent appeal case and Statement of Intent.

OFSTED (1994) suggests there is no single route for the improvement of schools. Yet, it can only be considered that their concerns for Summerhill were such that their sole route for improvement was to issue the Notice of Complaint. One analysis for subsequent improvement might be provided by the concerns with regards to

protection of the pupils, also indicating differences of beliefs surrounding child vulnerability. The report outlined concerns with regards to accommodation and potential child abuse. Zoe's views surrounding bathing within The first Visitor Day suggest a disagreement with 1999 'anxieties'. This could be interpreted as a reflection directly emanated from Neill's (1962, 1972, 1992) 'controversial' writings surrounding child sexuality and perversion and societies repressive educational practices. It might be a reflection of the isolation by Summerhill from a changing society - Summerhill's family-styled community becoming ignorant of child protection situations through naivety. The post inspection 'improvement' outcome in this area proved to be two-fold. In meeting the Notice of Complaint, Summerhill segregated pupils. However, parental interview recounts Summerhillian perceived gender imbalances within the small children's play led to post appeal case Summerhill reverting back to prior practices. A cynical analysis might be that post inspection 'victory' left Summerhill empowered to ignore the OFSTED action point and this countered the intended OFSTED 'improvement'.

Changes to accommodation feature as improvements in the opinions of pupils and possibly, without inspection review, may not have occurred. However, School improvement potentially should be an approach to educational change that has the twin goals of enhancing student outcomes as well as strengthening the school's capacity for managing change. As such, successful innovation is usually linked to strategies that incorporate fundamental organisational change and directly address the culture of the school (Hopkins, 1993). Yet it would appear that the culture of Summerhill was not a vehicle for improvement by OFSTED, unless improvement is defined as the changing of their culture by compulsory attending lessons. To which the court appeal would not have changed Summerhillian culture but reinforced both their commitment to freedom of child to attend at child's discretion and a Neill-philosophy driven 'democratic' culture.

Other probably unintentional improvements at Summerhill stemming from the OFSTED inspection, 'discovered' in the data collection, actually resulted through Summerhill's pre-appeal review process. Whilst some pupils reflected there were no changes in their perceptions, parents saw that Summerhill not only invested in its premises but, importantly, revisited philosophical educational foundations. In

undertaking such a review Neill's approaches were re-endorsed by the teaching staff and the community had become more committed to and fundamentally focussed upon Neill's advocacy. A confidence in their practice was a direct result of the court appeal. This success provided them with a defence for future inspection. Parents perceived these as improvements and certainly staff and pupil interviews support a re-kindled spirit of Summerhill as a positive outcome, which also led to reducing the isolation from society. Staff, parents and pupils' interviews reflect a discovery of a wider network of 'friends of Summerhill' and recognition for the need for external links. One perception might be that these are all threat-driven satisfiers to anxieties regarding future inspections. Alternatively, these might be considered as a reinforcement of the success of longevity of Summerhill school philosophy but clearly, in terms of the School Effectiveness and Improvement agenda, there has been no evidence that improvement could be measured by improved performance in league tables or examination/testing success. From which it might be considered that the unintended 'improvement' for Summerhill lay with a fundamental failing of the OFSTED inspection to raise standards in 'a failing school', if so judged in light of OFSTED criteria and school effectiveness theory.

Hopkins' (1993) thinking concerning school improvement perhaps extends this filter and might be used for further analysis. He suggests that School improvement approaches to educational change embody the long term goal of moving towards the vision of the 'problem solving' or 'thinking' or 'relatively autonomous' school. Clearly, Summerhill is an autonomous school, yet the parent and staff interview evidence suggests that, whilst a review of practices was undertaken in light of the threat of OFSTED's Notice of Closure, the longer term goal for the school fundamentally lay with future avoidance of any spectre of adverse inspection. Hopkins (1993) provides the assumptions surrounding educational change from OECD sponsored International School Improvement Project (ISIP) which might further facilitate analysis of post-inspection improvement at Summerhill:

- **The school as a centre of change rather than assuming all schools are the same** – clearly the concern voiced by Summerhill is that change was being forced upon them by a Notice of Complaint and they did not own that change as simply they appealed 3 of the items of the complaint. Although it can be

reflected that they did make changes in line with other items so there was an element of agreement where they became centre of the change but principally, the change was presented by an external influence.

- **A systematic approach to change through a carefully planned and managed process that takes place over a period of several years** – clearly the OFSTED report suggests that systematic change had not been the result of prior inspections, which was further evidenced by the number of previous inspections. Moreover, the outcome of the appeal case perhaps suggests a ‘halting of change’ which was brought about through outside forces.

However, interviews with staff suggest the remaining ISIP assumptions as measures for school improvement were clearly not evident as a result of OFSTED inspection:

- **There was no evidence that a key focus for change are the internal conditions that support the teaching learning process** – the teaching practices were largely unaffected insofar as the report focused upon attendance and dealing with non-attendance – which remains unchanged.
- **The accomplishing of educational goals more effectively in terms outcome or student scores on achievement tests** was unaffected given no philosophical change post inspection
- There was no **evidence of any multi-level perspective** since the school acts alone and did not become embedded in any UK educational system but remained both independent and separate. Only Summerhill’s establishment of wider external links was a consequence of the appeal campaign.
- **Any linkage between top down and bottom up, diagnosis, priority goal setting and implementation perceived** in school improvement terms was inappropriate to the collegial or ambiguity model within which Summerhill continues to operate.

- However, a **drive towards institutionalisation change** was possibly successful post inspection given a review of practice prior to the appeal. Again, unless it had become part of the natural behaviour of teachers in the school, it would not meet the ISIP assumption since any implementation as a result of single inspection, by itself, is not enough to meet the wider concept of improvement.

‘The Logic of School Improvement’ (Hopkins, 1993) is that it emphasises that school improvement to educational change involves:

- Implementing educational reform in the form of identified school priorities
- Creating the conditions to sustain and manage change in schools
- Embedding the priorities and conditions within an overall strategy

that, it all depends on the aspirations and experience of the schools and individuals involved. The more open and democratic the school climate the more effective school improvement should prove to be (Hopkins, 1993). However, an educational audit for abnormality may throw up a very different conclusion from healing and advancement (Reynolds, 2001), particularly as studies of effective schools have focused upon achievement in basic skills (Reid, Hopkins, Holly 1987). Summerhill’s OFSTED inspection report shows focus upon basic skills and as such, Summerhill would prove ‘abnormal’ insofar as their ‘failure’ to follow ‘normal’ expectations of an ‘effective school’. It is this aspect referred to by the staff interview that it was

**‘...ironic that every single inspection over past 10 years repeated Narrow and Fragmented curriculum because of choice...’**

evidence of an abnormality of the curriculum delivery effectively through ‘non-compliance’. If OFSTED inspection is considered in light of Reynolds (2001) work, it would appear that clear influences of school effectiveness leads inspections. Fidler (2001) suggests that if a series of uni-dimensional perspectives are used to build a holistic picture then differing lens are demanded. Summerhill’s inspection by OFSTED was conducted on OFSTED’s inspection criteria, which might be accepted as based in the concepts of an ‘effective school’ and the target for ‘improvement’. If the determinants of an ‘effective school’ are conceptualised from institutions which

do not share educational approaches or philosophy, Fidler's (2001) assertion that it is a 'slippery concept' which assesses 'effectiveness' by measurement through the relative effectiveness of other schools and illustrates the flaws of such an inspection approach. Given the uniqueness of the 'democratic' philosophy of Summerhill, it is perceivable that a 'one appraisal' approach to independent schooling based upon an 'effective' institution may not reflect what makes Summerhill effective, (or not). Equally value judgements as to the behaviour of a school may have impacted upon the inspection.

### **6.2.1 Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development**

Having previously identified the purpose of OFSTED inspection outlined in terms of improvement and accountability (Snelling 2002, Cullingford 1999) perhaps as important as a background to the evidence examined from the Summerhill inspection would be to reflect upon the perceived role of Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development. Within an OFSTED discussion paper, (February 1994), Stewart R Sutherland, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools clarifies:

'...the fact that successive pieces of educational legislation have had at their centre the belief that education in this country is not only about the gaining of knowledge and the acquiring of essential skills ... but also about personal development in its fullest sense...

A statement such as this, at the heart of our political and legal framework for state-funded education, reminds us of some important facts about the relationship between education and the society which pays for it ...' p 1

'...The thread which education can offer them consists of two closely interwoven strands. The first consists of personal relationships. One inevitable implication of the 1992 Act is that all those working in education ... be entitled to expect from others, good standards of behaviour, marked by respect and responsibility.



It follows that teachers should be able to operate on ... established conventions designed to create good order...'

This extract provides a wider explanation of the further role of the OFSTED inspectors in terms of the behaviour 'models' anticipated for schools. This central steering suggests behaviour as a control feature and possibly one taken from 'effective schools' (Bottery, 2001). This places OFSTED inspection in the domain of school effectiveness rather than claimed 'improvement through inspection'. Such evaluation might be held out further by excerpts from an OFSTED discussion paper, (February 1994):

'Inspectors concern themselves with the complete educative cycle. They are, of course, interested in what the school offers (the inputs and processes: its provision); but they are also, fundamentally, looking towards the outcomes of education, in what the pupil derives from that provision: ... The comparatively easy part of inspection is to focus on provision...' p3

'...Not only is personal development erratic, unpredictable and in many respects long-term phenomenon ...not only has concern about the moral development of young people been given a particular twist by news events in recent months ...governmental policies in education are aiming to address problems over the behaviour and attendance of school children'... p3

'One of OFSTED's key duties, under the (1992) Act, is to construct guidance and criteria for inspection, in order to make sure that inspectors are able to evaluate schools' work consistently...' p5

The drive for consistency between schools and wider state-provision would suggest problems of attendance would appear to be a 'school of thought' driven by the 'answers' offered by School Effectiveness ideas. It is interesting to reflect that Summerhill did not have an attendance problem. Simply, that as a boarding school where lessons were not compulsory, attendance was not a feature. However, the problem of lessons 'not being compulsory' was the key theme of the OFSTED 1999 inspection and the one that the appeal largely based its argument around. Therefore,

possibly, the reasons why this contributed to the OFSTED judgement might be as a result of the state-based 'problems' of behaviour and attendance of school age children nationally rather than claims by Summerhill staff of Summerhill being targeted.

OFSTED recognise the difficulties of considering the educational experience of learners in terms of spiritual development. Whilst statistical clarity in terms of academic achievements and comparisons can be made, potentially, judgement of spiritual development is a critical to the Summerhill experience. The foundation of Neill's philosophy is the Summerhill-style preparation for life, rather than academic achievement, despite criticism for the vague ideology of such 'natural development' (Barrow, 1978). Whilst OFSTED recognises the complexity of assessing these areas, there is clear steerage within their training material (A Self Study course for OFSTED Trained Inspectors Course Booklet, The new Framework for the inspection of schools (1996)) as to where inspectors might find examples of where values or social skills might be derived. Possibly, this represents a need for central control/direction over behaviour and what is acceptable behaviour in 'effective' schools.

An OFSTED publication, A Self Study course for OFSTED Trained Inspectors Course Booklet, The new Framework for the inspection of schools, effective from Summer term 1996, claims that the framework used to inspect schools in 1999, at the time of the Summerhill inspection, had changed as a result of previous inspections. Changes allowed clearer identification of strengths and weaknesses and more openness and professional discussion with inspectors about what they see. The reports could reflect a school's particular circumstances. There would be less emphasis on form-filling and judgement of paper based policies and a greater emphasis on the quality of work in the classroom (p4). OFSTED acknowledged that the term 'Achievement' used in the inspection framework had not been understood by the differing audiences who might make decisions affecting the school. It suggested the evaluation of pupil achievement should be more strongly based in concrete evidence. As a result, this would lead to more objective evaluations and be accepted as fair to schools from differing circumstances, recognising inclusion of pupils from differing prior attainment. Individual attainment could be evaluated in terms of how well pupils reached or exceeded the standard expected for a typical pupil of that age.

Whilst it recognised that for some schools, attainment would be low, the shift of importance would lie with the progress individuals make. Effectively, this might be a 'common-sense' reference to 'improvement'. Possibly in line to Neill's arguments, OFSTED (1996) recognises that almost all pupils progress over time but their progress is not necessarily linear. Judgement about whether a pupil is making progress that is reasonable, good or poor should be made in relation to how well all pupils of similar prior attainment progress during the time.

OFSTED possibly recognised the weakness of its modernist quantitative roots as the booklet explains to inspectors

'... a judgement about teaching is not made on the basis of an arithmetical aggregation of criteria which are or are not met, but on the net effect of the strengths and weaknesses on the educational standards achieved. It is perfectly reasonable to judge teaching as good even though all the criteria may not be met. Particular attention should be paid to whether teaching promotes high educational standards for all pupils...' (p32).

In providing this guidance, clear neo-conservative undertones suggest that high educational standards for all might be judged at organisational level. Equally, inspectors might use 'professional judgement' to identify where teaching is good or bad rather than considering the vagaries of learning that might take place.

The general approach appears to present a traditional school effectiveness model, where a good teacher or school is one that follows particular approaches to teaching rather than the way that might prove to be a better method to facilitate learning within the learning environment. It would appear that this direction for 'more effective' compliance is in line with the criticism of Bennett and Harris (2001) 'emperor's new clothes' image of effective action planning for school improvement. In summary then, whatever the intention of OFSTED might have been, the question remains as to whether inspection of Summerhill really intended compliance to centrally-stated educational preferences.

The OFSTED framework of 1993 has now been updated. Yet, OFSTED has had such a potent influence that there is concern that OFSTED has dominated and 'colonised' teachers' thinking. Further, a new set of assumptions derived from OFSTED discourse has become a constant, controlling influence on schools (Ferguson et al, 2000). Heads are now overwhelmingly satisfied with their school's inspection, research found that there were wide variations in time that it took for schools to 'recover' from inspection week (p13). The staff interview which suggests that Summerhill had taken a long time to recover reinforces this finding. Yet, methodological advances, particularly the development of multilevel techniques have led to improvements in the estimation of school effects. These have enabled researchers to take better account of differences between schools and the characteristics of their pupil intakes and facilitated exploration of issues such as consistency and stability in schools' effects upon different kinds of outcomes and over time (Reynolds, 1976). However, it is critical to appreciate these suggest some fundamental causality which might be attributed to particular features of the schools and at best, this would be a reductionist view of Summerhill.

Inspection might be termed as 'a wake up call' (Coleman, 2000), and that Summerhill parents may have seen it as such an opportunity. However, other systems of inspection may go some way to involve the school in identifying aims against which progress will be measured and incorporate measures of self-evaluation. Schools in South Australia are required to provide plans that include issues identified by the school, and provide the focus for external inspection (Coleman, 2000). The approach adopted by the European Council of international Schools means that the evaluation and accreditation process is based on self-study followed by a visit from a team from other schools to view the school on its own philosophy and objectives and seek ways to helpfully realise potential (Coleman, 2000). There are doubts as to whether the inspection process nationally has led to improvement (Lumby, 2001). The lack of impact of inspection outside of Summerhill seems to stem from allocation of little time for feedback and that the feedback OFSTED provided offered no new insights. Where inspection fulfilled its purpose of providing an account to the public, since ownership of the process did not lie with staff, the second purpose of supporting improvement is more questionable. The attitude of staff also impacts upon potential for school improvement (Lumby, 2001). Time spent assuring staff that the process is

positive and to be approached with confidence within the overall quality approach of the institution potentially leads to inspection being less stressful and having greater impact on improvement.

Lumby (2001) suggests that if the process is moderated to other stakeholders eg parents, they may be called upon to provide data for the inspection and to act upon its findings. However, where the inspection process becomes a detached and imposed exercise, viewed with suspicion and resentment by staff, the likelihood is that the emphasis will be on surviving rather than use the experience. Further, upon providing stage-managed documents which may help measure quality at a moment in time but do not improve the institution. Possibly, the management of the inspection by Summerhill reflects an initial hostility to external inspection evolving later to a perceived 'threat' which instigated the preparation of documentation in anticipation (Staff interview 2). It seems then that rather than any improvements resulting from planned, positive improvement emanating from a positive inspection raising standards, they were a consequence of the need for post-inspection survival.

Evaluation is an essential part of management, yet the importance of ownership of evaluation findings further calls into question the use of externally driven inspection (Lumby, 2001).<sup>4</sup> Yet to contradict any wider perceptions that school inspections have not brought about positive change, Lumby (2001) suggests that in Hong Kong, in 1998, the majority of schools offered that the findings of QA inspection teams helped to affirm the schools' attainment and achievements and boost staff morale. As such, a further filter which considers staff morale in terms of any likely contribution to positive change for Summerhill resulting from the 1999 inspection might be considered.

### **6.3 Deprofessionalisation of Summerhill Staff**

A filter to facilitate further analysis of the impact of the inspection might comprise then consideration of criticism surrounding lack of organisational or staff ownership of the inspection process, and professional undermining of teaching staff, that a unidimensional measure of educational provision by OFSTED might emanate. The literature review suggested OFSTED inspection substantiated an emasculation of the

teaching profession (Bottery, 2001) providing little time for emotional renewal (Ferguson et al, 2000). These views can be confirmed from the interviews with staff and parents. Summerhill claims of OFSTED's 'lack of understanding' for Neill's educational philosophy probably reflects a deficiency of recognition by OFSTED of any professional right to an alternative ideological stance by Summerhill.

Moreover, negative feelings emanate, relating to stress derived from the inspection process (Burns, 2000). This can be identified by the staff commentary re-counting the pre-inspection discussion, and subsequent 'fallout' concerning post-inspection and the pre-appeal at Summerhill. Suggestions that inspection adds to workload (Jeffrey and Wood, 1996) is further described by the number of pre-inspection meetings, the invitation of external advisors and time length of the pre-inspection process identified in staff interviews seems a clear outcome for Summerhill staff. Summerhill employs House Parents to support much of the accommodation element of the independent boarding school, it should be recognised that Summerhill staff would also attract duties outside 'normal' teaching if they live within the community. As such, additional meetings and pre-inspection preparation would impact upon time when other teaching activities might take place insofar as live-in teachers are possibly never 'off duty'.

Perceptions of political agenda and baggage (Burns, 2000) are further identified by Summerhill staff and students. Clearly, one staff member concludes, in line with Collins (1996), OFSTED offered limited constructive impact by the complaint that OFSTED identified weaknesses but provided only one remedy – compulsory attendance to lessons. In line with Sterne, (1999), who suggests advice is not always provided by OFSTED, Summerhill staff clearly confirmed this perception and as staff claimed that OFSTED simply didn't understand Summerhill so that any feedback was inappropriate insofar as it addressed issues which were not appropriate to Summerhill. Jeffrey and Wood's (1996) criticism stemming from the inspection process did not generally apply insofar as it appears that only the pre-inspection documentation preparation increased their workload. One member of staff suggests that only superficial 'tidying up' was undertaken on the morning of the OFSTED inspection. No-one interviewed suggested that there was any feeling of being 'tarred with the same brush' stigma of coming from a failing school, or scapegoating of the teaching

staff. The tone of webpage Summerhill: Myths and Realities further evidences a clear feeling of ‘political baggage’ and wanting to retaliate to the OFSTED report. Coleman’s (2000) ‘Fears associated with Inspection model’ possibly, therefore, facilitates better analysis of Summerhill perceptions:

- 1) **inspections started with a degree of mistrust** – clearly indicated within the work of Neill (1962), he perceived an intention to close Summerhill down after his death. Again, the staff and students interviewed offer their concerns of an governmental anti-Summerhill agenda, suggesting Summerhill as a target confirmed by their claims that Summerhill was contained on a ‘hit list’ and was the ‘most inspected’ school.

One staff interview suggests Zoe was very emotionally concerned by the potential inspection outcome and further pupil interviews confirm Zoe’s distress at the time of the OFSTED interview with head teacher.

- 2) **worries about the disruption of the normal working life of the school** – this is clearly evidenced by the staff who perceived that the pupils were greatly affected by the inspection process, suggesting a lengthy recovery period for the School. By contrast, in pupil interviews they repeatedly seem to ‘have forgotten’ the event and perceive the event as an historical happening that they were proud to be part of.
- 3) **worries about the final report not reflecting accurately the situation in the school** – clearly, the appeal seeks to contest the reporting of the school and the point that Summerhill’s standards were ‘drifting’ was one that OFSTED were unable to substantiate.
- 4) **worries about the particular nature and composition of your team** – generally, there was limited evidence of this, other than that which might be implied by both parents and staff interviews which expressed comments surrounding Zoe’s educational competence in comparison to the literary and argument skills of A S Neill. Equally, the discussion within first staff interview surrounding the special needs students infers concern as to where

OFSTED had gained information surrounding Summerhill's Special Needs practices. Comment suggests an anxiety of a member of staff who may have mis-informed inspectors portraying concerns of a 'weak link' in the Summerhill staff. This anxiety possibly stemming from the negative perceptions of the nature of inspection and its hidden agenda and 'hard' evaluative methodology.

- 5) **concerns about lack of 'after care'** - by contrast to other aspects of Coleman's (2000) model addressed herein, there was no evidence of fears concerning 'after care' expressed by Summerhill community
  
- 6) **fear of harm to external reputation of school possibly even leading to closure and redundancy** – whilst there was evidence of real fear of Summerhill closing by staff (interview 2 – appendix one) prior to inspection by the recounting of perceptions of Zoe, there was no evidence of any concern as to external reputation of Summerhill. Moreover, pupil claim that the global reputation was enhanced by media attention post-inspection leading increased student numbers. The pupil suggesting that prior to inspection, there was a perception that Summerhill might have already closed.

It is possible to infer that one of the potential emotions may have been fear of harm to the external reputation but did not constitute part of the data collected. However, pupil interviews supported their personal concerns in terms of the future of their education should Summerhill closed post-inspection.

- 7) **Fear on the part of the individual teacher of being graded as unsuccessful** – this is another feature which was not apparent from interview data. The suggestion by teaching staff was that adherence to Neill philosophy rendered 'successful' teaching and there was no evidence that any one teacher was less than successful in interpreting Summerhillian community ideology individually.

This appears to provide clear evidence then from interview data comparable to Coleman's (2000) model of fears and the emotional context, and subsequent impact of



the inspection (Jeffrey and Wood, 1996), is further evidenced. Moreover, the subsequent de-professionalisation of staff is suggested by feelings of 'powerlessness' in the face of the OFSTED inspection. This may be levelled by a lack of staff understanding leading to inappropriate preparation prior to inspection – by producing evidence which inspectors did not require (staff interview claims that inspectors did not review all documentation or observe pre-organised pupil activities). Alternatively, it might be considered that there was a lack of respect for the professionalism of teaching staff in their advocacy of Neill's educational ideology. As such, an inspection process which measured the institution against OFSTED's national framework – despite any claims that independent schools could negotiate the nature of their inspection – attributes a failure of recognition of the professional judgement of progressive teachers. Moreover, this might be judged as concurrent to OFSTED reductionist view of effective teaching (Fielding, 1997) disenfranchising Summerhill teachers from their professional assessment of pupil progress for those in their care. Certainly, the court case appeared to uphold the professional right of the teaching staff to facilitate an alternative curriculum furthering the point that the outcome of inspection was a de-professionalisation of the staff.

There was little evidence of changing relationships between groups of staff (Busher, 2001). However, it is recognised the limitations of the data collected to analyse and the earlier inference of possible conflict drawn from lack of access to the wider Summerhillian staff. Yet, an earlier observation lies with the strengthening of the relationships between Summerhill community in the subsequent appeal case. This suggests a possible potential positive outcome of the re-professionalising of Summerhill staff post inspection appeal.

In summary then, the analysis of the material through three filters suggests a number of issues have arisen from the conduct of the 1999 Summerhill inspection and subsequent appeal case. Possibly Bush's (1995) Ambiguity model suggests there are basic problems for the logic of OFSTED inspection when approaching organisations which do not respond in the rational fashion of the formal organisation. This supports the concept that one model cannot fit all in inspection since contextual-fit may impact decisions, even where the judgements are made sincerely with a genuine attempt to improve the organisation.

The debate surrounding 'school effectiveness and improvement', in the analysis section of this work, proposes that using the criteria of a successful school as the measure of a school for subsequent abnormality is deficient in complexity. The OFSTED reductionist model from school effectiveness study, potentially, fails OFSTED ability to consider how standards might be raised by 'improvement through inspection'. Equally, the case of Summerhill illustrates the limitations of models which seek to review educational experience from modernist constructs based in inputs-outputs, particularly when there are sincere concerns regarding the educational performance or wider provision of the school. The filter perhaps offers that it is the values and beliefs from which the process emanates which influences judgements. If inspection is to avoid any judicial downfalls, 'robust' arguments are needed to support judgements. Moreover, that if an inspection genuinely seeks to improve institutions and raise standards of education, a reductionist, time and cost constrained model is unlikely to facilitate intended improvement for institutions, particularly those which fall outside the realms of state control such as Summerhill.

Finally, the filter examining the data in terms of de-professionalisation of staff reinforces literature in terms of evidence of stressful, demoralising processes which fail to inform professionals to facilitate ownership of change for improvement (Jeffrey and Wood, 1996). Filtering the staff views indicates potential disruption to students in their studies from adverse inspection, which is not the intention of Raising Standards agenda. Despite pupils generally being resilient and reflecting varying levels of memories of the events, staff clearly found the process damaging to the organisation. It is further an interesting suggestion that the appeals process both 're-professionalised' staff and possibly undermined further 'improvement' when Summerhill rescinded any changes (eg accommodation arrangements) in the face of success at appeal.

## **7.0 Conclusion**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This work set out to explore and consider the extent to which an OFSTED inspection of an atypical independent school (Summerhill) was able to make appropriate judgements about that school. Through deliberation of the purpose of OFSTED inspections - which was to improve schools through accountability, based on inspections - the methodological approaches adopted for OFSTED inspection were investigated to ascertain whether the process allowed sound judgements to be reached. By considering the arguments for school improvement and effectiveness presented in the Literature Review as filters for data collected further, questions to whether the processes undermined or constrained both the potential for improvement at Summerhill, the accuracy of OFSTED's judgement were undertaken. This was explored particularly in light of the philosophical foundations at Summerhill compared to that of the OFSTED inspection process.

From this examination, perhaps, the main theme of the work applies to the appeal judgement subsequent to the 1999 OFSTED inspection and Notice of Closure to Summerhill. It was the court judgement which both decided the fate of Summerhill and whether OFSTED were able to defend their judgements surrounding the practices of Summerhill. Further, the analysis and findings debate suggests that improvement at Summerhill had taken place in terms of financial investment. However, other 'improvements' were less tangible and perhaps, incidental rather than part of OFSTED's intentions. Equally such 'improvement' might not be measured by OFSTED as improvement ie the review of the school in preparation to the appeal leading to a greater commitment to its philosophical roots than pre-inspection preparations had accommodated versus an improvement in examination outcomes.

Perhaps, one view reflected from the analysis chapter through school effectiveness and improvement paradigms has been that hurried and decontextualised empirical school effectiveness research, whilst politically acceptable, has led to misrepresentations of potential 'effects' by which judgement of effective education can be made. Perhaps this is particularly so when translated via OFSTED inspection

criteria. School Effectiveness literature works within modernist and industrial conceptions with narrow and reductionist definitions, failing to connect with any postmodernist elements of both the wider state and the institutions within which education is delivered. It might be considered that the state operates as hybrid modernist-postmodernist in its desire to control versus its rejection of framing a meta-narrative and epistemology in order to 'steer at a distance' (Lingard, Ladwig and Allan, 1998). Simply at the heart should be OFSTED recognition that school and work is cultural, rather than simply modernist economics (Lingard, Ladwig and Allan, 1998). Whilst OFSTED aims at producing better schools, the current implementation of context-free factors merely supports moves towards work standardisation by central policies for which responsibility of implementation is left to the institution (who is then judged upon this) and potentially, professional deskilling of the teaching profession (Bottery, 2001).

School Improvement thinking is better able to interrogate process. School Improvement conceptual frameworks may be considered as oppositional to school effectiveness. Within School Improvement thinking is an appreciation for the ongoing development of a school, and greater multifactorial judgement in appreciating an idiosyncratic culture of the school (rather than a replicable set of characteristics determined by school effectiveness). However, in the main, both improvement and effectiveness paradigms fail social and political context. Neglect of this dimension may lead to profound damage to society's democratic foundations and emasculation of the education professional (Bottery, 2001). Ultimately, one view to be drawn was that this was the cause that led to the Notice of Closure at Summerhill. For which, perhaps, only the appeal process restored the opportunity for opting to an alternative, democratic education provision to those who wished to buy it, and potentially, 're-professionalisation' of Summerhill staff.

However, the findings against School Effectiveness models compared within the analysis chapter, perhaps, demand reflection against wider views of School Effectiveness than those perhaps anticipated as the fore-runners for the OFSTED inspection processes. As such, possibly, this work 'throws up' the view that OFSTED's practices adhered to one reductionist view of school effectiveness. To explain, three school effectiveness models might be applied: the Received, the

Heretic and the Contextual model (Lauder, Jamieson and Wikeley, 1998). The Received Model is the mainstream tradition of school effectiveness research. It suggests schools have an effect on student outcomes, rather than individual teachers alone. Such effect is not by chance and successful re-engineering is possible since staff and pupils respond to the school through systems, sanctions and rewards. This might be the model from which OFSTED attempted to 'improve' Summerhill by giving the Notice of Closure as the ultimate sanction. By contrast, the Heretical Model denies what most researchers and policymakers assume, that although schools are complex, loose coupling overcomes this problem. Levels of interdependency cannot be easily explained. The incoherent (and changes where schools drift, decay or regeneration) should not be viewed as problematic. Teachers can be professionals rather than merely purveyors of others' policies. However, this requires a model of school improvement which recognises teachers as professionals (Lauder, Jamieson, Wikeley 1998). The view of the OFSTED report that Summerhill was 'drifting' supports the OFSTED view that this was 'problematic' in OFSTED's judgement. This reinforces OFSTED's adherence to the Received Model.

In exploring issues in greater depth it can be argued that the contextual model provides direct relevance for accountability insofar as it fundamentally links the different capacities, potential and limits of schools within their contexts. Regulatory agencies, such as OFSTED, may assume working class areas have the same capacity as other schools, and therefore must be failing, the Contextual Model allows the school to be viewed under the conditions they can best perform within and be judged accordingly. Since there are no initial substantive theoretical commitments, via case studies and schools responses, contextual criteria emerges to provide accountability for both the schools and policymakers. As such, this third model builds upon the strengths of the other two models and challenges political orthodoxies. It builds a middle group whilst it runs against practices such as a National Curriculum (Lauder, Jamieson and Wikeley, 1998). The National Curriculum was claimed, by Summerhill, as unpinning the debate surrounding the delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum at Summerhill. As such, using the Contextual Model might have avoided fundamental disagreements surrounding judgements of narrow provision. Equally, the analysis of deprofessionalisation of Summerhill staff largely concludes that the OFSTED process ignored and failed to offer respect to Summerhill's educators as

holding valid, professional views. By use of the Contextual Model, the educationalists might be judged within their own philosophical foundations and rather than the overriding theme falling to non-compulsory attendance of lessons. The provision at Summerhill could be judged upon the basis of its ability to meet its own educational ideology.

The discussion surrounding analysis of Summerhill as an ambiguity, collegial or democratic organisation equally presents thinking as to the inspection of organisations dependant upon their structure. Perhaps, this reinforces the steerage of the Heretic Model insofar as problems associated with inspecting democratic, collegial or ambiguous organisations may reflect an intention that 'effective schools' should be formal. The effective school as the goal would lead to the role of school improvement by OFSTED inspection to possibly lead to restructuring 'poor' organisations. As such, then it is the outcome of the court judgement which perhaps provided new ways of thinking about inspection, insofar as any criticism of the mis-match of OFSTED model applied might be debated, the appropriateness of the inspection is perhaps best judged from these findings.

## **7.2 Conclusions from Findings**

### **7.2.1 Court Judgement: Guardian of Summerhill or failing of OFSTED?**

A possible conclusion then may have been that the theoretical model informing OFSTED practice was inappropriate. That it failed OFSTED in their ability to judge the school appropriately. Perhaps the outcome of the court judgement was to further 'put right' poor judgement. Another view, which may be taken from the analysis of the case, may lie with an argument that the judiciary failed OFSTED. The role of OFSTED of raising standards and improvement lay with concerns for the failings of the UK education system, to which increased accountability through public reporting of inspection would facilitate comparison between educational institutes. In part, OFSTED had been introduced, given the previous role of HMI appeared to be highly problematic in terms of external accountability. There is no doubt of the significance invested in HMI reports of individual institutions but that the limited number and variable nature of inspection in terms of accountability constrained any claim to national systems of inspection. HMI was a model where external inspections resulted

in advice followed by resources or sanctions, if advice was not followed. By contrast, perhaps OFSTED reinforced a polarisation of responsibility for education between the institute and central government since it offered no role for the Local Education Authority (LEA) (West-Burnham, 1994). Yet OFSTED's methodology was introduced in accordance with section 9 of the Education (Schools) Act 1992, and superseded (from 1 November 1996) by section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996, in order to increase accountability and facilitate 'raising standards by:

- 'giving parents regular information about the schools their children attend or might attend;
- providing schools with an external evaluation of their strengths and weaknesses to contribute to their development planning and improvement;
- identifying those schools which are failing to provide their pupils with a satisfactory standards of education.'

It was OFSTED's duty to assure satisfactory standards of education within which the OFSTED inspection and Summerhill provision would appear to lie. The appeal case appears to hinge around the arguments surrounding OFSTED's methodology and further arguments about the nature of a broad and balanced curriculum and whether Summerhill parents should be allowed to purchase an alternative education. Perhaps, the constraints of OFSTED processes of observing within time limits, contractually by teams of consultants formulating a report to meet public reporting requirements by the use of systematic criteria to defend observations and judgements, left OFSTED vulnerable to the appeal case.

The independent inquiry did not afford itself such constraints in making the case for an appeal. However, given the concerns of the interviewed learners, in terms of their ability to move to alternative school provision, possibly identifies a valid concern for the inspectors who sought to judge pupil progress against key indicators (such as levels of competence in core areas demonstrated by Summerhill pupils). Should Summerhill ever close there would be a duty to these learners. Potentially, this duty to assure Summerhill educational provision was satisfactory included a duty to its learners which was wider than perhaps the reporting processes allowed inspectors'

judgements to be reflected. In such a case, it should not be the merits of Summerhill as a standalone, unique institution which should be judged but its provision within the wider UK provision. In that sense, should one of the imposed duties of OFSTED be that of protection, then the appeal case may have failed both Summerhill learners and OFSTED by a debate which focussed on narrow issues of inspection and learning rather than wider duty of the state to protect learners? The longevity of Summerhill may defend such an argument, however, the research from a parent interview identifies the lack of investment and need for firmer financial footing inherited by Zoe.

The notice of closure items agreed by Summerhill and parent interview about the updating of resources, may point to resourcing constraints upon the institution. However, the independent inquiry noted that should Summerhill have been closed by OFSTED then Summerhillians would not move to another institutional educational provision but home learning. The defence that Summerhill provides learners the opportunities to benefit from learning within a community is suggested as preferable to the isolation of home learning. It should be recognised that home learning falls under the responsibility of the LEA, it is then a matter for judgement as to whether this would be a destination for Summerhillians post-Summerhill. Further, value judgements as to whether home learning would be lesser provision than that judged by the inspectors at Summerhill surrounds whether OFSTED's duty to protect was failed by the appeal case ruling. Further analysis of this was not possible within this work as the OFSTED report merely identifies that judged weaknesses were not compensated by judged strengths but fails to provide comprehensive explanations of the weaknesses other than their cause lying with failure to attend lessons. As such, it is difficult to interpret whether such weaknesses might compromise OFSTED's duty to failing schools or whether it was that underachievement in terms of national expectations lies only with individual inspector's values of an uneven quality of education.

Reflecting upon staff responses, perhaps, there was a need for a guardian for Summerhill insofar as it offers alternative educational experiences. One impact of the inspection lies with the regained confidence of Summerhill in its defeat of OFSTED at appeal. Perhaps, this 'confidence' can be further judged by Summerhill



setting up of the AS Neill Summerhill Trust (EADT, 25 May 2004). It appears that the trust might not solely lie with their commitment to Neill's philosophies but a new 'confidence' that the state might have to work with them on their terms as an alternative school, rather than their conceding to any threats of future inspection. The setting up of the trust is aimed at raising bursaries for Summerhill school fees for parents on lower incomes and to offer residential places for teachers. However, within a newspaper interview at the trust's launch, Zoe Redhead noted it 'tragic' that state education did not cater for those with a philosophy different to the main stream. Moreover, that since education is moving towards emphasis upon citizenship UK educational policy was moving towards the roots of Summerhill School (EADT, 25 May 2004). The new trust to promote the school possibly suggests that one concluding outcome from the inspection in terms of the appeal case was to assure Summerhill's sustainability, rather than raise its standards in OFSTED's or school effectiveness terms. As such, the appeal case may have acted as a guardian of the right to offer Neill's doctrine simply because a lack of demand by parents might be the sole (democratic) judge of the school's effectiveness. Plainly, as an independent school it would not be able to financially sustain its provision if it could not satisfy its role of external accountability to the parental audience.

### **7.2.2 Voice of the child – children's rights – inspection process to ask children**

One further theme from the Summerhill case lay with the judgement by inspectors as to what should be included as the observed lessons. A Parliamentary Select committee considering the work of OFSTED expressed concern about the inspectors observing only parts of lessons and the government appeared to endorse this (Ferguson et al, 2000). OFSTED/Select Committee have agreed to differ on whether part or whole lessons to be observed. Carroll (1989, p27) cautioned 'time as such is not what counts but what happens during that time', it was not perhaps the limited time within which OFSTED undertook observations, or even where they observed at Summerhill but their assumption that the participants (children) of that education had no view about participating in the inspection. Whilst the pupils were asked questions to interrogate their understanding, the inspectors clearly did not anticipate that the learners might not wish to 'participate' in the inspection. That by their actions in

avoiding classes, which be judged as level of truancy on the day of inspection at another school, Summerhillian pupils distorted the inspections when pupils were followed to prove their 'idleness'. Moreover, even judgements of the level of broad and balanced curriculum were undermined by the pupils who did not 'play ball' in a conventional fashion.

Equally, if the sincere democratic principles of Summerhill are accepted, a triumph of the appeal case for childrens' rights is the agreement that future inspections will involve the children's opinions. However, it might also be concluded that this was further evidence that the inspection system was devised upon school effectiveness of the formal school and a democratic model might prove problematic since the OFSTED processes did not facilitate tools to address such occurrence.

### **7.3 A Post-modern finish**

Whilst the findings, analysis and conclusion chapters attempt to consider, within filters, the evidence of the case study, the data comprising documentary evidence, observation and interview is presented 'warts and all'. These thesis chapters provide some possible views or (mis)reading of the data. However, to maintain the integrity of the case, it is left for the reader to conclude their 'answers' to the research questions posed.

Having undertaken this research work in the post-modernist tradition, sincerely intending to allow the audience to judge through interview data, naturalist observation and documentary evidence, my journey as a researcher perhaps offers insight both into my personal bias in terms of viewing the data and further justification of approach. Equally, this also facilitates the opportunity to provide some understanding of my personal viewing of the evidence. There were a number of frustrations in the journey based largely in the difficulty of accessing interviews with individuals. However, the postmodernist collection of such data makes it rich and leaves it for the audience to think what they will. The documentary evidence further provides the history to the case and reflects views from inspectors, the independent inquiry and the appeal case. The naturalist observation also provided insights to compare Neill's advocacy with current Summerhillian practice ie head teacher's

available by other sources and prior literature. The intention to facilitate a case study, which may generate new thinking from an emergent perspective lies then with ownership by the audience.

#### **7.4 A Post Modern Case Study?**

At the outset of the study, the Collins English dictionary definition for rationalism was considered. The dictionary identified 'rational' as a 'philosophy which regards reason as only guide' and rationalism as 'inventing specious reasons for one's own conduct' (p 426). It has been argued then that, to view Summerhill through a rational construct would possibly present an 'objective' view, with a potential for comparability, but in so doing deny the multi-dimensional potential of the research in finding new ways of thinking about the impact of OFSTED upon Summerhill. The collection of 'unrestrained' data from the post modernist tradition presents methodological anxiety for thesis preparation. It has been argued in the methodology chapter that within this exploratory study post modernist data collection facilitated insights, that questions constructed from literature could not have predicted, particularly from the pupil interviews within this study.

In this vein then, this work recognises that qualitative research proposes an inductive relationship between theory and research. Further, that the epistemological position of qualitative research is described as interpretive insofar as it stresses understanding the social construction of reality works through the interpretation of that world by its participants. Qualitative approaches include traditions upon a continuum from naturalism to postmodernism but the ontological position still implies that social properties are the outcomes of interactions between individuals (Bryman and Bell, 2004). The intellectual tradition of postmodernism evolved historically essentially from Critical Theory, which was originally associated with Marxism. Spurning grand narratives, such as Marxism, postmodernists claim enlightenment theories purport to have 'all the answers' whereas, post modernism stresses that there are fluid identities within current life (Mutch, 2004). Fundamentally post modernism has emphasised 'method talk', that is, recognition for the multiple ways social reality might be constructed. The postmodernist tradition might be considered a way of seeing and understanding results by questioning the taken-for-granted (Bryman and

Bell, 2004) and lies with the role of the narrative and discourse. Since ethnography leads to representations, there is an ethical difficulty emanating from the relationship between the researched and the researcher, therefore post modernism questions the desirability of objective representations of the world (Hammersley, 1999a). What is portrayed here is a representational crisis, where old modes of presentation might be viewed as distant, divorced or disengaged educational study, which no longer work since they represent a 'doubling of agency' or cannibalisation of the original voice. The interpretive demise lies with its narration, which may become a celebration of relationships of power or a social construction of subjectivity (Goodson, 1991). As a result, naturalistic observation considered within an interpretive position simply fails to recognise the dynamics imposed by the researcher interpreting evidence on behalf of the audience. Equally, pseudo-objectivity should not be allowed to cloak any search for subjectivity by claiming objectivity by the presentation of a sanitised scientific style since this denies any opportunity for reflexivity for the audience (reflexivity which had been available to the author) and might prevent any organic link between data and data collection (Ball, 1993).

Given the lack of boundaries within post modernist research, the interpretive position might be held out as 'more reliable' or 'valid'. Yet research is an instrument and there are no reliability, or validity, co-efficients for naturalistic observation. Rigour lies with a demonstrable set of procedures, which include a research biography and a stance and style and form of writing up the research. As a result, qualitative (or post modern) research may not inevitably lack rigour (Ball, 1993). Qualitative researchers are not 'closet positivists' and do not regard data as 'being there' waiting to be gathered. Data are social constructs of the research process, and of the interface between the researcher and the researched. Their choices, omissions, problems shape the research process. Thus, meaning is generated based upon the research aim and the part of social life it aims to record (post modern) or describe (interpretive) (Ball, 1993). This thinking led the research design along a philosophical debate towards a post-modernist collection of data. In answering the research questions surrounding the impact of inspection upon Summerhill, there was thus a need to recognise that narrative accounts can provide rich insights of the socially constructed nature of experiences. As a result, the researcher adopted a post modern rationale. Yet, it should not be suggested that post-modernism is necessarily incompatible with

interactionist principles. In essence, the position of post modernity is to question the desirability of producing representations of the world. Yet post modernist emphasis on textuality has led to changes in ethnographic writing towards multi-vocal forms so that by 1990s, there has been less distinction between from other approaches as once were there (Hammersley, 1999b). Thus, post modernity as a family of theories (Creswell, 1998) lies along a continuum of post-positivist approaches. It is possible to have a post modern-influenced ethnography since the critical component lies with the challenging or questioning of use of meta-narratives. Equally, the post modern perspective can offer solutions through qualitative research as it might form a different conceptual lens for designing qualitative study. An exploratory case study, absent of theory at outset, might be perceived as being mid-point along any continuum of post-positivist approaches and perhaps, advances a 'theory after' perspective (Creswell, 1998). Its exploratory nature leads to revising of research questions as the work evolves (Creswell, 1998). This becomes apparent in this work as rather than issues surrounding the initial research questions exploring inspection process, the final position lies with the consideration of the impact of inspection upon Summerhill as the main focus.

Prior to data collection then, this work adopted the post modernist tradition as its philosophical position. Both ethnographic and post modernist data collection may include narrative accounts since these are social constructions. Post modernists set out to record the narrative, whereas researchers working from an interpretive perspective attempt to describe (Bryman and Bell, 2004). However, it is not until fieldwork commences that problems for data collection surface and at this point the researcher is forced to make decisions (Ball, 1993). In the attempt to limit the impact of any direction or bias upon the respondent when recording their stories for this study, each respondent was informed at the beginning of their interview to just provide their account, that there would be no intervention by the researcher, they were just to talk. In the main, respondents completed their interviews following this uniform instruction. Rather than questions to facilitate the volunteering of interview data, the researcher needed only to provide cues such as 'go on'. Within the interview each talked freely about the impact of the Summerhill inspection or change since inspection. Respondents were made aware of tape recording being used for accuracy

of transcription and shorthand notes of their words. In addition, Summerhill set up a tape recording of the interview process for Summerhill's records.

Generally, respondents presented their accounts enthusiastically. In itself, perhaps, this may be reflective of whether these 'stories' had been rehearsed prior to the interview by respondents as a result of speaking to others, or prior participants to the process. Potentially if this had taken place, their social interaction may have had some impact on the nature of accounts. Simply prior interaction with others might reflect upon any individual social construction of history insofar as respondents may have wished to present their views aligned to pre-conceived 'events'. For instance, it might be that respondents may have discussed the events and that the views expressed may be influenced by the community. This would be akin to participant observation effect (Ball, 1993), which recognises the social roles and expectations of actors. It should be recognised that there are multidimensional ways that 'actors' present themselves in different settings. Methodologically, this work recognises simply that 'school life does not cease at classroom door'. Within transcripts there was a need to 'let respondents speak for themselves' since within interpretive paradigm, the researcher becomes the agent for interpretation and takes away the respondent's voice (Ball, 1993). However, it should be recognised that interviewee's social roles within Summerhill community, and any expectations they may have of any external viewing of their accounts may have influenced the responses. Perhaps, this confirms earlier argument that working in post modern tradition recognises the potential multi-dimensional nature of accounts.

By allowing the respondents freedom to talk, absent of direction from the interviewer, was intended to allow richer insights into their testimonies which may have been more difficult to gather from directed questioning. Yet one ex-student respondent quickly 'dried up' after the introduction and required fuller prompting. Quickly recognising the problem for any earnest attempt to gain data from the post-modernist tradition, this presented a dilemma. It was not possible to question the candidate further and assure no impact upon the respondent. The researcher then had to ask would the methodology be compromised by asking questions to prompt the respondent or should the research be constrained further by not asking questions and

then failing to gain potential data within case study which may limit opportunities to gain fuller, richer insights?

A further difficulty lies with naturalistic approaches when the respondent chooses to answer their brief by responding in a way that doesn't address the area being posed by the research. In the instance of the interview of an ex-pupil, there was difficulty in gaining any length of response. What became apparent was the respondent wanted to recount the events of the inspection, or the court case, rather than consider the impact of the inspection, as requested by their interview brief. This response may have resulted from an initial discussion with the Summerhill member of staff, who assisted in identifying potential respondents for the research activity, or a lack of understanding of the initial briefing. This demonstrates one of the problems as the process, prior to research event, can impact upon their social constructions presented by the respondent however carefully the interview is devised to reduce researcher impact or facilitate unconstrained recording. As a result, the researcher has to make a decision.

On this occasion, within the student interview, questions were posed as cues to facilitate further testimony. By asking the respondent during the interview to identify what happened to them, however, presented further difficulty when this elicited limited response. Therefore, the broad research question of impact upon Summerhill was re-constructed to ask the respondent how Summerhill might have changed and then in response to their answer to that a further question was posed to progress the interview around whether anything had changed. This small aspect presented a major challenge ideologically since this presents a departure from a post modern data collection of interview data. Whilst the attempt was to frame the supplementary questions around the main research aim of the work, and not lead the respondent further, simply by asking further questions may lead the interviewee to respond differently. Simply, the majority of methodological debate does not prepare the researcher for the practical realities of the event, or environment, within which the research is taking place. When undertaking fieldwork, researchers have to make decisions (Ball, 1993).

Whether this undermines the value of the data must be left to the reflexivity of the research. Perhaps the resolve of the problem (presented in the immediacy of an interview) might be attributed to moving more closely to a critical theory approach of the researcher by recording its occurrence and stating the sincerity of the researcher's position. Yet, post-modernity does recognise the need for reflexivity by allowing reflexivity to the reader by the researcher identifying this problem and allowing the audience the democracy to make their own decisions.

Additional challenges arose in attempting fieldwork since the initial difficulty for an exploratory case study, undertaken from the post-modern tradition, lies with where to commence research and when to stop. Whilst an overriding problem for this research lay with difficulties of access to respondents for interviews, and the subsequent size of evidence base, the observations and interviews provided rich data. This work set out to be an exploratory case study for which the themes and boundaries may not be evident at outset (Robson, 1993). Therefore, at the initial 'opening' of the study, my policy decision was 'not to have a policy'. To explain, after reading Neill's work and reviewing OFSTED inspection criteria, I attempted to access the inspection team visiting Summerhill to gain some background to their resulting report. However, I was advised from OFSTED that such direct contact would not be permitted. As a result, I undertook an initial visit to Summerhill turning up on a Visitors Day to create an opening for the case study research. Recognising some of the limitations of the first observation, and to gain a longitudinal view of Summerhill, I visited Summerhill to undertake a further 'naturalistic' observation 2 years later after reading the OFSTED report since insights are more likely to be generated from 2 sets of data (Ball, 1993).

Within exploratory case study, boundaries become apparent and 'theoretical sampling' may take place as a result of analytical insights gained from the data producing emergent conceptual categories through the ongoing analysis of the data. Choice surrounding this process indicates control and reflexivity of the researcher (Ball, 1993). However, does this contradict the essence of post-modernist data collection? The challenge for the fieldwork of this research was to produce a case study surrounding the impact of OFSTED inspection upon Summerhill, whilst recognising the multi-dimensional nature of social constructions. In undertaking an exploratory case study of the impact of Summerhill, it becomes apparent that there are no fixed



points since there are shifting perspectives and perceptions of what has occurred. To explain, historical accounts surrounding the impact of the inspection are affected by social re-constructions of memory and as mentioned earlier, possibly the dynamics of interaction within the Summerhill community. As noted with interviews, expectations of the needs of, or viewing of, an external audience of the interview evidence may have impacted also upon the material volunteered.

The Summerhill case and independent enquiry had provided preparatory interesting reading but reinforced the fundamental problem of viewing Summerhill by traditional research models. The Summerhill environment I visited was far removed from the educational settings I had previously been to, albeit perhaps some training providers and colleges I have worked with who are engaged in adult learning for drug abusers or ex-offenders or the long term unemployed. This should not be viewed as any criticism of Summerhill. Rather than an 'underclass' many such institutions dealing with abusers or offenders have valuable approaches to engaging dysfunctional learners, if 'dysfunctional' means learners who have not been motivated by traditional approaches to their learning needs. The essence of the similarity lies with the freedoms given to the individual eg to smoke, to use foul language, to engage in work which stimulated them.

I had not revealed any substantive literature surrounding inspections within progressive or democratic organisations or thinking surrounding 'raising standards' through inspection within these. Whilst the literature review provides some case studies, which facilitate some understanding of the impact of OFSTED inspection historically in schools, there were no appeal cases from independent schools, which fell within the domain of the Summerhill appeal. Therefore, at collation of the observations and interviews, along with documentary evidence, potential boundaries for the case study research became more apparent. Boundaries hold properties of reliability (Johnson, 1994) and for exploratory case study, the conceptual framework may not be formulated until post data collection. The appearance of boundaries, or a conceptual framework from exploratory case study, might seem to move this work away from the post modernist intention of producing work absent of interpretation. Simply by the instigation of filters to think about data might be considered as facilitating an interpretative stance. This would suggest that research must be uni-

paradigmatic and that the judgements made by the researcher in designing the methodology are absolute and can not be revised, thought about or developed during the research process. If the evolutionary nature of fieldwork can not be incorporated into a thesis, this would result in the researcher having to deny any methodological arguments surrounding paradigms recognised at the outset of the research and change their approach, simply because they were presented with problems and challenges when undertaking research. Such abdication from the tradition would represent a methodological falsehood and possibly lead back to methodological purism and the flaws of research arguments (Hammersley, 1998). Post-modernist data collection presented problems when producing exploratory case study for a thesis. Should it be forgotten therefore, and the researcher should pretend that they set out to undertake interpretive inquiry using naturalistic methods? Clearly, this would be an act of methodological deception.

Post modernity sets out as one, among many ways, of rendering social reality to audiences and offers 'readings' rather than observations (Bryman and Bell, 2004). Therefore, post modern research would produce accounts or stories which act as unwitting testimony and to which the audience might decide what took place absent of any interpretation. The presentation of the documentary evidence within post modernist research would lie solely with the copying of documentation and allowing the audience to read. As such, post modern research might present discrete interviews, narratives or documentary research to investigate events by recognising the rich nature of data may be adequate by provision of single episodes. By contrast, a thesis following the UK Quality Assurance Agency's recommendations for doctoral studies requires the scholar to subject their findings to scrutiny, in terms of what they might mean and analysis of the 'theories, ideas, challenges to make an original contribution to knowledge in its field' (EDMU, 2001). This work additionally sets out to produce an exploratory case study, for which it was clarified at its outset the conceptual framework might not have developed and theoretical underpinning might be scant. At conclusion of case study data collection, theoretical sampling might have facilitated both the boundaries of the study and themes by which the data might be considered. Does this undermine its post modern roots? Do these problems mean that this is not a piece of post modern research?

These questions stem from the use of filters, and potential insights generated within this work, and whether these fundamentally undermine the philosophical stance at outset to undertake post modernist research? The research set out gain insights, and to provide the opportunity for new ways of thinking about the case. If it adopted an interpretive position at its outset, it is argued that potentially the research would be constrained. To explain, within ethnographic text the researcher presents an authoritative, dispassionate account that represents an external reality. Post modernity is highly critical of the researcher, who extracts knowledge from observations and conversations with others and then transmits knowledge to the audience since the researcher is implicated in the construction of knowledge and the ways in which an account is transmitted (Bryman and Bell, 2004). Naturalistic observation from interpretive inquiry might evolve in similar manner to post modernist. It is argued, however, that the issues of agency of representation of the interviewees' or documents' voices present a philosophical difference to the approach of this work in that it presents the reader with the methodological debate that an interpretive researcher would not include.

Whilst, all researchers make decisions about their position at outset, the fieldwork may present unforeseeable problems, for which they make decisions whilst undertaking fieldwork and this evolves the nature of the research. The presentation of the work within the constraints of a thesis may limit equally any final presentation of testimony, absent of interrogation or need to develop a conceptual framework. If post-modernity and interpretive approaches are viewed on a post-positivist continuum, it might also be recognised that there can be multi-paradigmatic approaches to research. Whilst mixed methods provide triangulation by method, multi-paradigmatic approaches facilitate new ways of thinking about events and problems from research. It allows the researcher the opportunity to get started with the research, unconstrained by arguments surrounding validity or reliability, which prove problematic for naturalistic observation in any setting. Yet this raises the further question of whether these present problems for the research product? Perhaps, 'problems' lie with purist observation of method and fails to recognise the multi-vocal discourse surrounding qualitative research (Creswell, 1998) by any claims that one aspect might undermine or flaw the research. Exploratory research, by its nature demands flexibility in its design. The presentation of a post modern-

influenced thesis then might be perceived as flawed if filters are presented to 'interpret' data but the critical component to this concern seems to lie with the purpose of the work. If the aim is to find new ways of viewing an issue, recognising the social construction of reality as multi-dimensional, and the problems of agency of interpretation of the researcher working from an interpretive context, then a starting point for a case study would appear to be to recognise the discourse of post modernist arguments. However, if in so doing, an exploratory case study meeting the demands of a thesis, utilises boundaries and themes by which the case might be thought about, perhaps does not undermine its postmodernist approach if the researcher allows the audience reflexivity by including them into the discourse surrounding the process. By contrast, the interpretive researcher simply would not need to provide such account. Whilst the results of the interpretive researcher, using naturalistic instruments to collect data and themes to interpret the case study, may appear similar in its content, this argument lies with the acceptance that post modernist and interpretive paradigms lie along the same continuum. Judgement as to whether this work is multi-paradigmatic or a post modern-influenced case study then might lie with the audience and the 'school of thought' to which they wish to attribute. If this becomes a problem for the audience then methodological flaws can be raised but perhaps, this brings the debate back simply to the issues of methodological purism (Hammersley, 1998) and a failure for appreciation for the decisions the researcher has to make when undertaking fieldwork (Ball, 1993).

## **7.5 A Final Note**

There have been changes to OFSTED practice since the 1999 Summerhill inspection and further research might reveal some of this being as a result of the Summerhill agreement post-appeal. In the main, this change appears to have facilitated greater ownership by the institutions inspected, the need for which is a concluding theme of this work.

Moreover, whether the independent learning offered at Summerhill would more appropriately meet the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century workplaces than state provision, my personal conclusions lie with numbers. Key to Neill's work is his recognition that Summerhill needed to be contained in size pupils in order to work. Whilst the

Summerhill 'experiment' might be viewed as working in Leiston, Suffolk, the translation of its core philosophy may be critical to its success. As such, to extend the Summerhill model to all schools nationally would be to fail to recognise the complexity of mass education and the numbers to which it caters. In many senses it might appear state education, in moving towards citizenship, does reflect some of Summerhill's democratic roots. However, educational provision needs also to reflect society's expectations, which are largely influenced within a political environment. Therefore, my personal conclusion to this work would be that given the demands of external and democratic accountability, it would be unsustainable for a nationwide system to generally adopt a Summerhillian model. Interestingly, Woodhead (2002) concurs with this conclusion reflecting upon the outcome of the Summerhill case in his arguments surrounding the raising of standards for the state educational provision.

## Appendix One

### Observations – Visitor Days

Initial visit to Summerhill on a Visitors Day  
2nd Visitors Day – observation July 2002

### Interviews

Interviews – Students  
Interviews – Parents  
Interviews - Staff

## Appendix One

### Observation

#### Initial visit to Summerhill on a Visitors Day

25 May 2001

Arrived at 10.00 am promptly in beautiful sunshine driving up to a very well-hidden entrance with a mosaic 'Summerhill School' on the side of a red brick wall. Having parked the car then began walking towards the school unsure of directions. Walking down the hill saw a main entrance of the school and absent of any signs or labels entered the door and through the building. A decrepit wooden hall way leading to areas for food preparation but absent of signs or assistance to my locating reception. A 'cook' poked her head around the corner as I walked around the corridor and I asked her the way to reception. She then explained it was the portacabin-like building next to the car park.

Upon entrance to the reception I identified myself to a receptionist who explained that a student host would be taking me around. I was aware that Zoe Redhead was in the room but no recognition of my presence was acknowledged and I awaited to join a party of visitors with my student host. The remainder of the visitors were French accompanied by an asian student who was taking a Sociology Phd.

Our host – a male pupil of about 13 years - met the group outside the office and proceeded to walk to the main school building that I had previously entered. As the party walked down the decrepit wooden access hall, a dark room lit by natural light from large windows at one side was identified as the Community Meeting hall. The host explained that meetings were usually held here by the community and all the community attended to vote on pupil punishment or other issues raised by the community for resolution.

He then directed us into the adjacent hallway explaining that an art room was next to be entered. Within the art room there were a number of students working and upon entrance our guide asked if they were happy with our entry. Upon entrance to the room, loud music blared and as a result our guide ushered us back into the hallway where he began to explain about the dining room queues. He explained that one potential punishment was to be at the end of the dinner queue at mealtime and occasionally, this might be a punishment to a member of staff. The host pupil thought this was a very humbling experience as pupils continued to jump the queue over your place whilst you hungrily await any final meal left by the time you were served.

He also showed a wall which had limited graffiti. The host pupil explained that at the time of inspection the wall was painted over as there were concerns that inspectors would not appreciate the nature of the profanity contained within the graffiti. He noted that the purpose of the wall was to allow the 'kids' to gain ownership and freedom in expression and therefore 'kids' often daubed swear words alongside other

expressions on the wall. However, Zoe felt this would not provide the right impression during inspection and it was painted over.

The group were then ushered to a woodwork room which was contained within a wooden building – a two storey shed – where pupils were working on wooden artefacts with the assistance of a member of staff. Outside the area were a collection of pupils ranging from 5 years-13 years who appeared to be skateboarding and generally playing around a log. Our host explained there were no compulsory lessons and that children usually played in this area throughout the day and week.

The host then proceeded to a line of portacabins where he explained that these were classrooms where lessons were taking place. He entered the classes without the group to ask permission for our entrance but returned explaining that permission had been denied by the learners. He explained that at Summerhill, it was necessary to respect the individual's choice and that pupils did not necessarily need to be 'invaded' in a class if they decided against this. The group did not speak English in the main and therefore there was little discussion within the group during the tour. At this point the French visitors talked amongst themselves suggesting debate about the incident and began video filming and photographing around them.

As we had been unsuccessful in attaining access to lessons within the classrooms, our host then walked the group through the premises to a field adjacent to the grounds. In the field of long grass at one end near a field sat a group of pupils apparently singing. The visitor group began to approach them and they appeared to wave suggesting that they were not happy that we should join them and the host said that we should return to the main Summerhill building. As we began to return a female pupil of approximately 14 approached the group and loudly in an agitated voice declared that she was unhappy that photographs of her had been taken without prior permission. It appeared that she was referring to the French visitors who had been using a video tape. There was some attempt to explain her concerns to the French visitors by the host but they did not appear to understand as they had very limited conversational English. At first the pupil did not seem to wish to give up her mission of rebuke to the visitors but her eloquent reproaches were not understood by the French visitors and therefore she dramatically returned to her fellow pupils in the field. Our host was extremely sympathetic to her and expressed to the visitors that this was seen as an invasion by the pupils and that it was very acceptable for them to feel unhappy or uncomfortable with the observations of the outside audience of the visitors with recording equipment.

The host then directed the group to a tree in the middle of the general playground/courtyard area and said that the Head Teacher, Zoe Redhead would be available for questions. He noted that she was due to be with the group immediately but had promised previously 2 of the pupils to go shopping and that had taken precedence. As a result it was hoped that she would return shortly and insisted that we wait in the area seated on stumps until her arrival. He did proceed to the office to check on time for her return whilst the group waited. Upon his return he clarified that he couldn't be sure when she might return but the group should wait. Zoe appeared approximately 15 minutes later and began her question session:



## Zoe Redhead – Question Time to Head Teacher

### Responses

- Damage to children in main stream education
- Not expected to take over Summerhill
- Day boarders – approx 15 – Summerhill works on full-time attendance – children independent lives from parents
- Limited visits out per year
- Children from 5 years of age quickly assimilate group norms/rules of ‘Summerhill’
- Freedom v democracy approx 240 laws reviewed in Friday meetings
- People haven’t changed for millions of years their basic needs are the same
- State inspectors cannot accept children are not out of control – state education worries about keeping children under control or they will go out of control – traditional education sees children as ‘enemy’ separate from teachers and adults who know what is best for them.
- Baths – social services advised that a screen needed where two baths in same room – social services believe that children’s resistance to abuse is reduced – having a bath with a friend might be fun – if anyone wants to bathe on their own they can – Summerhill does not force anyone to have a bath
- Social services advise Summerhill staff that they are at risk of a complaint of inappropriate behaviour
- Same pedagogy despite cultural background. Summerhill is an English school and all communication is undertaken in English Some new arrivals do not speak English and there are no appointed foreign speaking staff translators but generally a pupil will be able to translate to a new admission. This is discussed with parents prior to admission.
- Summerhillians share unique culture only other Summerhillians truly understand – tend not to send back children as not money orientated and cannot afford Summerhill’s fees – Summerhill graduates move/work within all walks of life – very diverse

- Do not accept children after age of 12 – parents send either because they have read of Summerhill or they don't know what else to do with children – this is a 50/50 split.
- Currently 72 children in residence – Summerhill is full.

## Appendix One

### Observation

2<sup>nd</sup> Visitors Day – observation July 2002

A member of the pupils is allocated to each guest and walks around with them to explain what activities are taking place and to host any questions about Summerhill life. To enter any classroom or community activity, prior permission must be attained. This may not gain consent from pupils. Therefore, visitors may not have access to observe and further, the prior permission to take photographs or video has to be obtained by the observed. This may be denied and this is explained by the Summerhill pupil escort as they greet visitors at the commence of the visitors day.

1.00 pm

at arrival/car park/reception it was a rainy day  
huddled by the entrance, a spread of visitors  
one girl from Japan  
one set of parents with a potential student viewing for the day  
a group of social work students from Dudley  
a sociology degree student

prior to entrance to the Community Meeting, a Summerhill student announced that the meeting was due to start but that the community would need to vote as to whether they would like us to attend to observe the meeting. Until that vote had been gained we should stand in the adjacent entrance hall.

Upon entering the hall, a larger room could be viewed where about 20 pupils sat around the edge and one pupil chaired the meeting. The pupils appeared to range from approximately 8 years of age and through to 16 years of age with the majority of pupils representing the lower of this age range. Zoe Redhead, Head Teacher was present and about 3 other adults who may have been staff. It was not possible to distinguish from the observation except during one discussion when one of the adults was involved in a debate clarified why the canteen staff had complained that pupils were leaving dinner plates around the school. It was agreed by the meeting that dinner plates should not leave the dining facilities and that eating should generally take place in the communal dining room. There was some debate surrounding the eating of snacks in pupil rooms and the member of staff used this point to clarify that this was not part of the issue but merely the housekeeping requirements of tracking plates.

The meeting voted that the visitors could join and visitors were ushered to the edge of the room where we could stand silently to observe the meeting but not participate.

The meeting agreed an agenda, which included the voting on punishment for a pupil who had exited the school by a fire exit and it was agreed that this was an unsafe

practice. The offender – a male pupil of approximately 15 years and of asian appearance - suggested that a fine should be placed against them and also joined the vote to agree his punishment by voting that he should be punished. The meeting lasted about 30 minutes during which time each item was discussed and voted upon in the silent observation of the visiting population.

At closure of the meeting, the male observed as the member of staff clarifying the dinner plates item announced to the guests that pupils would be willing to answer questions in a coffee room if anyone would like to join for a hot drink in about 15 minutes. Prior to that, he explained that guests might continue to walk around classrooms or school areas.

In the coffee room visitors were encouraged to be seated where possible by students and approximately 8 sat on the floor. Coffee or tea was prepared in mugs by 2 pupils and a member of staff with shouts of 'tea' or 'coffee' and little explanation of whether there was a charge or what might happen next. No unnecessary manners were exhibited and visitors 'mucked in' with the process of allocation of refreshments. Then 5 pupils sat down at the side of the visitors with the 2 students who had prepared refreshments sat on the table and member of staff standing aside the coffee bar which formed the table upon which the pupils sat. The staff member announced to the audience of visitors that they would be able to ask questions about Summerhill and its practices.

Initially one visitor asked about life in Summerhill and the member of staff began by explaining that much was the same as previously encountered when A S Neill first set up Summerhill. He said that the archives contained films of Neill and that during the evenings there were often film screenings for the pupils so that they might celebrate Summerhill history or to inform pupils about the Neill philosophy.

The pupil who had previously chaired the meeting observed by the visitors was seated within the 5 pupils at the side of the visitors. A visitor asked him what it was like to chair a meeting. He explained that there was expectations that pupils would try to chair meetings but he had managed to avoid it for some time when he first attended Summerhill as it seemed an onerous activity. The visitor said that he thought the pupil was quite good at doing this and the pupil replied that over time he had become better but it could be quite a frustrating task and he was very worried about doing it correctly when he first undertook the role.

One visitor said that they were keen to hear from the pupils about life in Summerhill. One pupil provided testimony of how he had previously been at a small state primary school in Suffolk which had been very friendly and supportive. Then he had been transferred to the secondary school where he had experienced real problems with teaching staff, who had seemed adversarial to pupils. This had made him very depressed and therefore his parents became so concerned that they sent him to Summerhill. He has been there 3 years and is very happy.

Another student explained that he had been at schools all over the world as his family had been moving but that he had been at Summerhill for 2 years and it had become his home. Another pupil joined the testimony by saying that at Summerhill the

teaching staff were their friends and kids learning was not necessarily about sitting in classrooms being controlled. The audience were very appreciative of such comments and general nods and agreement were evidenced whilst pupils spoke. One pupil said his only concern about Summerhill was that he wanted to ensure he had sufficient learning as he hadn't attended lessons for 2 years. Another pupil chipped in saying that he hadn't been to lessons for almost 3 years and didn't know whether this would disadvantage him in life as he was unsure how he might perform in his GCSE examinations.

Members of the visitor audience then interrupted, one stating that examinations didn't mean much and that it was more important to be happy than to achieve academically. One visitor noted to the pupils that career planning in modern times means that people change their jobs often 3 times in their life and this is not necessarily reflected by the qualifications they sat at 16.

This discussion element lasted about 15 minutes and at closure visitors dispersed cheerfully, speaking amongst themselves as they walked up the drive to the car park. The Summerhill community didn't say good bye as they left and whilst one person negotiated access to the office to speak to the school secretary, the remainder left.

## Appendix One

Student Interviews  
Sunday 12 Oct 2003 at Summerhill

First interview 2 girls, current pupils

What was the impact of the Summerhill inspection?

Think of the day

What does it mean to you today?

**One day we were they came in and started talking to us about work and stuff**

**Before that it was really horrible as we were like reading and stuff, on the same day**

**Some of the words were quite big and quite hard to read obviously**

When we got a word wrong they would kind of say something about and were really horrible about it

That was how I felt anyway

**We got upset and we got really worried about it**

**It was one of the books from the classroom  
a book that they gave you**

**We got really down about it it seemed we were not any good at reading so we decided to leave the lesson**

**And we decided to walk out**

**We were walking in the woods and we heard some noises like shuffling kind of stuff we were not quite sure what it was and we were talking about private stuff**

**We went to lunch afterwards and we heard that they were following us  
we were a bit shocked and felt upset**

**it was really horrible as well  
They had no right to do it**

**They said that we weren't doing anything  
And that we were just not effective with our time  
We were saying we do is what we do**

**If you hadn't had lesson interrupted you would not have gone off to do something else**

**You were exercising your right**

**At Summerhill we say you have got your freedom**

**To do what you what you want to do**

**We were doing what we want to do**

**That's how it works at Summerhill**

They have to take that in

They have to respect that

We felt that they weren't respecting us

That was actually brought up in the court case

What about the inspection impact – you felt this was negative? You felt that was fairly negative how the inspectors saw what you were doing?

The Court Case

Do you think that the impact has been positive overall in a way

impact of you as individuals

**I am a lot stronger**

**was that the intention of the inspectors no**

has this made you think about freedom at Summerhill?

What would we say

We felt it was really unfair

the way that they were treating us

**respecting - they saw you as children you didn't and did not need to have an opinion**

**everyone has an opinion at Summerhill**

It was always very tense and uncomfortable

I couldn't be myself

If I was myself then they would put it down as bad

They always judged how kids were

Overall process of asking questions was daunting they always asked us how do you find Summerhill, how do you like Summerhill

**it was the way they asked questions**

**They all asked questions like**

**like how many lessons do you go to a week**  
**I would give them yes or no to questions**  
**I don't think it was the age that they were a lot older than us it was the way they asked questions and looked at us**

A couple were friendly  
I don't know if they did it because the fact was it was their job  
They didn't respect our privacy – we were talking about boys  
We would go off normally we go off walking quite a lot

We haven't stopped doing this

There were some more friendly – chirpy and more into Summerhill only about 2 or 3  
a woman don't know what her name was  
It made no difference whether friendly or not friendly in terms of impact on Summerhill

We hardly ever talk about it  
We start laughing about when they followed us  
I don't get why they did it  
I don't know what they got out of it  
Following us talking about boys

I was worried about it, the court case  
They said that we were going to win  
We had butterflies in our stomach  
On the night before the court case we were in our rooms holding hands and crying  
I would have to go back to state school  
Not worried otherwise never really like

**It made the school stronger**  
**We kind of know what might happen if it happened again**  
**We were always close to staff I haven't heard of anyone who liked the inspectors but no one ever talks about it anymore**

End

Interview 2, Pupil Male – tape cutting off

The impact

**The actual inspection it was intimidating – it was how I felt when they arrived**  
**Previous inspections**

**When they came the manner was not friendly**  
**A couple seemed quite genuine and friendly**

I think tape cutting

**No effect**



**Not in lessons week before**  
**Not in lessons week after**  
**Not in lessons during inspection**

Obviously I was with Zoe a lot during the court case  
I was quite worried about the court case  
I didn't learn a thing during time of court case very negative  
**After the court case, not negative relief**  
**I can't really remember, just a feeling**  
**Carried on as normal**  
**Summerhill changes all the time**

It was bad for what it did at the time

No difference at all  
I have learned how much I appreciate Summerhill  
What I might do if it disappeared

Interview 3, Current Pupil male – tape interrupting cutting

During inspection

**I can remember one inspector**

**Interested in what I was doing and stuff like that**

**She was friendly**

**She was impressed by what I was doing**

**Every day (for a week) when I went into woodwork she was always there**

**There was one in the art room he did speak to me for a bit**  
**He would ask what is it you do in here**  
**He was less friendly**  
**Negative**

I don't know why I think that

**I watched the other inspectors going round**  
**There were 8 inspectors**  
**I felt worried**  
**I had been inspected at other schools previously**  
**But previously inspectors have been friendly**  
**I had this funny feeling that they don't understand what's going on here**  
**I remember on a bit of the woodwork day and the artwork day because I was**  
**worried about it because I thought Summerhill was going to have problems**  
**The government don't particularly like schools like this**

**I have been reading it in the newspapers**

I read of schools who had had an OFSTED inspection but not been to court and won

I was worried that inspectors might do what they had done elsewhere

This affected what I did during inspection

**I was quieter and nervous**

**I don't normally**

**I wouldn't go into the woodwork class when the inspector was there**

**I did attend a couple of classes and there was only one inspector in class but I didn't attend as much as normally because I didn't want to be asked questions that**

**I couldn't answer and I was a bit worried about**

The court case

I went on the bus

## Appendix One

### Student Interviews

Friday 17 October 2003 at Summerhill  
(2<sup>nd</sup> sets of interviews)

Interview 1 - current (Japanese) student

I don't really remember much

I was quite young  
I was 12

I came (to Summerhill) when I was 7, 1993/4

**About the day?**

**I remember one thing**

**I was in class 2 with another friend I was on the computer with another friend called XXX we were playing this game and people from OFSTED came they asked us a question can you spell something and then they gave us something to spell and I said ok yeah I can spell it but my friend couldn't spell it they had this really weird expression**

**They didn't seem to be happy about it**

That's all I can remember - Not really remember (anything more)

I wasn't there I stayed back at Summerhill

I didn't go (To Court Case) because I don't know I didn't really think about it basically it wasn't such a big deal to me I thought at that time I didn't really think about

Now I really regret not going

It was a big thing it could have closed down Summerhill

I wanted to be there

I wanted to see it

It was quite low key and you didn't think that at the time

**What change?**

**After the court case, life in Summerhill hasn't changed at all I think**

**I feel a lot more safer kind of thing as I know that we won the court case easily and we are not going to get closed down**

**I remember when we were going to have to court case, I was actually really scared that we going to get closed down**

I realised that I didn't actually go to any lessons I didn't bother going to any lessons  
**If this place did get closed down and if I had to go to other schools I was quite late in education**

**It would took me a while to catch up**

**And I wouldn't be able to put up with the education at other schools**

I think it was a positive thing I think it was a good thing

Because, because I think OFSTED were just trying to close us down if they had any excuse to close us down

There excuses were that the toilets weren't very clean and crap like that

They were trying to close it down

**I think they were trying to close it down because**

**When they were here**

**I heard from a lot of people that were, that they obviously didn't like this place in newspaper, on the news, on the Channel 4 news that they didn't like this place you just know that they were trying to close this place down**

**Because I think they want kids to not to have to the choice of going to lessons or not and they don't like the idea that kids make their own rules up and no adults take charge/over**

That's just how it seems

Interview 2, Male, current pupil

Bad memory anyway

**I can remember seeing the inspectors walking around and staying out of their way**

**I think I was 11 in 1999**

**I didn't shout directly at them (as previous inspectors) I was careful not to swear and walk past them**

**It's not only inspectors I try to avoid, I personally don't like to get in the way of policemen either**

**Try to avoid Babylon authority whole fucking lot of them**

I didn't think too much about it

I was kind of worried

They got a court case against us

I don't like the state

They are always trying to shut things down

Only good place you can come to get your freedom

as a little kid that you get respected

I went to the court case

I felt very sad I cried I thought Christ they could close this place down

This would be the end of a good education for me  
(muffled)

**I started to cry in the court room**

**I thought they could make up some reasons to close the school down**

**I thought it would be really stupid if they closed the school down**

**I could have just been paranoid**

**I don't know**

**if I was being accurate or not**

**There was a good atmosphere for everyone going down to (court case)**

**And before that protesting outside No 10**

**afterwards**

**There was a strong feeling going around**

A lot of people wanted to keep the school from closing

It felt good because a lot of people outside Summerhill wanted to help

**Nothing major (change)**

**I think I probably went to class after inspection**

**Probably didn't go to class around time of inspection**

**Don't think I went to class as a result of inspection was something else it was a good couple of years afterwards and nothing**

**Everything changes always changing**

**I don't think anything changed for inspectors**

**I don't know**

I went to lessons but that was a totally different time and nothing to do with them that

I went to class

I am quite happy that they took us to court

I was happy

It really made my day when they hadn't got us shut down

**We are not getting inspected every year**

**I've been here for quite a few inspections**

**I don't know if I remember them**

**No impact not that I can think of**

**I think it was quite negative**

The inspection was quite negative as they had a really negative feeling towards the school

We weren't doing anything wrong

I haven't seen any problems

They were just trying to get us

End

## Appendix One

### Student Interviews

18 October 2003 at Summerhill

Ex student interview

Well sort of the inspection there was a lot built-up to it was more than, it wasn't just a wham bam

Q How old were you

About 12 can't remember

**Yes there was built up on it, you felt there was a lot of emotional tension and also kind of the whole idea of you're being inspected and might be closed**

**That kind of hung in the air**

**We'd had inspections before that**

**You know, 8 of them (inspectors)**

**it was everyone was sort of in turmoil as everyone felt this was make or break everyone put a lot of effort in that day**

**It was very scary you felt that you were part of something that was jeopardising**

You felt like

you didn't really think it was real as a well when you were a kid it was kind of Exciting but not in a good way

you felt you were on edge I don't know how to explain

There was a lot

Oh you didn't actually think it could be closed down

this is what happens, oh my God

**During the court case it was a lot more, it was the same, the same sort of un(real), very surreal sort of tension you felt like you were on edge you didn't know why part of you thought they were never going to close us down but the other part was what would happen if we do**

**There was a lot of things preying**

And felt like it was over very quickly the court case

there was a lot built up to it

a lot of things

a lot of external affairs

lots of writing to MPs  
lots of campaigning  
I was part of forming a campaign committee  
we went to London a lot  
it felt good to do that because it felt like you were doing something that was really important to a lot of people  
a lot of people got involved and really wanted to go to London  
really wanted to be part of the whole campaigning to keep the school open  
you felt like you were doing something  
you were giving something when you felt hopeless  
when you are a kid you feel like that  
you can't drive you can't make big decisions for yourself in the outside world  
being a kid, can be doing something

Q what happened to you during the inspection?

I stayed out of the way  
I remember  
I wanted to ignore it  
Not have it happen

Q Since court case how would it have changed Summerhill?

Obviously we've got a lot more students  
It made people aware of the school a lot of people thought it was closed  
It has made us stronger  
It's given it more  
Before there was always this thing about, Oh my God what's going to happen  
There is a lot more guidelines for them about how they inspect us  
I think that helped because changed the schools feeling about the way  
We don't feel the whole that jeopardises were hanging  
Because of this one inspection  
There's a lot more  
Last inspectors came in well exactly they can't (do what they did in 1999 inspection)  
and that really helped  
made us feel like we have more power or foothold than we had before

Q If it wasn't for that do you go about your business as normal, has anything changed?

**Overall it didn't change the school on a practical basis I think**  
**You don't forget about it it becomes**  
**Its history**  
**We worked really hard for that**  
**I just wanted to get back to normal**  
**Everyone wanted to get school back to its normal to its normal daily life that**  
**took some time**  
Everyone was very emotional during and before the court case

I think for me it felt like that was the most important bit it almost helped the school  
it's like  
we really found our strength we got so much support from so many different people  
people that we didn't think we would get much support from I think that was really  
important – the knowledge of

If they had given us something only have to comply to these rules, a little thing like  
that

In the short run at that moment we probably thought Oh God we've gotten off this,  
it's really good they have given notice to close

In the long run it would have been worse  
inevitably

A court case would have to be

They were going to get a notice of complaint

It was in the air

We knew that

It was scary but I think people thought that

I'm in a different frame of mind now and coming back to think about it

The court case involved people

Like

Not only have people become more aware of Summerhill we have become more  
aware of how we are perceived as a school and through that got lots of support

It is a really good thing as we did so much political stuff as well

End



## Appendix One

### Parent Interviews

Interview one – parent 1

Tuesday 16 March 2003

Shorthand notes – no tape recording

It had no effect on me at all

I was busy working whilst my daughter was boarding

**It was very traumatic for the students**

**But it was very good for the school as it opened up a lot of things**

**It make it look at itself and be less insular**

I kept well out of the situation but

Summerhill was a wonderful place to be for my child

**I feel changes have been beneficial to the school**

**Everything, resources**

**Contact with the Outside world**

Really getting a clear idea at where they were and the whole reflective practice of being observed

**Gave them the feeling they can cope**

**Benefits of being pulled apart is to think again**

**To validate things**

**Most important changes and considered what need to be changed**

I never thought it would be the end of things

They had a very good legal beagle and I knew what he was capable of

**The impact was to expand it – they've really tried to positively build on Summerhill**

**There were things that needed improvement – pastoral care – they'd got stuck in their ways**

It can happen to any leader, any organisation

Impact on the children – well I couldn't let it impact upon me as I was the sole bread winner – my child is pretty balanced but was aware how it was affected and the children felt responsible for Zoe and worried for her and their solidarity which was good

Kids began to value what they had got and recognise that it might be at Summerhill

I have great admiration and respect for Zoe as she was immensely supportive at a time when we needed her to be very supportive.

My child was probably the quietest child ever to have been to Summerhill

But she didn't suffer fools gladly and this was why state school was not appropriate

## Appendix One

Second Interview – two parents

Thursday 13 November 2003

From our point of view our kids had left by then – the court case – it's our perception from them

**It made Summerhill sit up and unite itself**

**Until critically examine it**

**Pulled a whole lot of its basic principles apart**

**It questioned what it was doing in its methodology**

**Which then made them re-look at it**

**In doing that they realised the importance of the**

**Freedom of attending lessons a critical one**

**And a number of the Social issues that were raised the**

**Younger kids being in a mixed dormitory – resourcing**

**That was A key point**

They changed it didn't they

**Also the Resourcing of the school**

**Whether they were keeping up to date, if you like, with classroom technology**

**Teaching methodology, the domestic arrangements and all that sort of thing**

**Since the OFSTED inspectors if you stand back**

**You can see quite a change in the school**

**in the physical appearance of the school,**

**partly to do with that and part to do with funding and commitment**

**there were whole range of things which came together then**

**When someone looks at you critically it does question a whole lot**

**Of what you are doing in other areas**

**From any point of view someone comes along and critically appraises what you are doing covers a whole lot of things**

**Some of which you know and some of which you think**

Didn't realise that we weren't doing that very well

Didn't realise that we were doing that very well

You don't know so much at the time

I think The downside in doing that at Summerhill

The basic principles and that's where the argument came

Outside

Doing that at Summerhill

Major principles

Like you got to have to attendance

**This freedom of choice**  
**Something the inspectors didn't like**  
**Summerhill had to stand up and unite and**  
Led to the court case

Some of the other aspects  
Did the school a lot of good from our point of view

**Emotionally it did affect the children They did feel threatened**  
**Always this feeling surrounding at Summerhill**  
Came from way back in Neill's day  
**Always this feeling that they were going to close the school**

**Under threat all the time**  
**That they were going to close the school**

**Always been that fear if you read any of Neills books**  
**Fear of the authorities some one would come and you know**  
Any inspection ever happen  
Any authority figure  
We don't want them here  
That was the sort of feeling around it from conception  
As time has gone on that is part of what  
Zoe has taken on as well and so there was a fear of any inspection  
from the children's point of view I felt that  
Possibly it needed to bring them together  
Because these things do  
A Falklands war

It's good, It's worth fighting for  
To really realise what they have got there  
The children did really do well out of that

You look at it Neill was supporting his theory behind it setting up the school  
Looking for alternative ways  
Battling against the system  
Since his death the school carried on a much lower profile, disappeared into the  
background

It wasn't controversial place in the public  
Because He was constantly writing questioning things  
Doing the political bit Role as an educationalist

School was in a comfy place

**The inspection It came back into the public eye and it wasn't used to that and you had had**

Two changes of management  
with Ena taking

I think the thing was Neill's philosophy

When Neill was dying and Ena was taking over what happened was there was still children at the school

**He always said that he expected the school to close when he died**

But there were kids at the school Ena felt that couldn't close the school just like that and throw them out and the school had to continue on

And of course when you continue Then new kids ask to come on

School did run down in numbers

She couldn't bring herself to close it

In our day we were interviewed by Ena not the kids

Were we suitable parents

Not the kids

**3-4 years when Zoe started to take more interest started to really take over**

**similar because basic principles haven't changed**

**she did do certain things like get rid of the gardener**

more financial interest

varying degrees of agreement with Ena to that

Ena was getting older and older less able to

Ena was watching

Suitable to take it over from that aspect

Then eventually Zoe and Tony did

And Ena continued in various lower roles but still very much part of the school

Tony came into the fabric of the school

No money had been put into the school

Maintenance let alone building

It was a Very big work problem there for Tony

The inspection was later on

By then Zoe had already taken over the school they were already running it

They were slowly working

Putting a number of improvements in

This is Part of the threat in Uniting the school

The question of Whether it was worth continuing

**Zoe was not the political animal her father was**

**Inspection had to come up with**

**Zoe didn't have any credibility with the education system she didn't write things**

Write letters to the Times

Quite a question phobic

I think it was a couple of years that Ena eased out it wasn't a case of instantly and Zoe eased in

Ena wasn't going to let go – 4-5 years

Ena wouldn't let go of the reins fully, They didn't have control

Ena was very much still running the school

When we got involved with Summerhill

Over 3 years that Zoe started to do more

End of one of the years working up to the same that

Ena handed over to Zoe officially, Zoe had been playing more of a role

I think they did invest some

**I got impression that they did in fact invest some of the profits of farm or family**

**Zoe and Tony put a sound business footing into what was happening the school**

I suspect they had analysed the breakeven point for number of students

The number of students had dipped it had got very small and was starting to rise again

They needed to encourage more campaign

Put the fees up

To make it more financially viable

Then they started to do some of the basic maintenance to maintain the fabric of the school

It took a number of years

It was finally starting to improve

Then came the OFSTED inspection

Ena died 6 years financially that would have released funds

There was a benefactor who left the school some money when that money came in

They could use that money to do a lot of work

They have had programmes about Summerhill

**There one programme**

**Channel 4 Cutting Edge most emotional and most despicable in lots of ways**

**They were duped terribly the kids**

**What they did get was students from it**

**From an emotional point of view the school felt totally betrayed**

**The whole of the community of Summerhill felt totally betrayed**

**By that tv programme**

because the people had been part of their day to day curriculum and the kids used to look after their children and everything

They completely cut all the positive side

They wanted it to look a certain way

That was very destructive for the children

It did actually take the school about 18 months to get over the pain

Very trusting the children because

They come from integrity

The result was

They felt threatened by anything from outside because of what had happened in that channel 4 programme there was a complete lack of trust in any outside organisation coming to look at them

**They had been so betrayed by that tv programme  
That they felt of anyone coming in 'What are their motives?'  
'Can we trust them?' No we can't because historically ...**

We have to remember for children in this situation

**Summerhill is their family**

**Their family has been trashed basically**

That's what I don't think they realised

**And also for Ex-Summerhillians too, people in their 40s and 50s, felt their home had been betrayed because that's where their childhood was**

So when OFSTED did come in

If you look at the sort of people who often attended Summerhill they often came from homes, when you go back from more difficult home background

Their foundation

**When someone trashes your foundation whatever age you are it destroys you or has a major impact then as it goes on it's going to be whatever goes on**

Very difficult to accept

I think I am not so sure

**I actually think that with hindsight now the OFSTED inspection probably did you a lot of good**

**It always does because it gets you to focus upon 'What you are all about'**

**Summerhill has been going for 80something years**

**No I don't think OFSTED impact was what they intended to do**

**They didn't understand**

**It didn't fit into their boxes, their categories they didn't know how to deal with it**

It just came out of their range of inspection

They had to adapt their criteria to deal with somewhere like Summerhill

Adapt their inspection criteria

It is an educational establishment

It isn't actually a normal school

The grasp of what the ethos of it they didn't have – understand at all

**In the early days – the joke was**

**They needed toilets everywhere you know**

The other thing they wanted to do

**The house kids/cottage kids, the young ones, boys and girls live together same dormitories if you like**

**there is no sort of distinction there they all play together**

boys and girls play together

there wouldn't be a set gender bias

**what happened when OFSTED said they had to be separated**

**Summerhill did comply this**

**When they were separated**

**What they found – it didn't work**

**The boys weren't playing with girls**

**True Equality issues the modern aspect of emphasis on equal opportunities**

They put the children back together It didn't work

The whole point of Summerhill is integration and there isn't any difference

They put them back together

**The OFSTED saying they should have compulsory lessons in some form**

**That was taken to the community and voted on**

**It was discussed in their meetings which they have**

Their regular meetings

The kids discussed and said no

The whole ethos of the school

That freedom of choice

If you change that aspect of lessons that basic aspect of Summerhill

that basic principle of Summerhill

If you change that aspect of lessons you have changed the whole ethos of the school

forget it you might as well shut the school

If that was what was going to happen that will happen

You had to stand up for that basic principle, as everyone saw it, which makes

Summerhill

## Appendix One

### Staff Interviews

Sunday 11 January 2004 Summerhill

#### First staff Interview

The thing was that I had worked at the school for about 3 years before the particular inspection

So I had been involved the previous inspections

And I was involved in the run up to the inspection

The inspection influenced the school way even before the inspectors came

**The inspection led before was Neville Grenier**

**We asked that he lead the 1999 inspection**

**The kids called him Father Christmas**

**He was Overweight and had a beard and appeared quite jovial**

**And he discussed with us about the need for evidence that Summerhill worked**

**And he seemed to be agreeing that we couldn't provide the kind of evidence of other schools normally provide and that**

Evidence such as Interviews of school leavers

And surveys of Past students would be one appropriate way of evidence about the school

After that inspection we were quite and I was quite excited by the fact that the inspectors seemed to responding to the ethos of Summerhill

Particularly this inspector

**He even bought a tee shirt**

**The Summerhill t shirt was 'Summerhill the most inspected school in the world'**

We thought was quite funny

he has got a sense of humour

**Before that there was an inspection, Sophie had asked a question and inspectors made her burst into tears**

**The inspectors would argue with you**

Previously

Issues to do with attendance

They perceive the children as not learning if they were out of the classroom

The idea that they learnt outside the classroom was something that we felt had not understanding

Me and Eric, he was the English teacher at the time, and he had arranged a hike

We went off on a hike, A 4 day hike we came back the morning of the inspection

**It meant that No time to prepare anything special which I wasn't going to do anyway**

**but**

**I spent that morning tidying up the lab so that it fulfilled health and safety**

**I had the sense that we were the best prepared that we had ever been**



From previous inspection we been asked by inspectors and department of Education for

**A 3 year plan, policy documents so we realised that the hostility of the inspectors of the past had partly been our fault in the sense that we hadn't provided documentation that really stated what the school was about**

The only document had been the Summerhill book

So we had a working party set up and a full staff meeting to discuss

Should we write policies

How should we write them

Let's look at other schools and their policy statements

What is the function of a policy

Is it to describe is it a practical document

Is it to constrain, is it to dictate what we do

A varied discussion

**Some staff thought we shouldn't have policy documents**

**Most staff had worked here for more than 8 years**

**Even so some came up with policy documents which were totally off the Summerhill philosophy**

**I was involved collective views of staff re policies towards literacy and numeracy After quite a few months the working party Created these documents ready for the 1999 inspection**

**Not only were they ready, they had been reviewed they had been revised by the community**

**Quite a fighting process really**

I was quite lucky because the staff who are here now don't know anything about it really

In the sense they weren't involved in the process

Our staff meetings are quite dysfunctional in a way

In the sense not everyone goes to the meeting

Some individuals use it, some don't

Some don't see it relevant because they don't use it

They don't seem to be practical

We can tell stories about

Quite personal issues

This English teacher went to a class 1 and class 2 which was part of policy stuff resulted in a number of differences

We had 2 Curriculum advisors

Me and Ian the maths teacher

Our job was to oversee the overall quality of provision of teaching in the classrooms that was our job

**Zoe is not a classroom teacher and is hands off**

**When the barristers/solicitors asked how do you know what goes on in the classrooms?**

**Do you go in and see No**

**Do you actively criticise No**

**Do you manage the teachers No**

**Teachers manage themselves**

If they weren't that good the children would bring it up issues would be raised

It does not maximise the capability of the teachers

**The kids here treat you as your friends and any public criticism of your work**

As a Curriculum Advisor

I got to look at different ways people taught

**The curriculum advisor thing was due to the court case and whilst it was**

**happening and during the Court Case Zoe was asked what did she do to ensure the quality of lessons she could say 'I have appointed 2 Curriculum Advisors'**

**Before the inspection then**

**We had policy documents and a 3 year plan**

**And I was very very confident**

**Not only did We have policy documents**

**Not only did we have the action plan**

**We had the same inspector coming back which was unusual to have inspector that had been before**

But from the beginning And he appeared to be taking into account evidence other than lesson attendance

We realised They were hostile

Social committee a fantastic committee

And we arranged a timetable of events for the 3 or 4 days that they were here

Part of it was a committee meeting

So they could see us organising as well

And we gave them this timetable

**And they didn't come to any of our events**

**They didn't come to any of the social events that we organised which was very disappointing ;**

**They didn't even come to see the House Parents**

The house parents were quite excited about being inspected

The house parents felt that their time

**As the inspection went on we realised that**

**They were totally focussing on classrooms and lessons**

**They had a meeting with Zoe**

**The 2 inspectors wanted to talk about the Management process**

**And Action plan and me and XXX member of staff who had been involved in this**

Zoe met up with them in the staff room and their

The questions was so opposite the philosophy of the school

**One other thing we changed our action plan**

**We had people from outside**

**An OFSTED inspector local to Suffolk a friend of XXX member of staff who came in about 4 or 5 times to form our action plan meetings**

**He was like inputting the language**

**Reviewing how people would respond to this**

**And he would keep on saying you have to say certain words in like Progress Tracking**

**And we kept fighting this**

**Saying if you track, if you monitor...**

**If it is about progress**

**What happens to child who decides not to go to lessons for a term**

**They may have gone backwards**

**If he or she forgets**

**How does our action plan deal with this if**

**Progress is one of our objectives**

**If we don't judge the negative things**

Quite difficult to create an action plan which words which come naturally and easily to schools

Quite difficult simply and easily by schools is a threat to the child

Always thought that I was opposed to lessons totally

I always wanted to apologise

I love teaching

**It was really important that whatever we did with the action plan reflected the philosophy of the school**

One of the words that did creep in and they did pick up on this – they asked what it meant

It means that it is up to the child

The objectives are set by the child

Up to the child

As a result they thought that we defined our action plan the action plan and our policies were in a sense meaningless which was interesting insofar as at subsequent inspection we said they were not meaningless the whole point

**They reflect what school does and therefore they change**

**They are responsive to what school is doing**

**Rather than a document that lies**

**A stationary document that doesn't reflect practice**

**So they took that as a criticism**

And it was used in the court case

Subsequent inspections have praised and complimented that it is part of the living of the school

Which is quite funny that one criticised and one praised

**We had a sense that they had a very fixed agenda**

**They ignored the social committee**

**They ignored the art and the woodwork**

**Anything outside the classroom**

**Anything that wasn't seen to be an academic lesson**

I said to them Your values are at opposite to ours

They stood out of their chairs in anger

And said how dare you

**The inspection proceeded**

**The inspector for science arrived a day late**

**He was a senior inspector of OFSTED and he arrived late**

**He was on his mobile most of the time**

Because he was involved in OFSTED had published document about Racism in Schools and he was a co-author

Spent most of his time talking about this report that had been published that day

We were puzzled thinking why was Neville Grenier leading this when Cliff Gould was by far the senior member of OFSTED

We were very surprised at how senior these people were

HMI inspects independent schools

They had inspected us 10 years previously

**I personally think there had been a build up if you read from the court case**

**Continuously we were a school that didn't respond**

**Narrow and fragmented curriculum**

**To do with narrow and fragmented curriculum due to attendance of lessons**

Ironic that every single inspection over past 10 years repeated Narrow and

Fragmented curriculum because of choice

Read it one report ok

Then again

**Third report you think where are they actually helping the school they keep saying the same thing**

**No way do they say what the school can do about it**

Basically the 1999 inspection says you have got to have compulsory lessons

When I was at the oral feedback 2 inspectors NG and CG at the end of the 3 ½ days of inspection went into the office Zoe me and Ian

Tony was there as well

**Basically the inspectors feedback was an hour long basically saying**

**We recommend that you have compulsory lessons**

**Do you realise that if that is what you are going to do**

**You are going to close this place down**

**Because the philosophy of this place is**

**I said to NG**

**Neill's bust in the room – Why 1949 did HMI say that educationalists should come and visit Summerhill to see what experiment**

How can inspectors say that in 1949 then 50 years later

He said the National Curriculum

They refused to acknowledge it

I wrote the adjudicator quoting this

She acknowledged it and she re-wrote the adjudication she wrote the draft and

There was so much that we complained about

That we missed out parts of the complaint

**One that the national curriculum wasn't referenced because the whole point was that OFSTED couldn't mention the NC because we were independent but this is what NG referring to**

She says it was confusion and lack of understanding between me and NG

The fact

Why didn't you go and see social committee which was brilliant and referred to literacy and numeracy  
He apologised as it was due to lack of time  
Yet in the Adjudication OFSTED said that they did their utmost to see  
And I quoted the apology In front of Cliff Gould  
And Adjudicator ignored it  
And I wrote to her after she had written it

And I quoted him that he apologised  
But you ignore my quotes  
The major evidence was that they failed to look outside of the classroom  
The fact that they apologised for that a major part of the argument  
Adjudicator said An apology could be interpreted In several different ways  
And that she wasn't willing to reference it

**They lied**  
**I wrote back to her and said**  
**Please could you show me the evidence**  
**What did NG say**  
**What did CG say**  
**I wanted the evidence to that which they denied**  
It basically contradicted what OFSTED told them to say

They totally came down  
And in the inspection afterwards  
They had inspection afterwards which was to do with checking the things we said we would do 3 things they were checking we had done this  
They have been 2 times since then  
**One of the boys said What is a broad and balanced curriculum**  
**This woman Said of the inspection team 'the National Curriculum'**  
**And I said how can you say the National Curriculum?**  
**And then Paul Hirst, independent DFEE Advisor, and he was asked what he thinks**  
**And he said he was not an inspector**  
**Look if what I saw over last 2 days is the broadest curriculum I ever saw**  
**Judges were clear that the National Curriculum is not the only broad and balanced curriculum and monopolised**  
**They kept saying why are you referencing the National Curriculum?**  
**So it is strange at the end of that people prophetically say we are going to close you down**  
**We are going to force you to have compulsory lessons**  
Zoe was very upset  
We had issues with what they had said  
We were very upset with what they had said as to What were our special needs  
We wanted to respond to that and they said  
We'll change that  
We'll change that  
They didn't change anything about special needs  
**We had no clue where they got there evidence from**  
Even though we all take responsibility for all that

I left that room late for dinner  
I got served dinner  
A child with learning difficulties sat next to me  
I was so devastated  
I asked her what did they ask you  
I had been teaching her  
Different children have different experience of children  
Different teachers had views on  
Some teachers thought she wouldn't progress very far  
She had very poor Short term memory no long term memory  
My experience of this girl  
You could build on it depending how you taught it  
I was teaching her one to one  
When she left and went to college  
Well you probably would  
But she went to study GNVQ Hotel and Catering  
The inspectors left her feeling  
She was someone that lessons weren't important to her  
She went to them  
What I thought of the inspectors  
I would think of that girl

I met with David Blunkett  
David Blunkett was The chief inspector at a conference in Sheffield  
Before  
The inspectors inspected  
Let's start doing things before it comes  
Let's lobby  
Where chief inspector is going to be  
Where the Minister for Education was going to be  
We invited ourselves to the conference  
Don't you want to have a workshop at your conference  
On children's rights hey yeah!  
This is the reason we want to come  
Main reason is Minister of Education will be there and we want to lobby  
The Minister of Education will not answer questions  
He said he would do his most  
There were 4 speakers there and he would respond to their speeches  
His remit wasn't human right but education  
We would be able to meet him before hand  
And lobby him  
First major conference I had been to  
Incredible group of people  
Totally devastated by human rights to do with death and torture  
And there was we from a little primary school  
And our problems paled into insignificance  
All were teaching in schools where parents of other children had killed the parents of  
the little boy sitting next to him  
There was a

Poet from Malaysia a barrister and they were imprisoning  
He loved summerhill  
Poetry at this school  
It was quite fun and I was very aware we were there  
I was aware we were there for our own cause  
And we dominated the conference  
My children  
They cannot believe they are denying their right by closing their school  
I was lobbying the minister  
we up to him afterwards as he walked to his car  
he said it was the press  
there were issues were health and safety  
it was on his desk and he was willing to negotiate  
made the joke  
at the age of 14 he would have loved to go naked swimming  
very concerned about the way we were treated  
on that Monday or Tuesday we got the letter  
I came back and said  
negotiate in public  
let's do something  
**others said don't believe in politicians**  
**we were for negotiation**  
**and the whole process began**  
**let's phone him up – I said no no he said it in public**  
**then we received letter of complaint – where was the room for negotiation**

**we challenged Chris Woodhead we met up with him personally with the**  
**secretary of education**  
**the one thing I wanted for the government no where at no time forget**  
**Summerhill was on the agenda**  
every single minister that ever was at one of those conferences  
how can you be threatening to close  
and being so proud of fact you are introducing participation  
Bernard C got really angry afterwards for a year and a half of it

Mary Robinson was  
Doing a Radio 3 broadcast lecture on human rights at the end of millennium and  
things  
Went with 4 kids  
Met her afterwards  
With Information about the campaign  
She didn't help but did acknowledge and pass onto the un

Then I asked a question about that which was broadcast on Radio 3  
Again, her whole speech as Human Rights Commissioner for UN was about  
War, children starving  
I asked  
How would she create a school based on Human Rights

So there was certain active fighting

Some of the material

Got passed to UN in London and they must have liked us

They sent us this press release A special rapportaire KT

She was In England for 3 days doing research for a paper on a Right to Education in England

Press release she was here in 2 days time oh my god

I will try to investigate processes by which the UN would defend us

I wrote to London office

The London office

Could only get involved if the government had signed

England is not one of these governments haven't

The whole process that the UN has

Cannot use the UN because we haven't signed it

Whole handbook on how to do but... they sent me this press release

My god, I went down to London

I phoned her hotel I phoned the London office

Borrowed Zoe's mobile

At a conference at the Institute of Education

I was so desperate

If we had 4 kids

I had 4 children on standby ready to run down London to meet this woman

Luckily I knew the woman who run children's rights office

We had organised

And this was the women and she said look if you cannot connect her

I am having lunch with

I will make sure Summerhill will have a voice

She was willing to meet in the hotel bar some of the kids

They came down and spent 1 or 2 hours

I had to sit

It was obvious from the beginning she wanted to work with the kids

I wrote this letter, it doesn't represent what you want because it was written by an adult and ripped it up

I just sat on the edge I listened it was all her

She interviewed the kids – a UN special representative

One of the best things I have ever seen

She goes round the world representing children like this

She was a little sad I will tell

And she would take up our case

2 year later she resigned which was a shame as she was really really good and the kids loved it

I think

she was quite troublesome to governments

totally children's rights focussed on the level

wanted to talk to the kids didn't want to speak to me

after that meeting yes there are people we can talk we have got power

then we arranged a press conference at the house of commons

we had article 12 there



it was organised by the kids  
the campaign was really good fun

**a lot of staff would think there wasn't a campaign there was no committee at the start**

**I was choosing**

**Kids were complaining why can't I come down why don't you choose me**

**Elected 12 person campaign committee which didn't include staff**

**Staff don't always get informed**

Public relations company

a legal march in a way what they organised was the giving in of a petition

In nearly resigned

They used on their website to show how good they were at public relations

The amount they charged us

I refused to go to the march

We had a staff meeting to discuss the march

I had organised a press conference

I organised the whole school going down and holding a democratic meeting in the house of commons

That wasn't a protest that was something I had wanted to do 4 years before

The oldest children's democracy showing parliament democracy and what it can do

We had people from UNESCO

And an extremely Old extremely friendly child psychologist in his 90s who was friends with Neill

I didn't think he would come he was a friend of mine

The only money I had

We had had this international conference £200

I took responsibility

There were 680 members of the house of commons

Kids were photocopying running backwards and forwards to the office

They were collating a 5 page pack

Sheet for MP's to sign

Letter a leaflet a prospectus

Sign saying Support Summerhill

Zoe said how much is that

If she had known earlier she would not have let it through

Every time Zoe asked how you have paid for this I said out of the

Too late Zoe found out

And it was half way through

Thought I had overspent but I hadn't

end

## Appendix One

### Interviews – Staff

Sunday 11 January 2004  
2<sup>nd</sup> staff interview

I'd like to start with my collection

Having been in a school in the 1950s and Late sixties  
I fell in love with the school when I was first started working for Zoe and we used to chat  
And I fell in love with the philosophy  
She gave me a couple of books to read whilst  
I was bringing up my children  
and fighting with the system  
and wanted to own them so I had to go out to buy them

then my youngest daughter was very unhappy at school  
and I brought her to Summerhill as I didn't have much to do with the school prior to her coming  
I used to teach horse riding here

Then my daughter was here  
And I learned so much about the philosophy  
How successful learning is for kids  
Especially if they have come out a system that's full on push push push  
**She virtually had a nervous breakdown at 11, which I think is totally disgusting**  
**Part of it was the conflict between her and me**  
She'd come home from school and say I've got to learn this by Friday  
I'd say Put it away you are a kid  
Let's go and walk around the forest  
She would end up and get herself in such a state  
I took her out of school and the state system  
She either had to give Summerhill a try  
Or we learnt at home together

She chose to come to Summerhill  
And she had the interview with Zoe and  
That child was a changed person  
I was impressed how it helped her how it got her through things  
When she had finished with the school  
My life circumstances changed  
I went to teacher training college and in that time I did a mature student adult access course with music as well  
Because I considered myself to be mature enough

**Then I go trotting up to Zoe just about to start this course I went round to Zoe and said will there be a job for me at Summerhill when I've done my training**  
**And she said Probably we will be closed**  
And that's what started if off me  
I said Over my dead body  
**Zoe She was absolutely exhausted at the time**  
**And Then it came out how OFSTED**  
**The school had been inspected**  
**How the school had almost failed OFSTED's inspection**  
I got very involved in all of that  
Took away a lot of paperwork to read  
And I went off and did my training which was 2 years  
In that 2 years I plucked to study curriculum and schemes of work and initiatives etc etc  
I was really interested in that  
When I came back in 1997 1998  
**Zoe wasn't going to employ anyone as she was convinced the school would be closed**  
**Left there was no way they were going to re-open**  
**I started to speak to her about my experience**  
With curriculum work and management of a school  
My involvement then became as an  
Outsider getting the right people for the school to talk to  
I became like a coordinator and the battle of the inspectors  
I spent about a year or 18 months doing that  
Part-time I used to come in 3 mornings a week or Working from home  
Collecting documentation  
Telling the staff what they needed  
**The impact of all of that was that paper was being gathered**  
**Before there had been no paper the only information**  
**All that was known was Neill's books**  
**And whatever Zoe said there was very little written information**  
I started to collate files we've got 3 of now which we called  
The Community Development files for want of a different...  
What my job was  
I would go up to a teacher  
Where are you having problems  
What's your problem with the inspector  
What do you think you need  
I'll find someone in the big wide world  
To sort it out  
**And I did that I brought a lot of people into the school rightly or wrongly**  
**At the time I thought rightly because we all felt shit scared frightened that if we didn't do something along the same vein as the state system we would not get any recognition for the work that was being done here**  
**Criteria - We needed to put something on paper out – although we'd gathered a different - criteria meets the same end**  
Just put out in a different way  
I was getting all these advisers in trusting as friends giving their time free  
It was upsetting a lot of staff it was frightening lot of staff

**Upsetting Zoe a lot as she had no background of this no professional training in any way**

It was all very frightening for about 2 years

Then we had the 1999 inspection we had done so much work

We had so much stuff on paper we were convinced we met all the criteria

Serious affair

Without interfering with the children at all

From the sign up downwards

They could

Sign up upwards

We were just putting it down on paper

This is how it works

**We felt the staff felt completely knocked on the head dysfunctional**

**All the hard work we had done**

**Still inspecting a state school**

**Not inspecting an individual school**

**That had been running for 70 years**

**We were featured in the history of Britain**

We were also recognising there wasn't much history to work to

So we thought we'd provide it

Lits if stuff a body of information

When we discovered afterwards

We were Doing all our talking after the inspection

We thought we had provided

Sat round and had many many long meetings

**The Annoying thing was according to the secretary and Zoe who were in the office when the inspectors were reading**

**Slipping through these documents as if they had little importance**

**It wasn't down to them to learn how this school worked**

Ho No they didn't have to do that

All they needed to know was

Did they pass their exams

Did they get jobs

Were they fulfilled and whole people in their eyes

So when I discovered and a lot of those working on those files discovered what they did I went berserk

Nobody is actually interested in

The philosophy they lost trust

When the court case

**Absolutely drained the school for 2 years afterwards during and afterwards**

**There was no energy left Fight fight fight**

**Tried to maintain some general life for the kids here**

**Amazing highlights Zoe would say**

**We are doing pretty good on so and so**

**A huge cheer of relief recognise that something was right**

highlights were

pretty Minimal

When we announced

We'd got the inspectorate off our backs the court case over several of their notice had been thrown out and we came back to school

Everyone was estatically happy

It took so long to get over that

Big kids here that had worked so hard

Kids were just knackered they had learned so much

**They had learned so much bitterness which was not part**

**In my eyes which had not been part of their lives before**

**They had also learnt**

**Resentfulness**

And also discovered there are adults out there that can really shit on you

Although when those things happen in the workforce when you leave school go out there and find out

At least by then you are an adult but these kids had been

Shat on from about 13 onwards by adults and it took a lot of healing a lot of healing time to bring those kids back round to realise that

Not all adults were like that

Not all associations were like that or corporate institutions are like that but quite a lot of them are

And you know How best to deal with that

Those kids have left Summerhill with

**An amazing insight into the workings of government**

I think since then impact I think has been

The impact has been one of continuous fear

Not so much in the community It's driving itself into the realms of the state system through the fear of it all happening again

I think That is really one of the sad outcomes

Some government body out there to protect Individuals rights

And there is nobody out there protecting individual's lives it's Fight fight fight

The fact that a lot of people are individual

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