Proposals for a Celtic Consensus on Global Priorities for Social and Ecological Justice

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This paper argues that to transform our worlds in ways which recognise and respect the beauty, complexity, and value of human and other than human life, there is an urgent need to transform mainstream, market-orientated, thinking in all aspects of educational philosophy and practice. The purpose of constructing a 'Celtic Consensus' is to provide a departure point for discussion, debate, and collective orientation, around the processes of catalysing the conditions necessary to facilitate a paradigm shift in the collective consciousness of humanity. The term 'Celtic Consensus' references the ancient Celtic tribe's rejection of colonialism by the Roman Empire. By building collective resistance to forces of violence and oppression and identifying shared understandings of key areas that need to transform at a local and global level, is it possible to broaden, and amplify, the call for transformation towards social and ecological justice, as the shared vision for our pluriverse futures?

"Since wars begin in the minds of 'people' it is in the minds of 'people' that the defences of peace must be constructed" (UNESCO 2021 p.1)

Introduction

Despite the huge technological advances which have taken place since the 1980's, by comparison significantly less progress has been made in relation to social and ecological issues (Norgaard 1994). The continuation of oppressive colonial practices under the guise of Free Trade agreements and international finance and the accelerated destruction of the natural world, show little evidence of abating, with outcome of the COP26 negotiations being viewed by many as largely a process in financialising the end of the world (Cultural Survival 2021) (Lakhani 2021).

Neoliberal policies such as the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) enacted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, have aligned with developments such as the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) (Sahlberg 2012), to place capitalist perspectives at the imagined centre of the global political spectrum. In this essay my starting point is that capitalist ideology is situated far to the right in any informed spectrum of political thought. As such I believe that formal processes of education from early years to higher education, that uncritically endorse the visions and values of free market capitalism, are in fact engaged in a highly damaging process of indoctrination. By offering a brief critical overview of a range of some of the major issues facing humanity, I ask readers to consider three key issues. Do we need to develop a shared understanding across cultures and continents, of the need for a collective transformation away from capitalist reality to a more generative way of living? A way of living which is in balance with each other, other than human life and our planet. If such a paradigm shift is both desirable and necessary, what barriers currently exist to achieving this goal? Finally, what is the role of education in this process and how might we take the first steps on this journey?

I offer the recent Futures of Education Report from UNESCO (2021) as a useful platform to begin a discussion around approaches to education that offer less market-orientated perspectives than those promoted by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation

and Development (OECD), and its influential Programme for International Student assessment (PiSA). I take Scotland as an example of a setting where these discussions of what the future of education could be, seem to ignore the potential of a future not proscribed as one of competition and conflict, but of peaceful coexistence and cooperation. A setting where a national conversation on education is beginning, which I see as currently damagingly restricted by ideas of 'change,' rather than engaging with the potential of 'transformation'.

This paper concludes with a proposal for the creation of a Celtic Consensus. This idea is floated as an alternative ideological framework to what I argue was the profoundly damaging Washington Consensus, a set of ideas which enshrined the neoliberal economic doctrine and that continues to influence mainstream attitudes to economics, education, and the environment, in most countries across the world.

The 'Celtic Consensus' aims to identify key areas of discourse that currently lie out with much mainstream dialogue related to education. In addition, this framework of ideas seeks to highlight the interconnected nature of transformative thought and action, the idea that once the restrictive 'logic' of the market is transgressed, many 'futures' become possible. I understand this 'transformation' in thinking to be central to the addressing the issue raised by Lorde's critical observation "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." (Lorde 2012 p 110). If educators instruct rather than teach and if we chose to ignore the manifest failures of our current economic and political systems, across both the United Kingdom and the world, how can we hope to support the development of societies that coexist in peace with each other, and the natural world? If as a species we continue to fail in achieving lasting peace, social justice, and ecological sustainability, is there hope for current and future generations?

The purpose of the Celtic Consensus proposal is to platform these questions and to encourage the development of critical perspectives that challenge the current 'status quo', and interrupt the dominance of utilitarian, human capital, performance related approaches to education. These neoliberal approaches, which are understood by many to be profoundly inadequate, still drive much policy and practice development in countries such as Scotland, stifling the potential of new thought and vision to emerge. Providing students, politicians, and civic society with vibrant and viable alternatives to neoliberal common sense, is I believe, crucial to allowing a national debate on education reform to take place within a critically informed environment. The Celtic Consensus seeks to frame such a discussion in a space out

with potentially 'nationalist' considerations, taking as a starting point the perspective that the futures of humanity and other than human life are interlinked, as are the futures of nations and cultures. This vision sits in stark contrast to 'neo fascist' rhetoric of European and US politicians and media that promote the toxic ideology of tropes such as the 'Great Replacement Theory' (Rose 2022), and it is with awareness of the danger posed by the continued growth of right wing popularism, that the Celtic Consensus seeks to offer a coherent counter narrative to the racist, homophobic and transphobic world view promoted by some (Bayer 2022).

Context and positionality

Given that the overarching theme of this issue of The Spark Journal is '*Sustaining Change'*, a question this raises for me as a potential contributor is, what kind of change are we looking to sustain in our worlds and why? My answer is that change within the broader boundaries of the current status quo is taking place constantly (Sterling 2021). In England, the introductions of academy schools (Eyles and Machin 2019) represented a significant reform of the existing system, while in Wales the introduction of a new, 'transformational' curriculum, is in the offing (Evans 2022). One recommendation from the recent report on education reform in Scotland (Scottish Government 2022) is that the Scottish Government should initiate a national conversation aimed at providing a 'compelling and consensual vision' for the future of Scottish education. This paper argues that the language of 'change' and 'reform' are not only inadequate in terms of responding to the multiple existential crises faced by humanity, they are also dangerous, as they can offer the damaging illusion that appropriate action is being undertaken, when in fact 'business as usual' is the order of the day. The proposal of a Celtic Consensus centres the urgent need for 'transformative' thinking and action. Thinking and action that engages with intrinsically political and philosophical nature of education and recognises what Springer calls the '..vile discourse of neoliberalism..' (Springer 2021 p12).

Can 'we' collectively understand the nature of human nature, and who is we?

I approach the writing of this paper from an epistemological and ontological standpoint that assumes the notion of a shared humanity, a concept of humanity that is part of other than human life, rather than existing separately in some notional hierarchy of existence. As a white, straight, CIS gendered, male, enjoying good health, economic security, and white privilege, I write from a desire to understand the world around me and the causes of ongoing

systemic injustice, with the aim of playing an active role in challenging the causes and outcomes of epistemic and other modes of violence (Santos 2014). When I use the collective term 'we' I am imagining all those past, present and future that have sought not only to understand the mysteries of human existence, but also to act in ways that can make our futures 'better' in terms of less violence and suffering for all life forms and create conditions which enable a more socially and ecologically just world. I think such ideas and the people that hold them are under continual threat, but also that those who do not fall into this definition of 'we' are still of intrinsic value, as is other than human life.

The idea of 'us' and 'them' is challenging to refute as we can clearly identify those with ideas and world views which foment violence and promote division and oppression. How to address these schisms is hugely important but not the focus of this paper, this papers focus is to promote the closer working of those dedicated to transformative approaches to education and ways of living in general. I write to transgress the boundaries between academia and activism and those between notions of health, education, politics, science and art, in an attempt to speak effectively to the human condition. Despite recognising my multiple inadequacies in attempting such a task, for me it is the task at hand.

Education: Lifelong, Life Wide and Life Deep

Much of the world we experience around us, look back on, and imagine for our future, is built upon huge levels of destruction and systematic injustice. Political and cultural systems that support Femicide, Colonialism, Ecocide, Patriarchy, Ableism, religious persecution, and persecution in the name of religion are still largely the norm (Amnesty International 2021) (Miller et al 2021). The money borrowed by the UK Treasury to compensate slave owners for the abolition of slavery was only repaid in 2015 (Tax Justice Network 2020) a reminder that much current wealth and privilege in countries such the United Kingdom is built upon the unjust treatment and misery of others. The circumstances of workers in the mines and factories of the world perpetuate this model of the suffering for some and luxury for others (Malm et al. 2021).

The oppression and murder of gay, queer, non-binary and trans people, as well as trade unionists and environmental defenders, journalists and in many cases those who simply speak truth to power, continue with little effective international action to address these issues. The reaction to the recent murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, largely understood to have been sanctioned by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, shows that many of the richest

and most powerful people are able to act outside the law with little, if any, consequences (Kirchgaessner 2022).

The Holocaust, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Iraq, Tibet, Rwanda, Cambodia, the Cultural Revolution, the Holodomor, the partition of India and Pakistan the list of humanities capacity for inhumanity is, for all intents, endless. Add to this the past, present and future slaughter of other than human life, from whales to buffalo and insect life and we have a litany of shame and an ongoing legacy of conscientious cruelty. Perhaps one reason this version of reality is not taught in schools within Scotland and in fact in many countries (Loewen 1995) is because to recognise the systemic violence inherent in systems of domination could perhaps increase the potential of individuals and communities demanding systemic change. There is certainly a desire among many establishment figures in the UK and beyond to prevent any critical analysis of the official historical narrative. Attempts to suggest that the violence perpetrated in the cause of British imperialism should be a source of shame and regret, is argued by many on the right to be an example of 'wokeism' rather than realism (Independent 2022). Despite the attempts across a range of generations and cultures to construct a worldwide understanding of principles and values which unite us as a global community of humanity, we are perhaps as distant from achieving this vision as we ever have been (Akbarpoor. et al., 2018).

Enter the UNESCO Futures of Education initiative:

The International Commission on the Futures of Education was established by UNESCO in 2019 to reimagine how knowledge and learning can shape the future of humanity and the planet. The initiative incorporates extensive public and expert engagement and aims to catalyze a global debate on how education needs to be rethought in a world of increasing complexity, uncertainty, and fragility. (UNESCO, 2021 p2)

The role of education in socialising for what Freire called 'adaption' or creating an approach to education and learning to support processes of what he termed 'integration' – '…*the capacity to adapt oneself to reality plus the critical capacity to make choices and to transform that reality'*, (Freire 2005 p.4) is an area of debate that requires reaching beyond those self-identified as educators, and engage with all learners, in other words humanity in its widest sense. Research and academic discourse critical of the impact of neoliberal ideology on the practice and purpose of education is abundant, (Hill & Kumar 2008) (Giroux 2014), (Lynch 1989), however the evidence of the damage already done to our global epistemic and

ontological environments may seem less obvious than that inflicted on the planet, our oceans and the atmosphere (Belanger, 2016). This epistemological damage and its limiting of our individual and collective abilities, or perhaps willingness, to think beyond the 'logic' of the market, may prove to be every bit as threatening to the potential flourishing of human life on earth as the destruction of the natural world that surrounds us, and on which rely for the sustenance of current and future existence.

Understanding the notion of 'global perspectives'

Given that there exists a presumption within the idea of a framework such as the Celtic Consensus that the notion of 'consensus' is desirable and that the potential for 'universally shared' values and vision is possible, the recognition of these assumptions as being in themselves 'problematic' must be acknowledged. This section briefly discusses the need for greater awareness of knowledge and understanding of how the collective pasts of humanity can be understood. The development of a more critically informed and shared understanding of our pasts and their relationship with the present, would appear crucial to the process of identifying what fundamental barriers, cultural and political exist to achieving this aim. If indeed, the concept of universality is deemed to have merit or is potentially in itself a barrier to the realisation of a more diverse and peaceful world.

The most significant advances regarding a global consensus on how a shared understanding and respect for humanity might be achieved, were seen following the aftermath of the Second World War. The founding of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations 1948) still underpin many elements of the notions of international law which currently exist. Although there have always been significant concerns whether the processes and procedures which brought these conventions in to being simply replicated global power imbalances, the notion of universal human rights has become increasingly widely valued across many cultures and countries (Ife 2009). It is also unfortunately self-evident that these efforts to secure global peace and justice have been proven to be ultimately unsuccessful in preventing all further acts of genocide and ecocide (Akbarpoor et al. 2018). The global Human Rights legislative framework can point to a level of success in the extent to which UN declarations and conventions have succeeded in respect of raising levels of global discourse on issues such as, freedom of speech, gender equality and the rights of Indigenous Peoples. This legislative framework creates a context within which countries and those in power can encounter a degree of scrutiny as to the level to which they

do, or do not, uphold human rights, however it is far from universally impactful. The example of the 2022 World Cup which will be held in Qatar, shows that despite significant concerns regarding the treatment of migrant workers and the impact of the 'Kafala' system of sponsorship-based employment, the power of commerce can be seen to outweigh the international desire for compassion or justice (Amnesty International 2019).

The Millennium Development Goals and their newest iteration the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) (United Nations, 2015) figure prominently in many countries policy statements and link to action on climate change. The Paris Accords followed the Kyoto Protocols, the Rio Earth Summit of 1992, and a long list of such meetings, and one possible interpretation of this programme of high-level diplomacy is that those within positions of national and global power, feel the need to be seen to be engaged in dialogue around areas of collective concern. However, critics would argue that these 'talks' merely serve to obscure the entrenchment of the harsh reality of a toxic status quo, one which perpetuates global violence and inequality and accelerates the race toward the cliff edge of catastrophic environmental breakdown (Monbiot, 2017) (Klein, 2014) (Hickel, 2020). In schools in Scotland predominately under the theme of Learning for Sustainability (LfS) (Education Scotland 2022), the SDG's are engaged with in a largely uncritical manner. The role of the fossil fuel industry in lobbying and influencing policy making and public opinion, could be more central to understanding the current circumstances of climate emergency (Friends of the Earth International 2021), however to achieve this aim without greater knowledge and understanding within the teaching and youthwork field. remains a challenge.

The Global dynamics of power and its threat to our collective futures

The powerful governments and governing forces of the world, including the US, Russian, Chinese and Indian Governments and the huge transnational corporations that provide the military and financial infrastructure they utilise, seem to have found common ground in the processes of manufacturing consent (Herman and Chomsky 1988). Many activists from across the world argue that a numerically small number of individuals and organisations increasingly use their power to openly oppress the majority of the planet's inhabitants (McGregor & Scandrett, 2022). Peace activists from all cultural backgrounds argue that nuclear weapons have played a role in establishing a globally agreed consensus of shared irrationality (ICAN 2022). For Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) to be widely accepted as the underpinning logic of, not just the Cold War, but the Perpetual State of War

which has evolved since the fall of the Berlin Wall, metamorphizing after the 'Twin Towers' into the 'War on Terror' (Kaldor 2006), one must ask oneself the question, to paraphrase Jiddu Krishnamurti, "Is it a measure of health to be well-adjusted to a profoundly sick society?" I believe it is important to consider how educationalists and education systems from early years to Higher Education engage with issues of global conflict. Is there potential for greater profile to be given to learning that links to issues such a Holocaust awareness, and the legacy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Nogami 2006)x, in the hope that greater awareness of the horrors of war and genocide leads to a more widespread and effective peace movement? I would argue this is undoubtedly the case but currently lack the research-based evidence to prove my case.

A query that could be offered in response Krishnamurti's question relating to the 'sick society' is to ask which society are we referring to? This is a vital issue that is often either overlooked or deliberately ignored in much discussion of the nature of global society and links back my earlier discussion as to the identity of the 'we'. The idea of a homogenous global society is the projection of colonial thought as evidenced in the globalisation of the 80's 90's and noughties that still holds significant sway today. The Americanisation and commodification of life, land and learning that accelerated after the Second World War and again after the demise of the United Soviet States of Russia (USSR) and the wall of the Berlin Wall, still exerts a significant influence on our body politic in the UK. The brutal enforcement of the neoliberal economic vision in Chile in 1979 carried on the US policy of 'capitalism or death' for countries across Africa, Latin America and Indonesia seeking a way beyond direct colonial rule (Prashad 2012).

The question of how we understand the concept of 'society' is then a starting point for our journey to transformed understandings of what is or is not possible to achieve in our collective futures beyond notions of Capitalist Realism (Fisher 2009). As is so often the case the words of the Zapatistas capture this vison most eloquently.

> Many words are walked in the world. Many worlds are made. Many worlds make us. There are words and world's that are lies and injustices. There are words and world's that are truthful and true. In the world of the powerful there is only room for the big and their helpers. In the world we want everybody fits. The world we want is a world in which many worlds fit. ('Fourth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle (1996), Zapatisa National Liberation Army, cited in Kothari et al. 2019 p.6)

In addition to considering agreed or contested notions of the potential for a world in which many worlds fit, as a critical pedagogue there many other aspects of instrumental reason and capitalist 'common sense' which I believe require to be addressed, to allow space in public discourse for consideration of an alternative future to that pronounced and prescribed by the current neoliberal hegemony. The continued threat of nuclear annihilation is an area that for me highlights the ongoing struggle between global perspectives that seek transformative action and in this case the outlawing of nuclear weapons, and those unwilling to imagine such possibilities.

Global action to criminalise possession of nuclear weapons

A current positive example of a global movement seeking transformative change to the current global status quo can be seen in the work of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN). The ongoing threat of nuclear annihilation appears to barely feature in current mainstream political discourse, although it has been brought into sharper relief recently following Russia's latest invasion of the Ukraine. The 'logic' as such, underpinning MAD is that the only reliable constraint against those seeking to dominate others with the threat of nuclear destruction is the threat of devasting retaliation. A no win, no win or lose/lose impasse (Barash 2018). The extent to which this is not a globally agreed consensus is laid bare by the development and introduction of the U.N. Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. The treaty,

> …prohibits nations from developing, testing, producing, manufacturing, transferring, possessing, stockpiling, using or threatening to use nuclear weapons, or allowing nuclear weapons to be stationed on their territory. It also prohibits them from assisting, encouraging or inducing anyone to engage in any of these activities. (United Nations, 2017 np)

Brought into force on 22nd January 2021, as of April 2022 the treaty has already achieved 86 signatories and 60 states parties, including Ireland, Palestine, and Venezuela. This in my view is an example of on one hand significant levels of global solidarity, while simultaneously highlighting a profound schism within societies around the world. A schism which relates to their fundamental understanding of what actions are required to prepare for a world community built on the values of peace, rather one precariously balanced by the threat of nuclear war. This schism lies broadly between majority world nations, those not in possession of nuclear weapons and those countries with colonial histories and nation states committed to the oppression of democratic choice and human rights within their own

citizenry. The Scottish Government takes a somewhat contradictory view with regard to nuclear weapons in an independent Scotland by on the one hand, committing to the removal of the Trident nuclear weapons system based at Faslane, but being willing to sign up to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) which see, "Nuclear weapons are a core component of NATO's overall capabilities for deterrence and defence, alongside conventional and missile defence forces." (NATO 2022). It is hard to understand why 'cognitive dissonance' is not a core subject in most curricula, as it seems to be a prerequisite for success in the fields of politics and commerce, an area where a silent consensus, seems in place. This idea of the potentially damaging nature of 'consensus' or at least the illusion of it, is the focus we move to now.

The 'Washington Consensus'?

A key example of the desire to present an illusion of consensus, which in fact is only a consensus of the powerful, can be seen in what became known as the 'The Washington Consensus', the impacts of which still feed the huge global inequalities of the present (Hickel 2017).

The Washington Consensus came from a simple set of ten high level policy recommendations identified by economist John Williamson in 1989 these were: 1) fiscal discipline; 2) redirecting public expenditure; 3) tax reform; 4) financial liberalization; 5) adoption of a single, competitive exchange rate; 6) trade liberalization; 7) elimination of barriers to foreign direct investment; 8) privatization of state owned enterprises; 9) deregulation of market entry and competition; and 10) secure property rights (Williamson 1989).

This consensus was between the US Congress, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO), all assemblies of power focussed on retaining the dominance of US capitalist ideology on the world stage. The IMF's role, which had been envisaged by Keynes as a safeguard for the industrialised world in periods of economic contraction (Hickel 2017) was repurposed to safeguard the western financial system by imposing structural adjustment programmes (SAP) on countries across Latin America, Africa and Indonesia. The motivation for this was to stop countries defaulting on loans from US banks and to ensure governments prioritised debt repayment, over investment in public services. The cynical and clinical social murder (Medvedyuk et al. 2021) of millions, and theft of trillions of resources is a historical fact that seems to have been

obfuscated by 'alternative facts' or subject to 'strategic ignorance' a strategy used to suppress inconvenient truths (McGoey 2019). Few if any pupils leaving Scottish schools will have any awareness of the political context that has created the environment in which they live and work. If accurate descriptions of historical events are to replace popularist propaganda, any meaningful decolonisation of curriculums must also include the study of how power has and continues to be, abused within systems that pretend to exhibit 'corporate social responsibility' (George, 2015).

Some level of the horrors inflicted by the SAPs are captured in a quote from the letter of resignation of Davidson Budhoo, an IMF senior economist whose job was to implement these policies. He wrote addressing the then IMF Managing Director Michel Camdessus:

> Today I resign from the staff of the International Monetary Fund after over twelve years, and 1,000 days of official Fund work in the field, hawking your medicine and your bag of tricks to governments and to people in Latin America and the Caribbean and Africa. To me resignation is a priceless liberation, for with it I have taken the first big step to that place where I may hope to wash my hands of what in my mind's eye is the blood of millions of poor and starving people. Mr Camdessus, the blood is so much, you know, it runs in rivers. It dries up too; it cakes all over me; sometimes I feel there is not enough soap in the whole world to cleanse me from the things I did do in your name and in the name of your predecessors, and under your official seal. (As quoted in Hickel, 2017 p 166)

The authority of The Washington Consensus and its wider neoliberal rationality began to erode in the first decades of the 21st Century. This was largely due to a mixture of resistance from the Global South and the impossibility to argue that the policies had been anything other than a catastrophic failure, in terms other than their effectiveness in opening economies in the Global South to be plundered by transnational corporations (Ostry et al., 2016).

One lesson that can be drawn from the transition away from the SAPs that relates directly to our discussion here of 'sustaining change', is the way in which, while much of the language and narrative of the IMF, World Bank, European Central Bank, has been modified over the past decades, the purposes and outcomes of the policies pursued have been identical. This can be seen in the treatment of Greece and the brutality of the 'austerity' measures enforced in the Greek government. Again, in retrospect the IMF hierarchy were forced to admit they had 'got their sums wrong' and had underestimated the multiplier effect of huge government public spending cuts on the ability of the wider economy to recover (Mody 2018)

In fact, up until the Covid 19 epidemic, austerity in terms of public spending was the only medicine still being prescribed in terms of spending on public services. The billions bestowed on the markets in terms of quantitative easing (Smith 2021) have only succeeded in widening the huge inequalities between and within countries. Critics such as Piketty (2021) and Varoufakis (2020) sit alongside a huge chorus of civic society organisations in calling out the systemic injustice of the current global financial and political order, however fundamental change still appears unlikely. For many people as Mark Fisher noted, "It's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism." (Fisher 2009 p1).

Democratising the debate, who's voices are listened too?

Many voices are calling for 'change' one such being Teach the Future. Teach the Future, originally launched in 2019, and operates across the UK in line with the devolved nature of responsibility for education policy. The various national groups have detailed programmes of demands, many of which go beyond the concept of teaching skills for the 'green economy'. An example from the Teach the Future Scotland branch highlights the intrinsic nature of climate justice within any discussion of climate change, " 3.13 Climate justice hardly gets mention in most relevant course content and seems to be regarded as alternative or peripheral, rather than mainstream and critical to the whole agenda." (TTFS, 2020 p3). Although there is much rhetoric in Scotland around the importance of Youth Voice there is little evidence that demands made by young people which threaten to interrupt the mainstream narrative of 'inclusive growth' have any meaningful impact on either educational or economic policy. The fact that the Scottish Government has aligned itself as part of the Wellbeing Economy Governments partnership (WEGo) and recognises the potential of concepts such as the doughnut economics has not yet evidenced a significant shift away from traditional modes of economic thinking and activity. The mainstream discourse of educators and politicians remains firmly disengaged from the transformative paradigms shifts felt crucial by many (Gopel 2016) (Hickel 2020) (Klein 2017), and time is running out.

The UNESCO Commission on the Futures of Education and several of its working paper publications offer a platform on which to build a broader more inclusive and critical discussion relating to education in the broadest sense. Recent special editions of the Community Development Journal (CDJ) and the British Educational Research Association (BERA) contribute to the broadening and deepening of the debate. Despite this the core

dialogue of a country such as Scotland is still firmly rooted in 'more of the same' and seems incapable of grasping the urgency and context of the existential dilemmas we face.

To stimulate a step change in the level and urgency at which 'transformative change' is discussed and understood, there is a need for the conversation to be taken into communities and the hearts and minds of educators and learners. By setting key issues within the context of a concise and accessible policy demand framework, it is hoped to contribute to this process. The UNESCO document captures the urgency well,

> Education – the way we organise teaching and learning throughout life – has long played a foundational role in the transformation of human societies. It connects us with the world and to each other, exposes us to new possibilities, and strengthens our capacities for dialogue and action. But to shape peaceful, just and sustainable futures, education itself must be transformed. (UNESCO 2021 Exec Summary p2)

Transformation of what, to what?

The arguments around the purposes and the processes of education are too extensive to discuss meaningfully in a short text however I think it is useful in the context of this essay to highlight the significant differences between the visions of UNESCO and the OECD regarding the purposes and approaches of learning. Previous reports from UNESCO namely the Faure Report and the Delors Report (Elfert 2015), highlight a more holistic understanding of the purpose of education while the OECD has championed the importance of skills for work. The impact of Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) aligned to a utilitarian vision of education can be see can be seen to work in similar ways as the Washington Consensus as creating a 'colonial common sense' regarding the purposes and practices of education.

> Sahlberg has identified the principal features of the GERM as increased standardisation, a narrowing of the curriculum to focus on core subjects/knowledge, the growth of high stakes accountability and the use of corporate management practices as the key features of the new orthodoxy. (Fuller and Stevenson 2019 p1)

The willingness to sacrifice virtually all notion of education as emancipation and embrace education for the 'needs of the market', still holds sway across the nations which comprise the United Kingdom. In my experience this process of, as Biesta terms it 'Learnification', (Biesta 2019) has also been instrumental in 'normalising' significant cutbacks of youthwork and adult learning provision across Scotland, and a focus on skills

development and accredited learning outcomes for what service provision remains (Youth Scotland 2019).

In Scotland, the OECD report of 2015 (OECD 2015) led to a raft on initiatives tasked with closing the attainment gap between the least and best performing pupils in state funded schools. The Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) has been used to target additional funding to local authority run schools related to perceived need of each school, schools in areas of economic deprivation receiving more funds that those in wealthier areas. The role of private education in perpetuating inequalities in educational outcomes has been absent from policy and to a large extent civic debate. This failure to problematise the role of private schooling in a debate claiming to be concerned with inequalities of educational outcomes is, I would argue, a further example of strategic ignorance at play (McGoey 2019). In his 2021 book Class Rules, educational critic James McEnaney makes the case that private schools represent key driver of educational inequality (McEnaney 2021). I would argue that the role of private education in sustaining educational inequalities is self-evident, as the ability for wealthy individuals to have their children's education take place in learning environments better resourced than public schools, is clearly a choice only open to those who can afford it. The Scottish Government champions the slogan, Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) (Scottish Government 2019) and yet still presides over an 'us and them' system of education, one abandoned by Finland, a country that continues to excel against most measures of educational achievement. Such contradictions are certainly not uncommon in systems of education across the world and as has been argued previously, standard fare in relation to Scottish Government policy.

Literacy, numeracy and well-being are identified as foci for the 'Attainment Challenge' Initiative which has been reviewed by the OECD in its latest report Scotland's Education: Into the future (OECD 2021) and yet the submission by the Education Institute Scotland (EIS 2021) argues that the focus has in reality been on literacy and numeracy. The EIS findings were submitted in response to a consultation on educational reform led by Professor Ken Muir (Scottish Government 2022). In April 2022, the findings were published and identified some key principles that should underpin educational reform these include:

- That all efforts, whether concerned with educational recovery post-pandemic or in terms of the future vision for Scottish education, must be directed to the purposes described in Article 29 of the UNCRC

Article 29 of the UNCRC says that a child or young person's education should help their mind, body and talents be the best they can. It should also build their respect for other people and the world around them. In particular, they should learn to respect:

- their rights and the rights of others
- their freedoms and the freedoms of others
- their parents
- the identity, language and values of countries— including their own.

Education should prepare children and young people for a responsible life in a free society. It should teach them how to live in an understanding and tolerant way that is non-violent and that respects the environment. (CYPCS, 2022)

Professors Muirs report titled "Putting Learners at the Centre: Towards a Future Vision for Scottish Education." goes on to flag up that,

- the current generation of learners see climate change as one of the most significant issues facing their futures and, as such, must be recognised as a key driver influencing the future of our education system

The third principle reverts quickly to a firmly neoliberal understanding of 'the official future'

- Increasing competitiveness across economies and in the labour market, re-emphasise the importance of setting high expectations for all young people and creating the conditions for these expectations to be realised. Excellence, equity and steps to close the poverty related attainment gap remain vital drivers of any education reform

There is an indication here that while some acknowledgement of 'climate emergency' is referenced, the concept of a vision for learners that goes beyond the increasingly competitive global economy does not appear to be under consideration. The fact that neither the OECD report or Professors Muir's response make any mention of the UNESCO International Commission on the Futures of Education may perhaps indicate an unwillingness or less likely and unawareness of an arguably more creative, informed and potentially more transformative understanding of educational practice and policy. It is with concern regarding an absence of crucial areas of critical debate, not only within education

policy, but within the wider areas of economic, social and environmental governmental and civic policy discourse that the ideas of the Celtic Consensus are offered.

If not now, then when?

While the focus of the OECD work referred to so far has centred around Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence, I would argue the need for transformative education reaches across all areas of educational provision including further and higher education. Sterling (2021) offers a detailed critique of higher education from a perspective of sustainability. He raises the notion of "system failure" which according to Peters (1999) can be understood as having four types: objectives not met; undesirable side effects; designed failures and inappropriate objectives.

Sterling comments,

Criticism of education – particularly in political debate – often centres on the first meaning, but given the incontrovertible imperative of educating for socio-ecological survival and well-being, education largely "fails" in terms of the other aspects of system failure: undesirable side effects including widespread ecological/sustainability illiteracy and its consequences, many participants and actors in the system are dis-engaged or stressed through the design of the system and most seriously, the purposes or objectives of education at national or institutional level largely fail to take into full account the urgency of global challenges. (Sterling 2021 p4)

Sterling goes on to reference the work of Bateson around the concept of "epistemological error" (Bateson 1972) also discussed by Boehnert (2015). These fundamental challenges call into question the current level of policy debate in many nations and certainly with the ways in which the GERM movement foresees the development of educational policy and practice. These might usefully be understood as a detailed argument regarding the 'positioning of the deckchairs on the Titanic'. The need to discuss the speed, direction and who is in charge of the ship, are the discussions which are long overdue.

Thinking within the field of critical global citizenship as represented in the work of the Gesturing towards decolonial future's collective (Stein et al. 2020), Vanessa Andreotti (2021), the Bridge 47 Network (2019), and the Common World's Research Collective (UNESCO 2021b), all offer vital perspectives on what transformative educational practice could entail. Broadening conceptions of education to stretch beyond formal settings and curricula would allow the practices of critical pedagogy, community development and community education to aid the reimagining of the purpose and practice of learning.

The great educational philosopher Raymond Williams wrote *"To be truly radical is to make hope possible rather than despair convincing."*. It is in hope of claiming the field of education for the purposes of achieving the vision of developing dispositions of radical democratic citizenship, (Zaunseder et al. 2022) within a pluriverse (Kothari et al. 2019) that the policy framework of The Celtic Consensus seeks to locate itself.

The Celtic Consensus

Preamble

The fact that the world has the highest number of "educated" people in its history and yet is the nearest to ecological breakdown is a stark reminder that 'more of the same' kind of education will only compound our problems. (Orr, 2011 p 238)

The purpose of constructing a Celtic Consensus is to provide a departure point for discussion, debate and collective orientation around the processes of catalysing the conditions necessary to facilitate a paradigm shift in the collective consciousness of humanity.

The ten contentions which together make up the starting point of the Celtic Consensus Conversation's, are drawn from a range of writers, researcher's, poets and prognosticators that share a diverse vision of life on earths, possible and desirable futures.

The title of The Celtic Consensus references a time before the colonisation of the Roman Empire and the notion of a diverse group of Celtic tribes spread across what is now called Europe. Stories suggest that a heterogeneous assortment of tribes sharing a nonliterature based culture many of whom fought ferociously against the forces of colonisation as represented by the Roman Empire. This willingness to fight the forces of colonisation and oppression, has the potential to connect those across cultures and continents who are concerned with challenging these ideological forces to create the potential of a fairer, freer and more peaceful and ecologically balanced future.

The Celtic Consensus seeks to acknowledge the richness and diversity of enduring indigenous peoples and knowledge, knowledge that has been for centuries the target of epistemic violence from a range of forces including eurocentrism. For those subsumed by modernity, the Celtic Consensus aims to provide an entry point to begin a process of unlearning the toxic myths of capitalism, patriarchy, and religion. A place of beginning and renewing beyond the anthropocentric and Cartesian dualism of post enlightenment thinking.

A place in which the Pluriverse is brought into being and love and hope reside – "…there is no path, the path is made by walking." (Machado 2003).

The Celtic Consensus (1.0)

Confidence in complexity

The Executive Summary of Reimaging our futures together argues, *"A massive commitment to social dialogue, to thinking and acting together, is needed."* (UNESCO 2021 p4) This can be understood as a challenge to the rise of authoritarian popularism in many areas of the world. Authoritarian rule and many forms of popularism rely on the erroneous simplification of complex issues, combined with the scapegoating and othering of vulnerable and marginalised groups.

Systems of learning and education should encourage and prepare learners and teachers to embrace complexity and to eschew mechanistic solutionism. The framing of social dialogue must move beyond the anthropocentric to a place of ecocentrism (Kopina et al. 2018) and beyond 'epistemic blindness' (De Sousa, 2007) to enable shared but diverse civic imaginaries that are able to extend beyond historical constructs such as the nation state and Cartesian dualism (Stein et al. 2020)

The certainty of uncertainty

"Relax, nothing is under control." Is perhaps a motto not out of place in a yoga ashram in Long Beach California. Its message holds a deeper truth when considered from a philosophical perspective. The desire for certainty in life is a significant part of the human condition. Multiple religions offer explanations which attempt to frame the world and human beings' relationship to it, as "knowable". Scientific knowledge offers the certainty of mathematical equations and formula although these certainties are routinely found wanting. The very concept of a truth or knowledge beyond question is itself and area of uncertainty (Haraway 1988).

It is possible that at various stages in our lives as we develop from early childhood to adolescent and then adulthood, that the desire for an illusion of certainty, even within a wider uncertain future, can help us cope with trauma and anxiety. The religious indoctrination of children and young people has historically been understood as unproblematic in many societies and many countries political and social perspectives are still hugely influenced by

religion. This can pressure to accept religious doctrine as unequivocal truth can create conditions of trauma in many children, the unqualified expectation within Article 29 of the UNCRC that, children should 'learn to respect their parents' requires to be significantly qualified, as to allow healthy emotional and cognitive development parents should also learn to respect, and above all love their children. Of course, it is a nonsense to imagine that love can be legislated, however the huge number of countries in which homosexuality is deemed illegal would indicate that it can be legislated against.

By offering illusions of certainty, education can easily cross into indoctrination. In the west and increasingly globally, indoctrination to the values of the capitalism is seen as a key deliverable of the education experience. To achieve a world in which values of kindness and love can flourish the role of educators must be to challenge harmful orthodoxies, not to endorse them. Creating the space in which critically informed individuals and groups can discuss the differences, free from threat and persecution must be recognised as a key aspect of a democratic society.

Caring about caring

In Care and Capitalism (2022) Kathleen Lynch presents a comprehensive critique of the contradictions and corruptions that run through capitalist ideology, not least the lionisation of the individual above the collective. Perhaps it is unsurprising that within patriarchal societies the highly gendered role of care provider should be consistently and comprehensively undervalued. Lynch closes her book with a discussion of the concept of 'privileged ignorance' an issue brought into sharp relief for her by the Covid 19 pandemic.

> What the Covid-19 pandemic has shown is that people cannot live in 'privileged ignorance' anymore. Our global health interdependency compels us to know, not least because it is a matter of life and death. Ignorance can no longer be regarded as an excuse for disregarding injustices that do not touch us in the present, as they may well touch us sooner if not later. (Lynch 2022 p.216)

The evidence currently suggests that the opportunity for learning and rethinking the current disastrous trajectory of the world presented by the tragedy of the Covid-19 epidemic, will be studiously ignored by those in power. Putin's invasion of the Ukraine is perhaps an extreme form of evidence supporting this perspective. The battle for care and health services in the UK as in other countries is still being fought in the capitalist marketplace rather than in a wider global conversation about paradigm shifts towards care-based economies. As

Audre Lorde pointed out there is no hierarchy of oppression. The commodification of care, in the same way as the commodification of nature, strips these aspects of life of the priceless value they inherently hold. Like food, water and air; care, love and freedom cannot be allowed to be traded for profit, yet they are. Precarity of employment and social security, private health care systems and in many cases systems of incarceration are sources of profit and loss. Little progress towards a more caring future can be made while the myths of 'market efficiency' hold sway.

Confronting the military industrial complex

Current climate agreements and negotiations are widely recognised to be woefully inadequate, with no requirement to even include carbon emissions linked to military forces.

> It is reasonable to expect that most militaries would merely attempt to greenwash their activities, instead of meaningfully reducing their impact. For example, achieving "net zero" as touted by many governments, corporations, and NATO as the solution to the climate crisis, is, in fact, exceptionally misguided, perpetuating the belief that technology and a few additional tree plantations will solve this crisis.

> "Net zero" is not the answer to the ecological crisis. Nor is the answer for the US military to use solar panels or biodegradable bullets to power its death machinery, for the British army to explore alternative fuels, or for Spain to plant trees on military land to capture carbon. (WILF 2021 np)

The requirement for education to prioritise critiques of militarism and the promotion of peace should be central to all curricula and teacher education. The ability to profit from weapons of war should be made illegal under international law.

Critically engaging with ideological hegemony

Education should be understood as a practice not boundaried by classrooms or indeed school settings. Adult learning, youth work and community development should be supported to develop a culture of community education practice that supports critical pedagogy and critical global citizenship education. The concept of lifelong, life wide and life deep learning (Belanger 2016) offers a rich perspective that once the economic imperative of education is no longer predominant in policy and practice, may lead to significant policy advances. These advances aligned with social and cultural developments championed by the degrowth community may be able to create systems where 'attainment gaps' are indeed a thing of the past, as is the political imperative to measure them.

Creativity at the core

Education and the wider practices of human development and interaction with human and other than human life, should be understood as creative and diverse representations of creativity should be valued within society. This needs to be stressed given the shift in many industrialised communities to understand creativity as peripheral to learning and living. Distribution of economic resources through mechanisms such as Universal Basic Income can offer alternatives to types of employment in areas such as 'fast food' restaurants and Amazon warehouses, areas of commerce which require to be hugely reduced to create models of ecologically balanced living. Care should be taken that developments such as UBI and Universal Basic Services are not simply co-opted within the capitalist model in what some tout as Green Capitalism. Capitalism is best understood as 'red in tooth and claw'.

Confronting colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy

In huge parts of the world the principles of capitalism remain largely sacrosanct. Monarchies and class systems persist often with little public outcry. Patriarchal mindsets which seek to govern over reproductive rights and other aspects of the lives of women remain both powerful and violent. Femicide is a global phenomenon not discussed at the table of National Security. While billions are devoted to weapons and military personnel, women cannot rely on funding for Rape Crisis services or refuges for those seeking to escape 'violence in the home'.

International trade, law and finance routinely disadvantage and steal from countries in the majority world (George 2015). These inconvenient truths are marginalised in classrooms, universities, and political debate transformative approaches to education can change this, with practitioners leading the change both in initial teacher education and current professional practice.

Connecting with the Commons

The Commons are understood by many as a foundational element within post capitalist thinking. Discussion of the ideological perspective provided by the Commons described by Bollier as "at once a paradigm, a discourse, an ethic, and a set of social practices" (Bollier 2016) do not feature within mainstream educational discourse in education within the UK and many other countries. The Global Commons of the oceans and the air are being contaminated at an increasing rate. Water courses in England suffer thousands of

instances of raw sewage dumped into them while other water sources are comminated from industrial farming practices (Monbiot 2017). The practices of industry make talk of education for sustainability or Learning for Sustainability in Scotland, little more than a cynical pretence by the state that it has the interests of this or future generations at heart. Guidance from departments of education and schools suggest the 'Fridays for the Future' school boycotts might damage the prospects of those children who take part. This represents a policy of 'wilful blindness' (Heffernan 2012) one which ignores the existential threat to young people's futures caused by climate change.

Creative chaos, against oppressive order

In 1857 Fredrick Douglass wrote the words,

> Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to, and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blows, or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress. (Douglass 1857 np)

More recently Savoj Zizek offered the observation that, "It is the very success of capitalism that the chance to be exploited in a long-term job is now experienced as privilege." Elevating the role of education to that of learning for life, peaceful coexistence, and care for human and other than human life, above that of the production of human capital for the market is not beyond our gift. It currently seems to be beyond our collective will.

Caring coexistence not corruption, excessive consumption, and co-option

Degrowth education, philosophical and eco-centric approaches to the framing on learning offer the alternatives to the current anthropocentric, colonial and capitalist forms of education promoted by GERM. The development of processes which enable radical democratic citizenship (Zaunseder et al. 2022) offer the potential of engaged populations inoculated against 'fake news' and despotic power manipulation by the excessively rich. A Global taxation system and the reform of global financial systems will allow global financial inequality to be addressed and 'fair trade' to replace 'free trade' as the global standard.

In conclusion

Despite the wide-ranging topics discussed across this paper and the obvious ambition of the ideas within the framework of the Celtic Consensus, there remains so much to be said

and so much that is far from clear. What can be understood as clear, although of course is refuted by many, is the collective threat posed to any vision of a viable future posed by the world's continued dependence on fossil fuels. Friends of the Earth International (Stabinsky 2021) Transnational Institute and hundreds of other organisations across the world call for the recognition that our current course of action, Net Zero and the further militarisation and securitisation of borders, represent a doubling down on the failures of the past. For those involved in education the words of Howard Zinn I believe offer both comfort and inspiration.

> "TO BE HOPEFUL in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness.
>
> What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places—and there are so many—where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction.
>
> And if we do act, in however small a way, we don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvellous victory." (Zinn 2022 np)

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