

Human Scale Education

Learning Through Contrast:

Danish Pedagogy in Human Scale Schools

By Mike Davies



This is the second in a series of Occasional Papers published by Human Scale Education that has arisen out of the Human Scale Education Seminar Programme which ran from November 2009 to May 2010. The publication of these Occasional Papers has been supported by the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services.

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By Mike Davies

In recent years Mike Davies has worked mainly on school transformation within the Schools for the Future programme. This, linked with his other main area of interest – the reorganisation of schools on human scale lines – grew from his experience as a Headteacher of a number of schools in England and Scotland. The schools were mainly in economically deprived and challenging communities, each with an emphasis on supporting human scale practices in relation to curriculum design and development, pedagogy, the use of time and space, staff and student organisation and relationships.



ISBN 978-1-898321-12-5

From past to present

During a phase of progressive English education in the 1960s and 1970s that saw the rise of schools such as Countesthorpe College in Leicestershire, Sutton Centre in Nottinghamshire, Abraham Moss in Manchester and Stantonbury Campus in Milton Keynes, there was considerable interest in recalibrating student and staff experience through more student centred pedagogies and democratic forms of school organisation.

This was not, however, simply an English phenomenon. During the late 1970's and 1980's there was a European network committed to developing and sharing practices which in today's terminology may be summarised as the co-construction of the curriculum, active pedagogies, social justice and empowerment. Stantonbury Campus was at the heart of this network.

The network, known as IADAS, (International Association for the Development of Adolescent Schooling), was committed to exchanging ideas and experiences of innovatory pedagogy. Although there were small scale exchanges of teachers and students, the main focus was the annual conference, an event usually held in late October for four days, and hosted by one of the schools. The venue rotated around the schools with each country sending two or three delegates who would stay with staff from the host school. Consequently,

costs were kept low, camaraderie high! The eight countries represented were Belgium, Denmark, England, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden. A ninth school, Stranraer Academy, Scotland, joined the group in the 1990s. The basis of the conferences was a series of workshops and discussions, sharing details of the practices from around western Europe, exploring similarities and differences.

Within the network, the Danish school, SPF - the National Innovative Centre for General Education - located in Copenhagen, was exceptional in that it was a small state run comprehensive school, co-located with a 'Youth Town'. Youth Town was made up of a range of experiential learning centres, for example, a Theatre, Post Office, Church - each with a mandate to try something new, to innovate and spread ideas throughout the state. It took students' ideas, issues, aspirations



and concerns about contemporary society and their own life-experiences as the basis for curriculum and wove an active student-centred pedagogy and assessment to support trust, challenge and collaboration. The power of its challenge to orthodox schooling sadly proved too great for a new century which brought with it a new right of centre government, and it closed in 2007. However the Danish flair for innovation was by this time being kindled in northern Copenhagen, in the prosperous, middle class, municipality of Gentofte. It was to this area and Denmark's new flagship school, Hellerup, that Stantonbury Campus and three other HSE schools were to visit in 2010 to share and exchange aspirations and ideas about practice.

New Opportunities

The Human Scale Schools Project

For three years, between 2006 and 2009, Human Scale Education (HSE), with the generous support of the Gulbenkian Foundation, was able to launch the Human Scale Secondary Schools Project (HSS) with a specific aim to help schools to reculture and restructure along HSE lines. There is insufficient space in this paper to detail the project or the intentions of HSE, but Mary Tasker's admirable paper 'Human Scale Education: history, values and practices' (2009), gives

an excellent overview¹. Thirty nine schools were involved in the project and of these four, including Stantonbury Campus, emerged as 'leading edge' schools where the philosophy and practices of HSE were most evident. Even these schools, however, articulated a number of areas where they would welcome additional support. Most significantly, the need for HSE to become involved in opening new doors to new pedagogies and recognise the primacy of process in change management and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) was made very clear in the Interim Evaluation Report of the Human Scale Schools Project published in June 2008:

"Changes in pedagogy were also apparent in the schools, but they generally received less attention than curriculum reforms. Examples of new directions in pedagogy included teaching with a stronger emphasis on closer, more informed relations with pupils, independent learning, team work, deep learning, active involvement by pupils and kinaesthetic learning. However, it was often the case that very small numbers of teachers were applying such approaches. As a general trend schools seemed more willing to take on across the board curriculum changes than mount full-scale programmes to bring about comprehensive shifts in pedagogy."²

Of the schools in the HSS project, thirteen had been involved in study visits to the United States led by the HSS team. These visits focused on the experience of the Schools-Within-Schools movement in the USA and the work of the Coalition of Essential Schools. Specifically, visits were made to a number of small schools in Boston, such as the Mission Hill School and the Boston Arts Academy, which were part of the Boston Small Schools Pilot Project. These schools had gained a number of freedoms from the local authority, frequently referred to as 'the five autonomies'. The autonomies gave schools the freedom to innovate in teaching and learning approaches and in curriculum and assessment.

The Five Autonomies:

Staffing

To decide on staffing patterns, hire from inside or outside the Boston Pilot Schools, and excess to the district "pool" staff who do not meet standards.

Budget

To receive a "lump sum" budget based on an average per-pupil expenditure, have total discretion over how to spend it, and receive funds for central costs they don't purchase.

Curriculum & Assessment

To choose curriculum and assessments and set graduation requirements.

Governance & Policies

To hire, supervise, and fire the principal; approve the school budget; and set school policies, such as for promotion, graduation, attendance, and discipline.

School Calendar

To decide the length of the school day and year for students and staff, including time for and use of professional development.³

Other schools visited included Urban Academy in New York. This is part of the Julia Richman complex of a series of Schools Within School and, as with the Boston schools, offered the HSS teachers a fascinating alternative. The extract below is from the Urban Academy website:

Why is Urban Academy so successful? Why do 97% of our graduates enter 4-year universities? Why do we have virtually no teacher turnover? Why do we rarely have any incidents of violence or theft? Why are our school indicators, like attendance and drop-out rate, always significantly better than those seen throughout New York City?

It's not just our small size.

Although we have only 120 students, that can't be the only reason. There are small schools out there that seem to be miniature big schools. So even though our small size does give

us more time with our students, it isn't the only reason the Urban Academy is such a success.

It's not just our students.

Sure they are a truly multicultural group who come from all over New York City. Some have been unhappy with their previous schools; some are seeking the personal attention of a small school community; others have been out of school for a period of time. They work really hard, take their commitment to Urban seriously, but even they aren't the one reason that Urban works so well.

It's not just our teachers.

Although our staff, many of whom have been with the school for an average of 10 years, is deeply involved in planning our curriculum, administration, and policy, they are still not the only reason that we do so well with our students.

It's not just our curriculum.

Although our courses are focused on critical-thinking and problem-solving and students are allowed to ask, research and answer their own questions, even that is not what makes us as effective as we are.

It's not just the comfortable atmosphere.

Couches, fish tanks and a student microwave cannot, on their own, make a school a success.⁴

Typically, the Urban Academy does not answer the question it poses and strongly resists any attempt to stereotype its work or reduce it to a series of recipe hints. It did, however, have a powerful impact on the British teachers from the Human Scale Schools Project who visited it.

The flavour of Urban Academy was vividly captured by James Wetz (2009) in his book 'Urban Village Schools'³ and featured in his Channel 4 Dispatches film 'The Children Left Behind' (2008). The re-structuring of titan schools on smaller lines, frequently into a Schools within Schools motif, has become much more common under the Government's Building Schools for the Future programme (BSF), but the accompanying re-culturing has been much slower in its development. This is the radical edge of Human Scale Education – it is about reshaping the experience of the learner, and using the acknowledged benefits of smaller scale to move to more student – centred practices.

The Human Scale Education Scandinavian Programme

Encouraged by the response of the HSS schools to the USA visits, and following the signal given by the Interim Evaluation of the HSS Project that the HSS schools would

welcome exposure to schools with a more radical, student-centred ethos and student-led pedagogies, it made good sense for HSE to begin to link with northern Europe. Scandinavia during the first decade of the C21st had become a new hot spot for educationalists and for some politicians, whether the attraction is Finland and its supremacy in the PISA tables; Norway with its forest schools and attitudes toward sustainability; the Free Schools of Sweden; or the student-centred pedagogy of Denmark. It was to Denmark that HSE turned.

Through a series of personal links and chance encounters it was possible in 2009 to reactivate a few of the contacts from Stantonbury's IADAS days and set about developing a new network centred around twinning with schools across the North Sea with the common goal of pedagogic renewal and student democracy. HSE published an internal paper which summarised its intentions:

HSE is looking to establish links and secure partnerships with schools that will further the aims of human scale education... specifically HSE is interested in work related to:

- pedagogic approaches that are more student negotiated/centred and more student sensitive/responsive;
- freer access and choices of students to determine their preferred ways of working, use of resources and medium of research and expression

- strong sets of relationships built on mutual respect;
- different, more devolved forms of school organisation, flatter hierarchies, more flexible use of time, teams and space;
- increasing use of adults in addition to teachers in the learning processes and more participation in the community;
- working in active partnership with parents to achieve the goal of transformation.

The intention is that through a process of working with a partner Danish school, participating UK schools will through experience, comparison and reflection be able to hold an 'appreciative mirror' to their own work so as to enable them to adopt and amend their practices to better match their own needs and context. The intention is to work with schools in their pursuit of developing good relationships, building communities and enhancing the impact that the curriculum and pedagogic practices can have in the development of human flourishing.

It is intended that the partner schools develop a long term relationship, maybe for three years, with the partners taking responsibility for return visits and future programmes.



Creative use of space at Hellerup



Staff area at Hellerup

The Copenhagen Partnerships

Four schools were identified in Gentofte as suitable partners to three of the English schools that had emerged as leading protagonists of HSE practices. The additional school in Copenhagen was identified as an 'Introductory School', to give the whole party a common experience and reference point, as well as orientate the group into some aspects of Danish state education. The schools involved were:

UK	Denmark
Brislington Enterprise College, Bristol	Munkegaardsskolen, Copenhagen
Stantonbury Campus, Milton Keynes	Dyssegardsskolen, Copenhagen
Walker Technology College, Newcastle	Ungdomsskolen, Copenhagen
	Hellerup Skole, Copenhagen

Hellerup Skole will become a partner to Stanley Park High School, London Borough of Sutton, another HSE 'leading edge' school, in a future round of school research visits. Research in this context refers to the set of issues and questions the schools developed prior their visit and that were seen to be illuminated by conversation and observation in another cultural context. During the first programme the Hellerup

acted as the 'Introductory School' providing a common meeting point at the start of the programme and a venue for review and reflection at the end of the week. A visit to Hellerup is a powerful and liberating experience.

Prior to arrival at Copenhagen each of the UK schools had identified an area of its development plan that it wanted to take forward and had developed it into a practical project. On the basis of its experience of the HSS Project HSE drew up a list of suggestions to schools to help guide their thinking on suitable projects. Schools were, however, free to find their own focus in consultation with HSE:

Possible projects – some opportunities:

- Using 'learning styles' as a way of increasing capacity, engaging students, personalising learning and developing respectful pedagogy
- Developing team bases and team approaches to curriculum development that are holistic and flexible in use of time, place and resources
- Sharing expertise and processes for developing an ethos of respect and a community of learners
- Leadership and change management....increasing confidence and capacity of staff to embrace the new
- The student's voice in articulating ideas that are worth planning and exploring, through

- individual inquiry and as a large cooperative group
- Design and pedagogy...sharing ideas, emerging practice and experiences, identifying elements of design that make for 'the third teacher' – an idea central to the Reggio Emilia educational approach and philosophy which insists that children learn readily from their environment, and there for the environment is the 'third' teacher
- Project based learning, sharing emerging practice and processes that make for effective projects and processes of inquiry, in school and beyond, including virtual
- Developing processes for identifying, recording, communicating and tracking students learning, and progression, that are authentic and consistent with human flourishing.

In reality the schools chose the following as areas for research and investigation and shared this with their Danish partner school well before the visit took place. They expressed their preferences as follows:

Brislington Enterprise College:

1. Alternative curriculum provision for older adolescents
2. Student voice through involvement in management of own learning
3. Engagement of parents/carers'

Stantonbury Campus:

1. Student voice

2. Engaging parents
3. Managing inclusion and diversity – especially approaches to literacy both within and outside the classroom.
4. Project-based learning

Walker Technology College:

1. Project and thematic-based approaches to learning
2. Team approaches to planning and teaching/organising learning
3. Additionally we'd like to add the following area of interest:- embedding and assessing social and emotional learning in the curriculum.

This sharing of ideas, prior to the visit, enabled the Danish schools to better plan their programme for their British guests. The UK schools also produced a presentation about their school and aspirations for the project which were also subsequently shared with the other UK schools and their Danish partners.

Partly as a result of planning sessions with the Danes, and with the encouragement of the education department within Gentofte, it was decided that to have any impact the research visit should be 4/5 days with a focus on immersion in the partner school. It was also recognised that to be faithful to HSE values, time needed to be invested in building relationships, hence the programme contained a number of whole group events. The final schedule looked like this:



Toilets at Munkegaardsskolen

	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Monday		Arrival in Copenhagen	Initial briefing, sharing: [i] description of own school, and [ii] school projectswith other UK schools at hotel
Tuesday	All visit Hellerup Skole Lunch at partner school, introductions, agree programme	All UK and Danish staff involved in the exchange meet at Science Experimentarium for group activity	Review of day – each school’s experience and sharing plans for Wed/ Thurs
Wednesday	In partner schools: observation, conversation, investigation	In partner schools: observation, conversation, investigation	Review of day – each school reports on progress with project, share ideas and plans All UK and Danish staff meet for a meal
Thursday	In partner schools: observation, conversation, investigation	In partner schools: observation, conversation, investigation	Sharing [i] of plans and ideas to take back to home, UK, school. [ii] preliminary ideas of area of interest that Danes which to pursue on return visit [iii] prepare for presentation to Danes of projects progress, findings and implications for moving forward
Friday	All at Hellerup Skole, [i] finalisation of presentations by UK teachers [ii] presentation to all UK and Danish teachers in the project [iii] outline of plans for return visit to UK by Danes	Depart Copenhagen	

The purpose of the HSE project with schools in Gentofte was to:

- Focus on developing relations between schools;
- Using the partnership as an education mirror to contrast/compare;
- Deepening understanding of pedagogy and democracy in learning;
- Understanding the practice of school based curriculum development and change;
- Ways of building capacity and confidence to change, learn and lead;
- Exploring alternative approaches that improve the experiences and outcomes for students and how these might be communicated.

The last morning of the visit to Copenhagen saw the participants gather back at Hellerup. Each of the UK schools had prepared a resume of their experience, their findings and what/how they intended to progress their project within their own schools. There were also some preliminary conversations relating to the projects that the Danes might want to engage with on the return visit. The final session was also one for reflection and evaluation. The UK Schools had found the whole experience a transforming one and the best way of encapsulating its success is through the reports that the schools have made. What follows is the report, written by Michele Rhodes, Vice Principal, Stantonbury Campus, Milton Keynes.

The Experience of one Human Scale School

By Michele Rhodes, Vice Principal, Stantonbury Campus

Dyssegaard Skolen, Copenhagen:

Ethos and Culture

The school is democratic in every sense of the word. Teams of teachers are empowered to work together to agree the curriculum and learn from one another; students take responsibility for their own learning and work in a range of different groupings to learn from and support one another. There is a striking sense of collaborative responsibility and accountability to all members of the community, including parents who have defined roles in working with teachers and other parents to agree the best way forward for students. This is a school in which everyone can express an opinion knowing that it will be heard and valued and where responsibility for self and others drives the whole school experience. The majority of students and teachers clearly enjoy school and thrive in this ethos.

School Organisation

The school is a state school, serving a middle-class area of Gentofte and

‘There is a striking sense of collaborative responsibility and accountability to all members of the community, including parents who have defined roles in working with teachers and other parents to agree the best way forward for students.’

catering for students aged from 6 – 16 years. A Headteacher drives the strategy and vision for the school, but below headteacher level there are no paid responsibility posts – the implementation of the curriculum and ethos is the responsibility of teams of teachers who are empowered to make decisions. There are some staff who lead aspects of the school’s provision, for example the management of the Pedagogy (PUC) Centre and developing the school’s ICT provision, but they do not receive additional allowances of time or money. There are no dedicated pastoral staff as the class teacher fulfils this role, similar to the model in British primary schools. However, there is support available from the local “Commune” (Local Authority) for students who, for example, have poor attendance and social problems.

Students remain with their class teacher usually for three years,



before moving up to the next phase of their education with a new class teacher. The class teacher teaches a range of subjects, excluding modern foreign languages and PE where expert teaching is offered. Class sizes are around 20 – 22 students, sometimes less, occasionally slightly more.

Curriculum and Pedagogy

The most remarkable features of the curriculum at Dyssegaard include:

- Ten cross-curricular projects per year enabling students to work democratically and responsibly in a range of different groupings, sometimes mixing up age groups.
- The prevalence of discovery learning where students learn for themselves individually and with their peers.
- The way student participation is integral to lessons – students teaching other students, evaluating how they learned and not just what they learned. Though students do not yet decide on the content of the curriculum.
- A strong focus on applied learning and relevance. Text books, projects and activities emphasise how the learning can be applied to real life, even in subjects where this is more challenging, eg maths. Projects and themes often link to subjects



'In English classes, students and the teacher talk only in English and in other subjects, students are often asked to translate from English to Danish as part of an activity or to present in English.'

of current relevance eg the Copenhagen Climate Summit, the Olympic Games, the World Cup, Darwin.

- The way teachers are trained to develop different learning styles and the way that kinaesthetic activity is given prominence at every level.
- The strong focus on learning modern foreign languages from an early age and to a high level, particularly English. In English classes, students and the teacher talk only in English and in other subjects, students are often asked to translate from English to Danish as part of an activity or to present in English.
- The way that teacher training is matched to philosophy and practice. At the time of our visit, all teachers in the local area were being trained in Spencer Kagan's co-operative learning techniques to deepen understanding of how to engage

all students in their learning through collaborative approaches.

- The flexibility of the curriculum. Though mindful of national expectations about curriculum content, teachers respond to the needs of students and create timetables and activities that address their interests and needs. Because of this the curriculum is always creative and dynamic.
- The lack of formal assessment in the early years. There is a reluctance to assess cross-curricular projects as teachers feel that this changes students' experience of them and focuses too much on outcomes rather than processes. Though there is increasing pressure from the government to increase the level of testing.

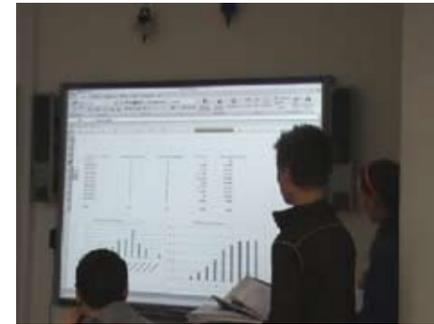
'The key is flexibility, freedom and space. The school feels more like home as students remove their shoes and can use the spaces in ways that are comfortable for them. For example, younger students often listen to the teachers whilst lying down!'

- Where external tests exist, these are often oral. Students have an hour to prepare and then present their ideas to their class teacher and a teacher from another school who acts as a moderator. Other tests are completed on-line with a lap-top.
- The development of ICT is an important focus of the Danish government, hence on-line exams. At Dyssegaard Skole every classroom had a data projector or Smart Board.

Use of space/ contexts for learning:

The key is flexibility, freedom and space. The school feels more like home as students remove their shoes and can use the spaces in ways that are comfortable for them. For example, younger students often listen to the teachers whilst lying down! As there is no provision for school meals, microwave ovens are dotted around the school and students use them responsibly to warm up last night's leftovers.

Each phase of education has a learning base – classrooms that have open aspects and break-out areas between them, where computers, work spaces, lockers and sofas are common. The spaces flow into one another and are used in a variety of ways. They are large enough for all three classes to be briefed together where this is needed. Teachers work fluidly across these spaces, dropping into





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one another's lessons, keeping an eye on students while they sort something out, watching over students from another class who are working outside the room. The spaces facilitate co-operative working and feel relaxed and calm.

Students are rarely reprimanded for being out of their seats as it is recognised that some students need to walk around to be able to learn.

In addition, the school has a Pedagogy Centre (PUC) which is a separate and spacious room designed to offer experiences and ways of learning that students are unable to access in their classroom bases. All classes use the space at different times and for different purposes. Students can choose to

visit the room individually or in small groups for example to complete a research task. On a typical day we saw: groups of students visiting the room to be trained as experts or "Super Users" who will then teach the skills or knowledge they have learned to the other students in their class. Others visited in small mixed ability groups to play a grammar game (a different group of students will have the same opportunity the following week) older students came to teach younger students a new game on the computer – in English!; learning support assistants came to be enthused with ideas about how to support students' reading development in their after school leisure sessions; a class of younger students came to understand how there are three different types of reading and to undertake three kinaesthetic activities to demonstrate this point.

The room is dynamic, flexible and inspiring, full of tactile experiences and visual stimulation. The aim is to change the environment, resources and activities frequently so that there is something new to learn on every visit. It is a key driver and resource for project-based work and enables students to engage in the chosen theme in different levels and in different ways. Teachers, in the form of a "knowledge team" are responsible for aspects of the PUC's development. The room is for everyone and is owned by everyone in different ways.

Focus of Return Visit to England

Focus of Return Visit to England Initial discussions have identified the following areas of interest:

- Social inclusion. This is a key focus for Dyssegaard Skole for the next two years and something we consider ourselves to be very good at at Stantonbury.
- Assessment. As the Danish government is increasing the level of national testing, there is an interest in how we use data and assessment in English schools.
- Pace, structure and organisation of lessons.
- How we manage our own cross-curricular projects (Rich Tasks) and Hall days.
- The use of ICT to inform learning and engage parents, particularly our VLE.
- How we support students eg through our library and learning centre.
- Our use of specialist facilities eg science labs, art rooms.
- What Post 16 teaching involves.

Focus of our own action plan, based on our learning:

- To introduce two student participation projects within the Science faculty with a view to sharing the methodology more widely when trialled. These will focus on older students teaching younger students and "Superusers" where students are

trained as experts outside the classroom and teach their skill to their classmates.

- To refocus the management of our Year 7 Staying Alive rich tasks so that teams of teachers are empowered to make decisions about outcomes and have greater ownership of the rich task and greater accountability and responsibility for its impact on the students in their hall. Although our 'Rich tasks' were set up collaboratively, now that they are an established part of the curriculum we need to find ways of reinvigorating the principles, keeping them fresh and relevant and energising the staff. We have learned many strategies and principles from Dyssegaard that will help us to address this challenge and we hope that when our Danish colleagues visit, they will act as a critical friend to

'Although our 'Rich tasks' were set up collaboratively, now that they are an established part of the curriculum we need to find ways of reinvigorating the principles, keeping them fresh and relevant and energising the staff.'





assess the effect of the changes we have made. We also aim to trial some of the strategies we saw at Dyssegaard for engaging parents with this Rich Task.

- To initiate wider discussion with SMT about parent engagement, the development of a pedagogy room, and the wider development of kinaesthetic and applied learning and co-operative learning techniques. This links with our Campus Development plan priority to continually improve the quality of teaching and learning.

Conclusion

Michele Rhodes' account of Stantonbury's study visit to Dyssegaardskolen demonstrates the impact made by the Danish school on the English teachers. A few years ago the evergreen Tim Brighouse wrote of the potential of the BSF programme to bring about 'transformational change'. He suggested that maximising that promise required at least two 'essential ingredients':

- First, staff in schools need to share ideas in solving some of the issues that are raised by the greater knowledge we now have about teaching, learning and assessment as well as by the advances in the learning technologies and changes in the curriculum and in school organisation

- secondly, we shall rely in future, as we have in the past, on the qualities, skills and commitment of staff in schools. Vital to that is their willingness to develop practice. This willingness depends, at least in part, on their intellectual curiosity. Staff development – Continuous Professional Development – as it is often called, is crucial to that intellectual curiosity.⁶

Tim's recognition of the power of CPD in the processes of transformational change is at the heart of this paper. Human Scale Education is committed to being an active partner, working intensively with schools to bring about radical change. It offers a new deal for learning and learners that recognises the centrality of human relationships as a precursor to excellence and equity and the potential of contrast and collegiality to develop insight and change practice.

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Manifesto

A Practical Manifesto for Education on a Human Scale

Human Scale Education suggests the following seven key practices that schools might follow. These practices are facets of educating on a human scale and were planned originally to represent the seven sides of a fifty pence piece.

1. Smaller learning communities.
2. Small teams of teachers of between 4 to 6 teachers, learning mentors, learning support assistants who will see no more than between 80 to 90 learners each week.
3. A curriculum that is co-constructed and holistic.
4. A timetable that is flexible with blocks of time which make provision for whole class teaching, small group teaching and individual learning. Teacher planning and evaluation timetabled.
5. Pedagogy that is inquiry-based, experiential and supported by ICT. Assessment that involves the Assessment for Learning approaches of dialogue, negotiation and peer review and develops forms of Authentic Assessment such as portfolio, exhibition and performance.
6. Student voice involving students in the learning arrangements and organisation of the school.
7. Genuine partnership with parents and the community.



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Further copies are available from
the Human Scale Education office.

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ISBN 978-1-898321-12-5