Supporting "Slow Renewal": Developments in Extended Education in High-Poverty Neighbourhoods in England

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Abstract: This paper explores how a small but growing number of schools in England are gradually extending their roles to act as, what I term, agents of "slow renewal": supporting long-term change in children's complex family and community environments, through a series of strategically-aligned, small-scale, locally-bespoke actions, intentionally planned to bring about incremental change. An empirical illustration of one such school is presented and its core features explored via four core concepts: socio-ecological perspectives on children's outcomes, soft-systems change, assets-based development, and liminal space. Through this, the paper contributes a set of integrated conceptual principles on which schools working to support slow renewal can act and which challenge the values of market-driven education systems more generally.

Keywords: community schools, extended education, assets-based approaches, systems change

Background and Aims

This paper arises from a keynote presentation I gave at the World Education Research Association (WERA) International Research Network on Extended Education in 2019, where I was asked to consider future directions for the field. In doing so, I reflected on lessons drawn from an ongoing programme of extended education research in England, which I have led individually and with colleagues since 2006. In general, this has focused on how schools can extend their roles beyond their statutory duties to address wider social needs, and more specifically, on how schools serving high-poverty neighbourhoods might help to address barriers to good education and related outcomes, arising beyond their gates, in children's family and community contexts. A detailed justification for this focus has been provided elsewhere (Kerr, Dyson, & Raffo, 2014), premised on: (1) the stark concentrations of multiple interrelated inequalities and shrinking public services found in these areas, and (2) the opportunities for intervention which arise from understanding an area's dynamics.

 This paper is concerned with these possibilities, and specifically, the small but growing number of schools, with strong connections to high poverty neighbourhoods, which are starting to develop what I call strategies for "slow renewal". I have coined this term to refer to schools which are: (1) making a long-term commitment to supporting change in children's complex, multi-layered, family and community environments, (2) aiming to improve children's outcomes over time, across all the domains in which it is important for them to do well– education, health, safety, housing, economic security, and community participation (Kerr & Dyson, 2016), and (3) are beginning to work through a sustained process of developing

strategically-aligned, small-scale, bespoke actions, which are responsive to and understood as part of a neighbourhood's local dynamics, and are planned to lead to incremental change.

At the outset, it is also important to note that this focus is somewhat of an outlier in contemporary developments in extended education. It is distinct from important and growing bodies of research exploring the growth and impacts of extra-curricular academic tutoring (e. g. Bray, 2020, Pensiero and Green, 2017), and children's academic and social development outcomes from participating in varied out-of-hours activities, particularly for disadvantaged groups (e. g. Schüpbach, von Allmen, Frei, & Nieuwenboom, 2017; Fischer, Steiner, & Theis 2020; Rollett, Lossen, Holtappels, & Tillmann, 2020). It does, however, draw on two established traditions which, particularly in the last decade, have lost prominence in the international scholarly literature, though remain strong in terms of advocacy. The first is the conception of extended schools as an anti-poverty strategy; to paraphrase Dryfoos (1994), if children from poor backgrounds come to school too hungry, too distressed and too unwell to learn, it is incumbent on schools to help ensure access to food, health and welfare services. Second is the idea that schools can help to revitalise poor neighbourhoods by acting to strengthen local infrastructures and support community development (Cummings, Dyson, & Todd, 2011; Morris, 1925; Warren and Hong, 2009). Schools which are working to support slow renewal provide an important link to these increasingly overlooked perspectives, while also helping to advance thinking around them (see also Lawson & Van Veen, 2016, as an important earlier contribution to this).

My purposes in this paper are therefore two-fold: (1) to provide a brief empirical illustration of what a school, working to encourage slow renewal, is doing in practice to extend its role, and (2) to begin to conceptualise core features of these emergent practices. The latter is particularly important as without this, the field will struggle to move beyond the presentation of one-off case studies and to enable the transfer of learning. This paper marks an important first step towards this, and I begin by briefly outlining the evidence base I draw upon, before addressing my main purposes in turn.

The Evidence Base

I draw here on iterative and cumulative learning from a 15 year research programme, which includes multiple exploratory and evaluative studies of national, local-government, and school-led extended education initiatives in England. Distinctively, it has enabled sustained relationships with a small number of schools (the longest spanning 10+ years), generating rich accounts of how their roles have been gradually extended. It is through close engagement with specific cases and comparative analysis across them, that the emerging features of schools supporting slow renewal have been identified.

These relationships have been underpinned by the principles of design-based implementation research (DBIR) (Anderson & Shutack, 2012; Fishman, Penuel, Allen, Haugan, & Sabelli, 2013; see also Kerr & Dyson, 2020, for a practice-based account). Importantly, DBIR assumes that: (1) interventions are not static, evolving iteratively through multiple cycles of design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, (2) intervention leaders and researchers work in partnership, both bringing their expertise to bear and with researchers

ensuring ongoing critical scrutiny, and (3) the context where an intervention operates is an integral part of its design. In practice, this has involved using a wide range of methods as appropriate to surface and document: (1) the intervention's strategies and actions and how these are intended to work, (2) how context shapes this, and (3) the intervention's impacts. As well as strengthening specific interventions, DBIR is also intended to support more general theory development through an iterative process of cycling back and forth between interventions' local theories, adapted to their particular contexts, and the more general principles underpinning transferable theories. In my work, the opportunity to work across heterogeneous sites has been important in supporting this.

In presenting an empirical case, I focus on Elmdean Community Academy (ECA; a pseudonym), which is in the third year of a DBIR partnership with Manchester University, detailing its evolving extended role. ECA is also an active member of a small UK-wide network of extended education and related initiatives which self-identify as working to support neighbourhood renewal, which I co-founded with a school in Manchester in 2016. I have chosen ECA as an illustrative case as it reflects the kinds of developments reported within the network which speak to slow renewal, while appearing more advanced than many.

ECA: An Illustrative Example

ECA is located in Elmdean (a pseudonym), an ethnically diverse town on the far outskirts of a major English city–not close enough to benefit from many of the city's resources and opportunities, but not far enough away to sustain a clear independent identity and infrastructure. Recently, urban development spreading from the city has had significant impacts on Elmdean; for example, new homes have been built specifically to attract commuters. At the same time, the town appears to be becoming more polarised, perhaps more so in relation to class than ethnicity, though the Black Lives Matter movement may be shifting this dynamic. Alongside new developments, the depletion of local public services has seen the increasing the residualisation of Elmdean's long-established, high-poverty neighbourhoods, exacerbating the challenges many residents may face.

ECA is located in Elmdean's central retail area. Opening about 10 years ago it provides primary (4–11 years) and secondary (11–16 years) education, and non-compulsory kindergarten and post-16 further education, on one site, with around 900 pupils. ECA is also part of England's academies and free schools programme (UK Parliament, 2019), where schools are funded directly by central government, independent of local government management, and have some freedoms over admissions processes, curriculum and staffing. ECA currently operates as a single school (i. e. it is not part of a multi-academy trust) and is rated Outstanding by Ofsted, the English schools inspectorate.

ECA's pupil population reflects Elmdean's increasingly complex local dynamics. It competes to attract pupils with other local schools and schools in the city, which include fee-paying schools and academically-selective state schools. While ECA's Outstanding rating draws in some pupils from beyond Elmdean, some also choose to leave ECA for selective and high-performing city schools when opportunities arise. To counter the impacts of increasing gentrification, ECA also uses its freedoms to ring-fence a third of places for children who are

eligible for free school lunch and who typically come from Elmdean's poorest neighbour-
hoods. The result is that ECA has an ethnically and economically diverse mix of pupils, some
who live locally and some who commute into Elmdean. Although attracting some more
advantaged pupils, ECA has a pupil population with above average levels of economic
disadvantage for schools in England.

Evolving in this context, ECA's extended provision is designed to be universally pro-
gressive; open to all, with the recognition that pupils facing the greatest barriers to achieving
good outcomes in their home and community contexts may need greatest support. ECA's core
extended offer includes many aspects familiar across the broad field of extended education.
For example, it has afterschool sporting, dance, and drama activities and activities designed
more specifically to support social development and well-being. These include opportunities
for older pupils to gain sports coaching awards and to coach younger pupils, and an in-school
counselling service with dedicated specialist staff and facilities.

Distinctively, over the last three years, ECA has sought to strengthen its provision for the
most disadvantaged by establishing Elmdean Children's Hub. The Hub is a semi-autonomous
organisation, sitting within ECA's broad management structure, with dedicated staff and a
remit to develop support for children, their families and the local community, to address
barriers to good outcomes arising outside school. Importantly, while Hub staff could simply
have developed a menu of varied activities, or used statistical data on local outcomes to
determine priorities and actions (for instance, addressing high levels of obesity in Elmdean by
providing healthy cooking classes), they have sought instead to understand and respond to the
challenges and opportunities experienced by those living and working locally. They have also
made a conscious effort to ensure this is not tokenistic, and are investing, for example, in
professional support for community organising to train staff to listen actively to community
members and strengthen community-professional dialogue. Alongside this, well aware that
local public services are struggling to meet demand, Hub staff have been mapping local
service provision to identify gaps which need to be filled in some way.

The Hub's emerging strategy and actions continue to be informed by this diverse range of
purposefully generated and regularly updated local intelligence, with its approach falling
broadly into three main strands. First, it is working to address acute needs; for instance, family
workers employed by ECA and based in the Hub provide vulnerable families with bespoke
support and help to access specialist services as needed. Second, the Hub places a strong
emphasis on empowering children, parents and wider residents and ensuring they are not
unilaterally "done to" by professionals. For instance, rather than pursuing traditional parenting
classes which aim to teach "better" parenting skills, it is investing in supporting parents to
develop sustainable peer-to-peer support networks. It is doing this by offering safe and
supported spaces with professional facilitation (for instance, recreational craft sessions) which
enable parents to take increasing responsibility for determining and leading provision over
time. The Hub's community organising activity is also helping local residents to explore how
they can reclaim green spaces in Elmdean and ensure these are safe for community use.

Third, the Hub is working to strengthen Elmdean's infrastructure in other tangible and
non-tangible ways. In some instances, it has invested in the direct delivery of services (for
example, employing a specialist in ante- and post-natal care to support new parents) and plans
to move to commissioning services in the longer term. It is also working to influence local
development plans, for instance, arguing for the provision of affordable housing and com-
munity-use buildings. In the shorter-term, Hub staff and residents have been co-developing

plans to establish a community café in Elmdean, which is intended to be resident-led and supported by the Hub, but not located on the school site. This is to allow the café to be clearly "owned" and led by community members, while also creating a site where professionals can come to them, rather than this always being the other way round.

Although the coronavirus pandemic has disrupted such plans, it has catalysed a range of other developments. When schools in England closed in March 2020 and England was locked down, ECA was able to act much more quickly than local government to co-ordinate a multi-service response to the pandemic's impacts. It was able to learn quickly about how the situation was impacting on children and families, and all pupils and parents were contacted by phone at least once a week, with a family worker or other specialist staff phoning the most vulnerable families every day. The Hub's wider listening and community organising activities also continued using virtual conferencing software. Drawing on its existing links, the Hub was quickly able to convene a virtual meeting with 35 local services and organisations including charities, churches, local government officers, schools, and youth groups, so they could share thoughts about who and what they were most worried about and why, and explore how they could jointly respond. This resulted in the creation of three multi-partner working groups focusing on providing food and essentials, supporting mental health and well-being, and supporting access to financial information and advice. The Hub provided administrative support for these groups, identifying and coordinating further partners and resources, and ensuring cross-group communication and coordination.

ECA also led the "providing food and essentials" working group, supporting three local foodbanks to develop and use a single referral form to ensure a coordinated approach to allocating food to those most in need. It also adapted its free school meal service using its onsite catering facilities to provide daily meals for the families of 400 pupils, including pupils from three other Elmdean schools and 25 elderly people with serious underlying health conditions living locally. Alongside this, the "financial information and advice" and "mental health and well-being" working groups focused on creating community-accessible websites and information packs to provide general guidance and signposting to accessible services. Hub staff anticipate these will become increasingly important as the pandemic's longer-term economic impacts begin to be felt, especially as the aviation sector is one of the area's largest employers.

Transferable Principles

ECA's evolving approach is, of course, considerably more complex, messy, fragile and indeterminate than this brief account suggests. The challenges involved are considerable, ranging, for example, from having the time, capacity, and necessary relationships to access and listen to a wide range of lived experiences; to securing commitments to working in partnership (assuming appropriate partners can be found) and adequate funding; to very practical concerns–for instance, if the Hub's activities are to be widely accessible as intended, they cannot simply be scheduled to suit ECA's school drop-off and pick-up times as for ECA parents. Schools in less favourable positions than ECA–for instance, those struggling aca-

demically or managing significant budget deficits–are likely to face even greater and possibly insurmountable challenges.

While such challenges must be acknowledged, this paper remains focused on conceptualising how schools like ECA are extending their roles and on developing a series of robust, integrated, principles for schools working to support slow renewal, which could be transferred to other sites. If this can be achieved, it may strengthen imperatives to explore how the conditions needed to fully realise these principles can be fostered in different contexts. Reflecting on ECA's activities, I suggest that four concerns appear integral to developing a principled approach. These are: (1) adopting a socio-ecological perspective on children's lives, (2) working through soft systems change, (3) building assets, and (4) creating liminal spaces for innovation. For clarity, I will outline each concept in turn, briefly relating it to ECA's current approach, before drawing them together. Importantly, while the concepts are valuable in their own rights, it is the dialectal relationship between them, and the emergent properties resulting from their interconnections, which truly characterise schools working to support slow renewal.

A Socio-Ecological Perspective on Children's Lives

A socio-ecological perspective on children's lives invites an exploration of how children's outcomes are shaped by the environments in which they live and develop. Among the various models to explore this, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems model is widely cited as a valuable heuristic device. This understands children's development as happening within a set of nested, interconnected systems and sub-systems, operating at multiple levels: individual (a child's personal characteristics, aptitudes and interests), micro (a child's immediate social environments), meso (the features of the physical, social and service infrastructures of the areas where children live), macro (national and transnational policies), and temporal (change over time). It also considers how these systems interact with and shape one another–for instance, how do national childcare policies shape parents' access to local employment opportunities and influence family functioning? As Dyson, Hertzman, Roberts, Tunstill, & Vaghri (2009) further explain:

Children live, grow up and learn through their interactions with a wide range of interconnected environments– including the family, residential communities, relational communities, and the environment of child development services (such as the childcare centres or the schools that children attend). Each of these environments is situated in a broad socioeconomic context that is shaped by factors at the local, national, and global level. Whether children do well depends to a very significant extent on the 'nurturant' quality of these environments. (p. ii)

The question this raises is whether schools can extend their roles in ways which can strengthen the nurturant qualities of children's environments and disrupt the interactions between and within these which are likely to promote poor outcomes. That some children, schools and communities in disadvantaged circumstances nonetheless achieve good outcomes would seem to suggest such positive changes are possible, and that each has a role to play.

From this perspective, it is clear that in extending their roles schools cannot limit their focus to treating the acute symptoms of disadvantage as Dryfoos describes. They will also need to trace the interactions between children's interconnected environments which are likely to place them at risk of poor outcomes, and to consider where and how they might intervene in the underlying causes–and the causes of the causes (Marmot, 2016)–of poor outcomes,

whether directly, through co-developed responses, or indirectly via a partner. This way of thinking is, for example, already well-established in the field of public health, where it is widely acknowledged that actions to address poor health outcomes may be most effective in the longer-term if directed upstream–i. e. designed to intervene in complex etiologic pathways and to address the role of economic, political, and environmental health determinants within these (Bonner, 2018; Butterfield, 2017). From a socio-ecological perspective, strengthening the nurturant qualities of children's environments is not, therefore, simply about introducing a range of disconnected activities under the banner of extended school provision, but of thinking strategically about the actions which are within the scope of schools and their partners (in which I include children, families, and wider community members, as well as professionals) which may achieve the greatest impacts over time–even if, initially, these appear only indirectly connected to children's outcomes.

This also draws attention to the importance of thinking about fostering and sustaining nurturant environments as a long-term process, which has to respond to the impacts of past events, while working in the present and planning for the future. The concept of slow violence (Ahmann, 2018; Nixon, 2011) is of explanatory value here. This captures the idea that poor outcomes are the product of complex processes of gradual, cumulative change over time. For example, slow violence has been applied to accounts of neighbourhood decline which explore the gradual, recursive and multi-directional relationships between changing features in the environment: decline in industry, residents being less economically active, housing stock being poorly maintained, increased instances of crime and ill health, and so on (Pain, 2018). This analysis is important for schools extending their roles on two grounds. First, it clearly demonstrates that there is no single cause of decline or simple causal pathway leading to poor outcomes, and correspondingly, no single point of intervention or single intervention (or even suite of interventions) which could straightforwardly reverse this decline. Second, it shows that gradual change across multiple systems and environments is possible, and while slow violence focuses on negative change, change is, importantly, not a unidirectional process.

All this suggests schools could act in ways which are contrary to processes of slow violence, pursuing what I term "slow renewal". In principle, schools and their partners, who are gradually developing a series of actions, informed by a growing understanding of the causes (and the causes of the causes) of poor outcomes, which are local in their scope, strategic in their intent, and incremental in their impacts, could start positively to reshape multiple aspects of children's environments over time. While there are clearly significant limits to what they might be reasonably expected to achieve, they could, for instance, act to reduce risks and strengthen the protective factors within children's environments, leading to changes for individuals, and cumulatively over time, perhaps across neighbourhoods.

All of these points speak clearly to ECA's approach. For example, through the Hub, it has started to recognise importance of understanding how local environments shape children's lives, and the need, therefore, to intervene in multiple aspects of those environments to bring about change. The Hub has placed a clear value on accessing, synthesising and responding to lived knowledge about local challenges and opportunities and is drawing on a diverse range of information to identify points where it–alone or with/through partners–might intervene upstream. This has led it to support actions which are distal to children's outcomes and address underlying causes of poor outcomes (for instance, ensuring community access to financial advice, or arguing for affordable housing) as well as taking actions which are proximal to these.

A Soft-Systems Approach to Change

In thinking about how to act on a socio-ecological perspective, it is valuable to draw on notions of systems change, and in particular, to distinguish between hard and soft systems (Checkland, 1981, 2000). Hard systems can be thought about as a series of component parts to be manipulated to achieve pre-determined and clearly-defined outcomes. Engineering analogies are often used to emphasise that the system's components are each standalone entities, designed to make a specific individual contribution to the working of the system (Checkland, 2000). The difficulty in applying a hard systems approach to complex issues of disadvantage is that in treating poor outcomes in different domains (health, education, housing, and so on) as separate issues to be resolved by different "component" services and interventions, the complex interactions between these cannot be taken into account (Kerr, Dyson, & Raffo, 2014).

A soft systems approach, by contrast, focuses on understanding ways of engaging with and influencing the social world, and developing processes to enable this (Checkland & Scholes, 1990). A soft system is therefore much more fluid than a hard system in its operation and likely to be characterised by a lack of specificity and indeterminacy of outcomes (Checkland, 2012). An apt analogy for how a soft system works may, I suggest, be that of a search party. First, its development may be catalysed by an organisation taking a convening and co-ordinating, and monitoring and oversight role, however, its precise strategy relies on a wide range of partners, each with distinctive expertise and resources, working together to develop and refine different aspects of this. Second, it requires each partner to operate with an awareness of how their actions impact on others. At the very least, this is necessary to ensure they do not cut across one another, and more importantly, that they can complement and add value to each other's work and develop synergistic approaches. Third, the system may also work with a broad sense of the outcomes it ultimately hopes to achieve, within a series of broad parameters and ways of working, which will be continually refined as "the search" progresses. This also means that the system has to be suitably adaptive. It needs to work in ways which are sufficiently nimble to be responsive to the dynamic nature of the environment in which it operates and to emerging evidence about the impacts of its actions.

In strategic and operational terms, ECA appears to be developing its extended role by working broadly on these soft system principles. For instance, the Hub's starting point has not been to deliver a prescribed list of extended activities, or even to start with prescribed outcomes. Rather, it has sought to understand the systemic nature of challenges and opportunities in children's environments from multiple perspectives, and recognised that it needs to work with partners to influence these. It has also intentionally sought to alter the nature of its relationships with diverse partners, supporting them to take leading roles rather than assuming that ECA must always lead or provide services directly. Thus, rather than positioning itself to command and control partners in line with a self-determined agenda, ECA, and the Hub more specifically, appears increasingly to be playing a convening, coordinating and facilitating role. It is starting to find ways to align the work of different services and organisations so that they can build capacity and add value to one other. In addition, ECA's DBIR partnership with the university is helping to ensure that this is not leading simply to a wide range of loosely connected activity, but is moving gradually towards the development of a coherent, strategic, and adaptive system for working across children's interconnected environments.

Building Assets

There is a critical literature on the role of extended schools in meeting children's acute needs and in trying to strengthen community infrastructure. This suggests several troubling scenarios: (1) that extended schools encourage client dependency, disempowering those accessing services (Keith, 1999), (2) that schools often seek to engage parents and the wider community by creating opportunities for parents to support school priorities, without recognising, valuing or responding to their interests (Nakagawa, 2003), and (3) more generally, as seen in community development literature, that in trying to avoid taking a deficit-fixing role, professionals may simply assume communities have the knowledge and skills to transform their local environments, placing the onus on them to do so, while leaving them unsupported (McLeod & Emejulu, 2014; Nel, 2018).

To engage with these issues, it is valuable to draw upon thinking around assets-based community development (ABCD; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Initially developed to support the renewal of high-poverty neighbourhoods in the US, ABCD takes as its starting point "…what is present in the community, the capacities of its residents and workers, the associational and institutional base of the area" (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993, p. 9). It then provides a framework for mapping assets, categorising these as individual, associational, and institutional. Individual assets refer to residents' skills and talents, the contributions they have or can make to the community (for example, peer support roles), and any entrepreneurial activity which may contribute to strengthening a neighbourhood's economic infrastructure (for example, running micro-businesses). Associational assets refer to more-or-less formally organised resident-led networks and local associations, as well as professionally-led services. Institutional assets refer to visible, physical places and structures which typically house formal organisations and professional services. These institutions may also act to convene other assets, for instance people with different skills, resources and networks. This mapping framework is valuable in explicitly acknowledging the range of assets which may be developed within and across children's interconnected environments, recognising that these are not only located in, or the products of, professional organisations.

In the context of extended education, building assets cannot therefore just be about schools offering a wider range of out-of-hours activities or commissioning new services. It must also be about strengthening assets held by individuals and associational groups. This is unlikely to be achieved if schools consider their extended provision to operate primarily on a unidirectional, transactional basis where, as Keith (1999) suggests, schools see themselves as providing for dependent clients. Rather, it strongly suggests that communities need to be meaningfully involved in the development of extended offers over time (Warren, Hong, Rubin, & Uy, 2009), and that these need to be clearly connected to their environments and lived experiences.

Relating these points to ECA, it is already working to strengthen a variety of individual, associational and institutional assets, though undoubtedly could consider this more systematically. It is, for example, using its own position as an institutional asset to play a convening role, creating systems for bringing multiple assets together. Through mapping current service provision, it has sought to identify and begin to fill gaps in the existing local assets-base in this respect, where it is well-placed to do so. Importantly, it is also working to support the development of individual and associational assets as seen, for example, in its work with vulnerable parents to facilitate peer-to-peer support, in the community café plans, and in

community organising activity. In doing so, ECA appears to be consciously trying to shift existing power relations to encourage greater reciprocity and mutuality between professionals and community members.

More generally, assets-building activities, and professionals' capacities to intervene in service infrastructures, convene partners, access resources, and generally drive developments, have to be understood as integral parts of the same system and be integrated within any process of change. Whatever the limits of its current approach, ECA appears clearly to understand that building assets is as much a soft process of convening, co-ordinating, part-nering, and building new kinds of relationships, as it is providing services.

Creating Liminal Spaces

That schools and their partners will need to work in ways which challenge more established practices runs throughout the preceding discussion. A final concept, of liminal space (Shortt, 2015), is helpful in considering this. In general terms, a liminal space can be defined as a space (whether physical, organisational, social or temporal) which sits: "in direct comparison to dominant spaces; those spaces that are defined by mainstream uses, that characteristically have clear boundaries and where the practices within them are interwoven with social ex-pectation, routines and norms" (Shortt, 2015, p. 634).

While there is some debate about how much freedom liminal spaces may actually allow, in principle at least, they create some scope to suspend established management and ac-countability arrangements and to allow for different ways of working (Whitworth, Torras I Calvo, Moss, Amlesom Kifle, & Blåsternes, 2016). For instance, there are examples from the field of management studies of how large businesses enable problem solving and innovation by bringing employees from different divisions together to work in a temporary space, outside the constraints of their day-to-day practices, to undertake specific cross-cutting projects (Lam, 2010).

The literature also commonly suggests that liminal spaces are necessarily transitory (Wood, 2012, Shortt, 2015). Over time, those spaces which endure will acquire their own boundaries, expectations, routines and norms, becoming dominant spaces in their own rights within local systems. Given this, it is also valuable to consider the relationship between liminal space and the achievement of sustainable change over time. While spaces for in-novation are essential to catalyse change, a system of sustainable slow renewal has to be able to embed innovative developments into everyday provision, so that they can become an established part of wider ways of working. This is clearly seen in business contexts where, for instance, products developed in liminal spaces are then moved into an organisation's main-stream systems.

All of this suggests three challenges for schools extending their roles to support slow renewal, namely how to: (1) create and protect liminal spaces to enable innovation, (2) embed and sustain innovations as part of core business, and (3) maintain new and more equitable relations as innovations are embedded and possibly scaled-up. By developing the Children's Hub, ECA has arguably begun to explore these issues. Although the Hub sits within the school's overall management structure, it has been positioned to act outside the constraints of performative mechanisms for scrutinising school performance, but still benefits from the stability and basic resourcing afforded by the school. This has allowed it to start working in

ways which are responsive to local knowledge rather than external targets, to take on convening and coordinating roles and begin to shift power relations, and to act on the underlying causes of poor outcomes. Also important, is that the Hub structure allows ECA to protect its long-term commitment to slow renewal. If, for instance, ECA needed to focus on raising attainment in the short-term, it would not necessarily have to compromise the Hub's work to do this, as the Hub can, in large part, stand alone. However, it may also be that the more established the Hub becomes, the more challenges it may face in maintaining its liminality. For instance, if it begins to commission services, it will have contractual power over service providers and will have to work out how to manage this without recreating reductive accountability arrangements.

A Dialectal Relationship Between Principles

It is important that the principles set out above do not stand alone, but enable slow renewal through their interconnection. For instance, the creation of liminal spaces can enable new ways of working and new relationships, which can support soft system developments, which can enable and embed activities to develop a neighbourhood's assets base, all informed by socio-ecological analyses of challenges and opportunities in children's interconnected environments. Just as with slow violence, there is no single set of linear relationships between these principles. They work together with the development of shared understandings, values and purposes, and trust and reciprocity, at the core of the interconnections between them.

This also emphasises the importance of change over time. Working on these interconnected principles is likely gradually to change the ways in which all those involved think and the actions they then take. Slow renewal is not therefore simply a process of people changing the environment, but of also simultaneously changing themselves in relation to, and as part of, the changing environment. However, this also brings with it a constant need to (re) negotiate the balance between competing interests and demands, and the Hub and ECA, in playing convening and oversight roles, will be central to this in Elmdean. While the ideal long-term direction of travel may be towards ensuring opportunities for meaningful co-construction between varied partners, across all aspects of systems change, the difficulties in moving towards this cannot be underestimated.

Towards a Principled Approach for Slow Renewal

In this paper, I set out to illustrate and conceptualise how schools, which I have characterised as working to support slow renewal, are gradually extending their roles to intervene in children's complex environments. Through this, I have identified a series of strongly interconnected and transferable conceptual principles which appear central to understanding how schools can act as agents of slow renewal. In summary, these require schools to:

- Act on a socio-ecological understanding of children's lives. They need to strengthen the nurturant qualities of children's interconnected environments by: (1) mitigating the acute symptoms of disadvantage, and (2) identifying and intervening in the underlying causes

(or causes of the causes) of poor outcomes which are within their sphere of influence–whether directly, or through working with or through partners.

- Build assets in ways which support the development of nurturant environments. This is not simply a case of providing additional resources, but also requires a move from a unidirectional and transactional model of professionally-led extended provision, to one characterised by increasing reciprocity and mutuality.
- Create liminal spaces. Creating and protecting spaces outside dominant practices, in which new ways of working and new relationships can be developed, appears essential.
- Achieve change through a soft systems approach. Schools need to establish robust working processes which embody the principles above and which DBIR can help to develop and document. Schools' abilities to help convene and coordinate multiple partners and assets is likely to be central.
- Make a long-term commitment to change, acting on the interconnected principles above. To act as an agent of slow renewal is gradually to develop and embed a series of small, but strategic, coherently aligned and focused changes, to enable incremental and sustainable change, over extended timescales.

It is important to note that schools acting on these principles may at first appear to be developing a fairly standard range of extended activities–parent recreation activities, a community café, and so on. However, scratch the surface, and clear distinctions between schools intentionally working to embody the principles above, and those which are not, will emerge. To give an example, England's last national extended school initiative, which ended in 2010, required all schools to offer a varied menu of extra-curricular activities, holiday and out-of-hours care, parenting support, signposting to specialist services, and adult education and community leisure activities (Department for Education and Skills, 2005). Critiques of its underlying rationale noted that policy makers appeared simply to assume that a broad range of activity would lead to improvements across an equally broad range of outcomes, with no clear explanation as to how or why this would occur (Dyson & Raffo, 2007). Furthermore, schools then often bought in a disconnected range of decontexualised, standalone activities to satisfy policy requirements, effectively treating extended provision as a hard system of component parts. This is fundamentally different to what I have outlined.

In bringing the paper to a close, I want to be very clear that I am not arguing that all schools serving high poverty communities need, or have the capacity, to pursue a strategy of slow renewal. Such strategies may not be needed where there are strong local government systems and services in place. Some schools may find they recruit pupils from such a wide area that it is simply not feasible to engage in pupils' wider environments in this way. Even where such an approach is needed, it only needs one organisation to be the central convenor for a local strategy of soft-systems change. Indeed, in some places, this need not even be a school (see Kerr & Ainscow, 2017, for an example of a housing association playing this role and partnering with schools).

With these caveats in place, the ECA case and others like it suggest that with the opportunities and imperatives to do so, schools and their partners can be uniquely placed to develop long-term strategies to mitigate the effects of poverty and related disadvantages on children's outcomes in high-poverty neighbourhoods. Again to be clear, I am not suggesting they can substitute for high-quality public services and nor should they be obliged to try. But they do have an important role to play, as ECA's ability to co-ordinate a response to impacts of

the coronavirus pandemic perhaps most clearly shows. This also clearly illustrates how schools like ECA actively see themselves as embedded in local systems, and their commitment to working with others who are also part of those systems, not least other schools. While schools like ECA are of course benefitting from taking a convening role, gaining status and influence as well as access to new partnerships and resources, their actions are far from being exclusively for their own gain. Importantly, as trust is built over time, particularly between local schools, reciprocal benefits can increasingly be shared (see Kerr & Ainscow, 2017, for an example involving 17 schools working as a Family Zone).

This leads to my closing reflection. That schools like ECA are extending their roles in ways which may support slow renewal says something important about their values and how these sit within the wider school system. Rather than investing in a Hub, ECA could, for example, choose to strengthen its market position by changing its admissions arrangements and investing in new on-site teaching and learning facilities to attract more advantaged learners. Instead, however imperfect its emerging approach, it has chosen to invest in a complex and indeterminate process of systems change, far beyond its comfort zone and statutory duties, because ultimately it believes that by doing so it can make the greatest contribution to tackling ingrained inequities. The interconnected principles outlined in this paper may therefore be considered both as a contribution to the field of extended education and as a challenge from the field to the dominance of competitive market place values in school systems. They reveal something about the kinds of values and ways of working school systems may need actively to embody if schools are truly to help overcome seemingly intractable inequities.

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