



# The value of learner participation and children's insight

Dr Colin Morrison, Co-Director, Children's Parliament

Susan Ironside, Head Teacher, Riverbank Primary School, Aberdeen





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**Colin Morrison: Children's Parliament**

**Susan Ironside: Riverbank Primary School, Aberdeen**

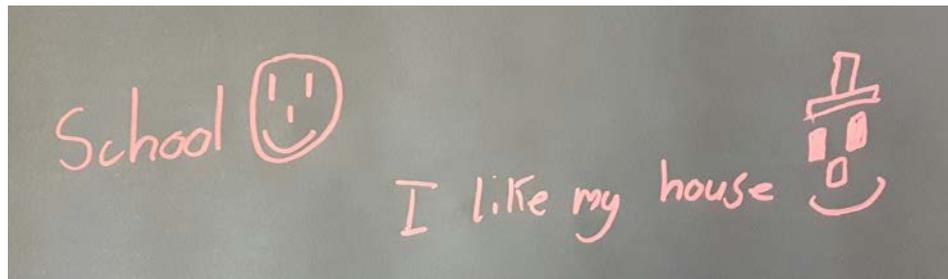
## Thanks to our partners

### Children's Parliament Investigates Learning

- James Aiton Primary: South Lanarkshire
- Carstairs Junction Primary: South Lanarkshire
- Burnfoot Primary: Scottish Borders
- St. Margaret's RC Primary (Hawick): Scottish Borders
- St. Thomas' RC Primary: West Lothian
- Logan Primary: East Ayrshire

### Imagining Aberdeen

- Bramble Brae Primary
- Manor Park Primary
- Riverbank Primary
- Tullos Primary



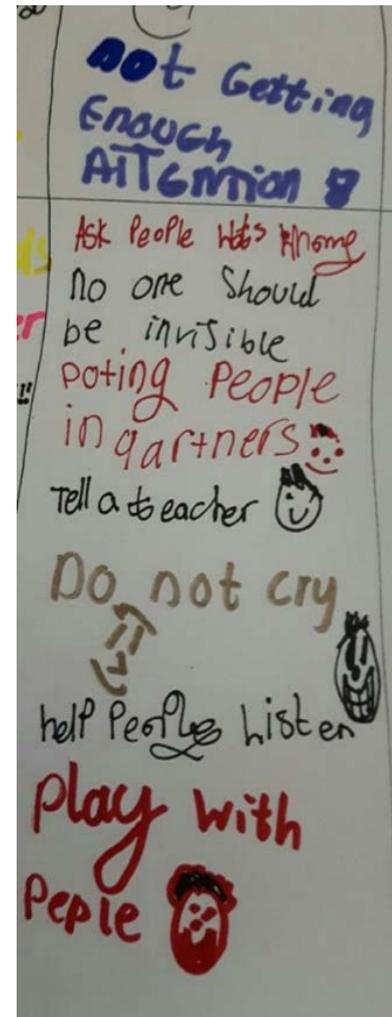
### The CP team:

**CP Investigates Learning:** Graeme McKinnon, Cathy McCulloch and Colin Morrison

**Aberdeen:** Catrin Jeans and Colin Morrison

## About Children's Parliament

- We work with children from their early years through middle childhood to early adolescence.
- Children's human rights (to be **healthy, happy** and **safe**) and **the idea of human dignity** are at the heart of everything we do.
- Our interest is in children's voices and effective participation at **home**, in **school**, and in the **community**,
- We use creative and participatory approaches.
- Our work recognises the effort we need to make to engage all children and to learn from their insight.
- We model how we want others to be with children; we provide training and support.
- **We love and value children. It's all about relationships.**



## **We introduce children and adults to the intuitive idea of human dignity**

- Every human being is important and special. We call this human dignity.
- Respect for human dignity means that we should be friendly and kind to others and it is wrong to hurt other people or make them feel bad about themselves.
- No matter how others treat you, they never have the right to take away your human dignity.
- When you learn what human dignity means to you, you are less likely to accept when other people hurt, discriminate or put someone down.





Film clip

Children's Parliament - St Margaret's PS

‘A child’s learning is directly influenced by the way he feels about his school and his teacher. How can school and home, working together, develop more favorable attitudes on the part of children?’

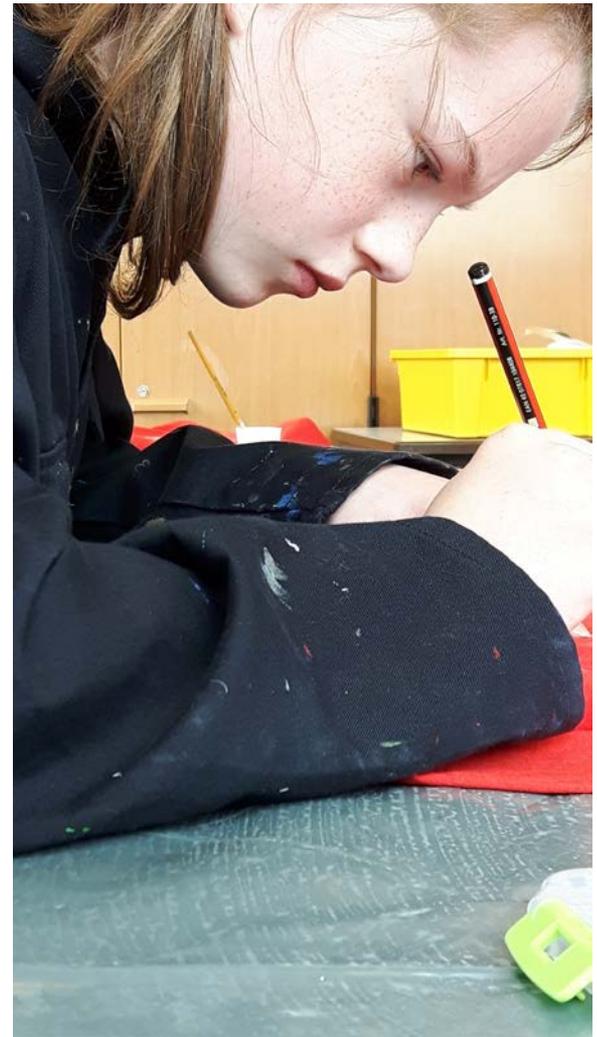
Paul Eisener (1954)



**‘Ability alone is not enough: how we think about ourselves matters too.’** Bob Burden: *Myself as a Learner Scale (MALS)*

MALS uses 20 statements with a 5-point scale to give us information regarding three main aspects of learner self-concept:

- **A sense of agency related to learning optimism** explored in statements: using statements like ‘I usually think carefully about what I’ve got to do’ or ‘Learning is easy’.
- **Learned helplessness:** using statements like ‘I get anxious when I have to do new work’ or ‘I find a lot of school work difficult’.
- **Enjoyment and active involvement in problem-solving:** using statements like ‘I like having problems to solve’ or ‘I like having difficult work to do’.



# MALS results

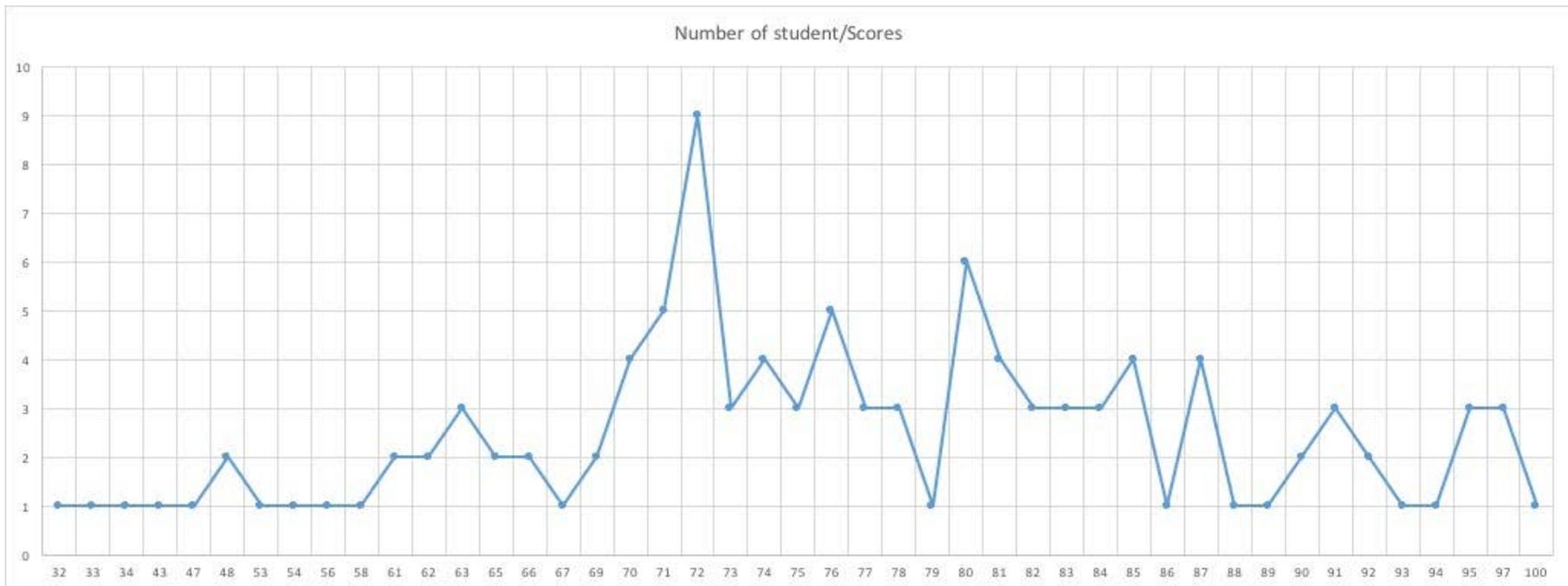
Mean: 75.28

Boys mean: 73.6 Girls mean: 79.1

Number of children scoring 60 or lower: 6

Number of children scoring 70 or lower: 29

P3/4 average: 81.0 P5 average: 70.9 P6 average 76 P7 average: 74.6



People who are important to me...  
my mum Dad brothers sisters  
my cousins my uncles

Things I have learned in my life.  
I have learned to make friends  
and how to hold a pencil

Things I would like to learn  
how to draw a Porcupine  
how to speak French  
more I would like to  
speak German and Latin

NAME Aaron .....

DATE OF BIRTH 27.4.2008 .....

Things I like to do...  
Play minecraft/Roblox/Field  
with Scott from Ruby and Jason  
minecrafter

People who are important to me...  
Dad, Mum, Kyle (brother)  
grandpa, gran. dogs.  
Friends.

Things I have learned in my life...  
How to walk.  
How to kick a ball.  
How to read.  
How to camp.  
How to play games.  
How to wait.  
How to be kind.  
How to craft.  
Not to be friends with anyone.  
How to draw.



NAME Kieran J .....

DATE OF BIRTH 2.11.04 .....

Things I would like to learn...  
• Football Leggens.  
• History. (Football)  
• How football came around  
• how to make a foot ball.

more family stuff.



LIKE ME AS A LEARNER.

Nothing gets in my way

I Make a Plan

I keep going

I Listen and understand how others see

I watch and learn

I can Manage distractions

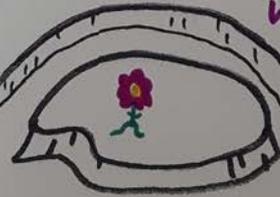
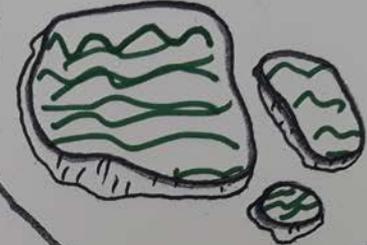
I Work carefully

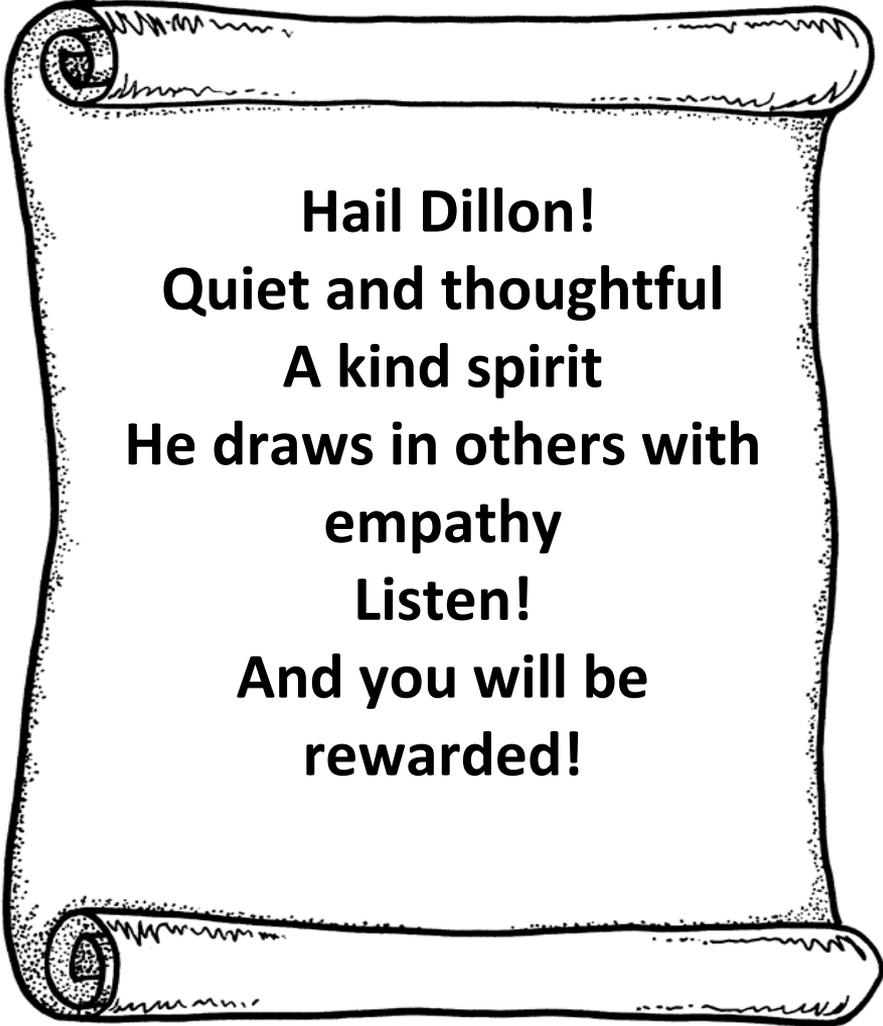
I Notice things I like imagining

I ask questions

I get on with others

NOT LIKE ME AS A LEARNER.



A hand-drawn scroll with a textured, stippled border. The scroll is unrolled, showing a central area with text. The top and bottom edges are rolled up, with small circular details indicating the binding. The text is centered and reads:

**Hail Dillon!**  
**Quiet and thoughtful**  
**A kind spirit**  
**He draws in others with**  
**empathy**  
**Listen!**  
**And you will be**  
**rewarded!**

## While we reflect on learning from the programme, 5 thoughts.....

1. To be a learner who fulfils their potential children need to be nurtured and to know they are loved.
2. It's not what we do to children it's what we do with them that will last.
3. Learner self-perception matters for all learners *but* there are children for whom it needs to be an explicit focus. We would suggest both universal *and* targeted approaches to learner voice and participation to build learning self-concept.
4. External support from an agency like Children's Parliament is best used when we are able to get alongside the teacher.
5. The empathic teacher is the key – it's all about relationships

(Teacher empathy reduces student suspensions Stanford research shows: “A focus on relationships helps humanize students. Then you see them as not just a label but as growing people who can change, who can learn to behave more appropriately, with help.”)

## Children's Parliament Investigates Learning: 5 questions

1. Can we improve how we talk about learning?
2. By talking about learning (with their teacher and with each other) can children become better learners?
3. By talking about learning (with children) can teachers become better teachers?
4. By talking about learning and changing relationships can we create learning environments where everyone feels respected and included, meaning we enhance the child's experience of learning and their learning self-concept?
5. If we do these things (and use the other tools and skills at our disposal) can we be more optimistic that we can impact on attainment *in the long-term* and in ways that are *sustained* for the individual child and the population of children for whom we are concerned?



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Susan Ironside, Head Teacher, Riverbank Primary School, Aberdeen

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# Imagining Aberdeen

<https://bit.ly/ImaginingAberdeen>

Susan Ironside Riverbank Primary school





# Imagining Aberdeen Our Imagineers

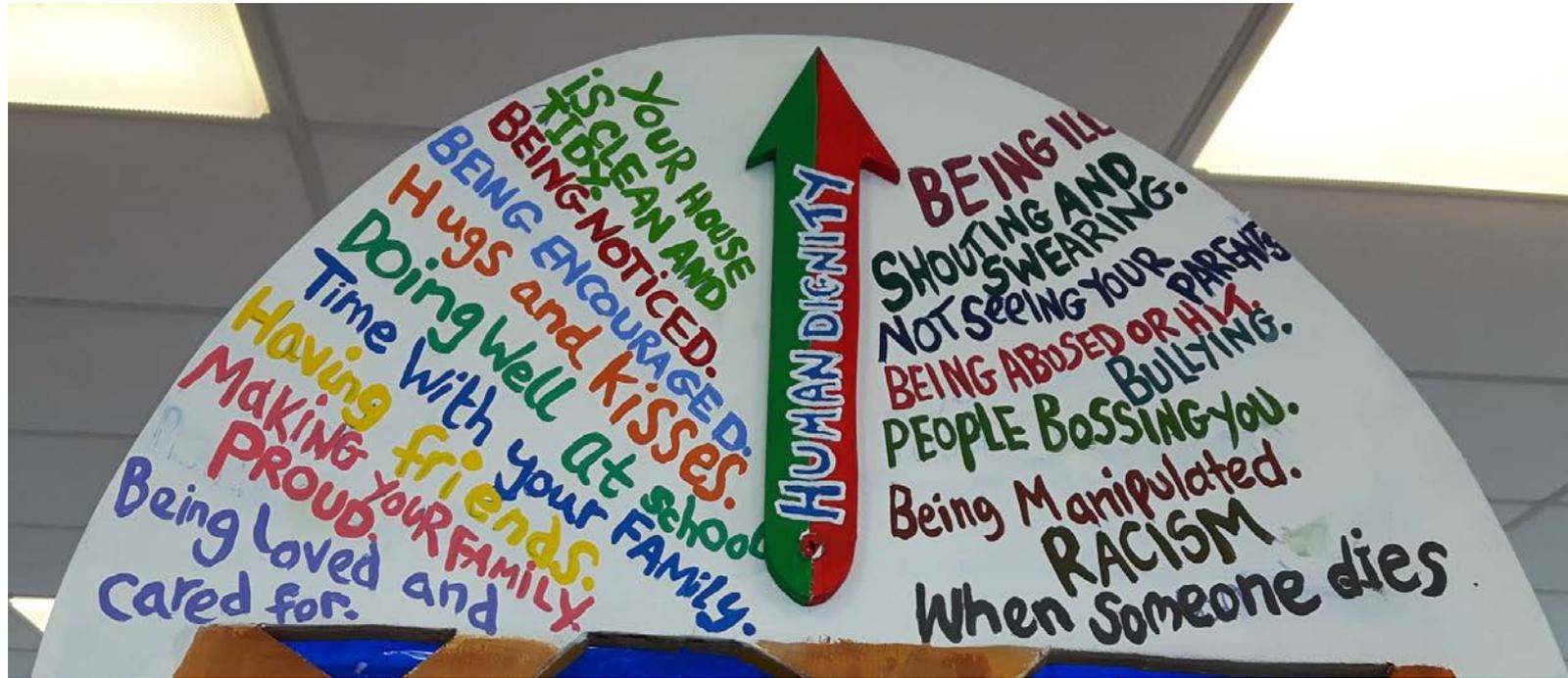


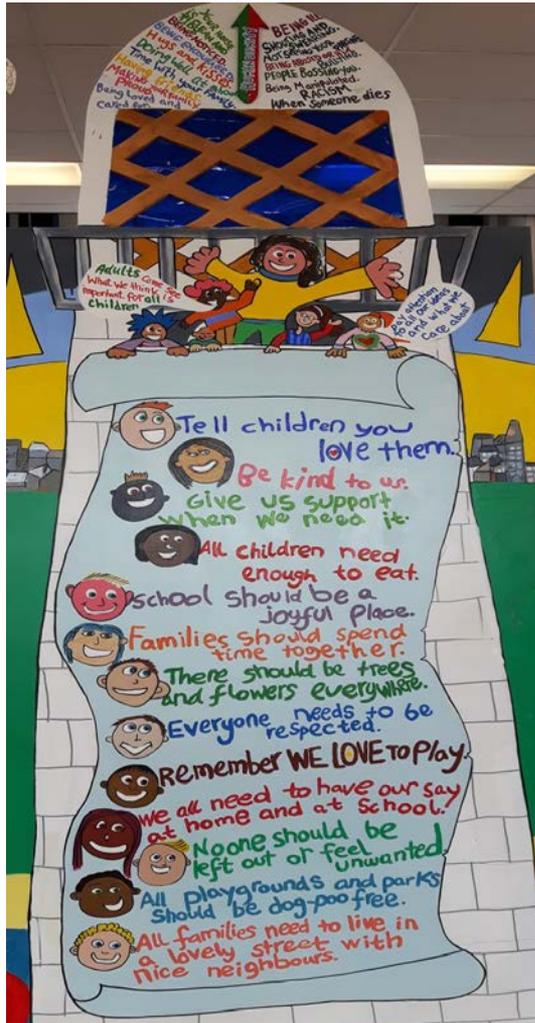
# Imagining Aberdeen

## The mural



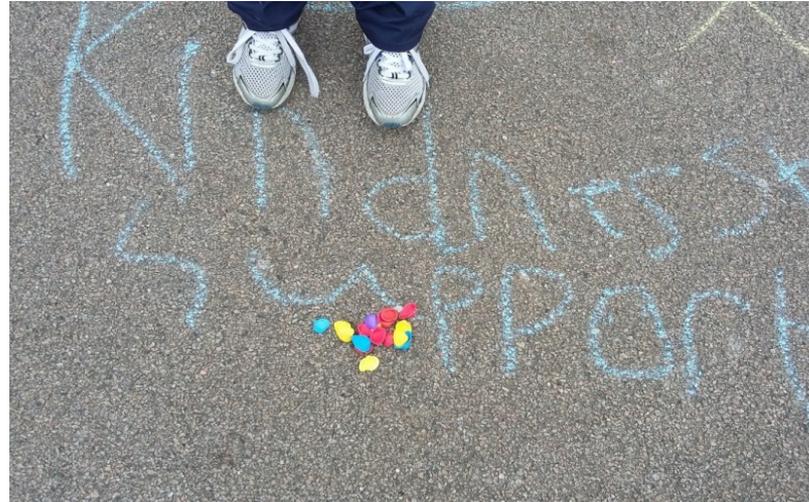
# Imagining Aberdeen the 'Dignometer'





# Imagining Aberdeen

<https://bit.ly/ImaginingAberdeen>



'School should be a joyful place'

“Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home - so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighbourhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm, or office where he works... Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere.”

Eleanor Roosevelt



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