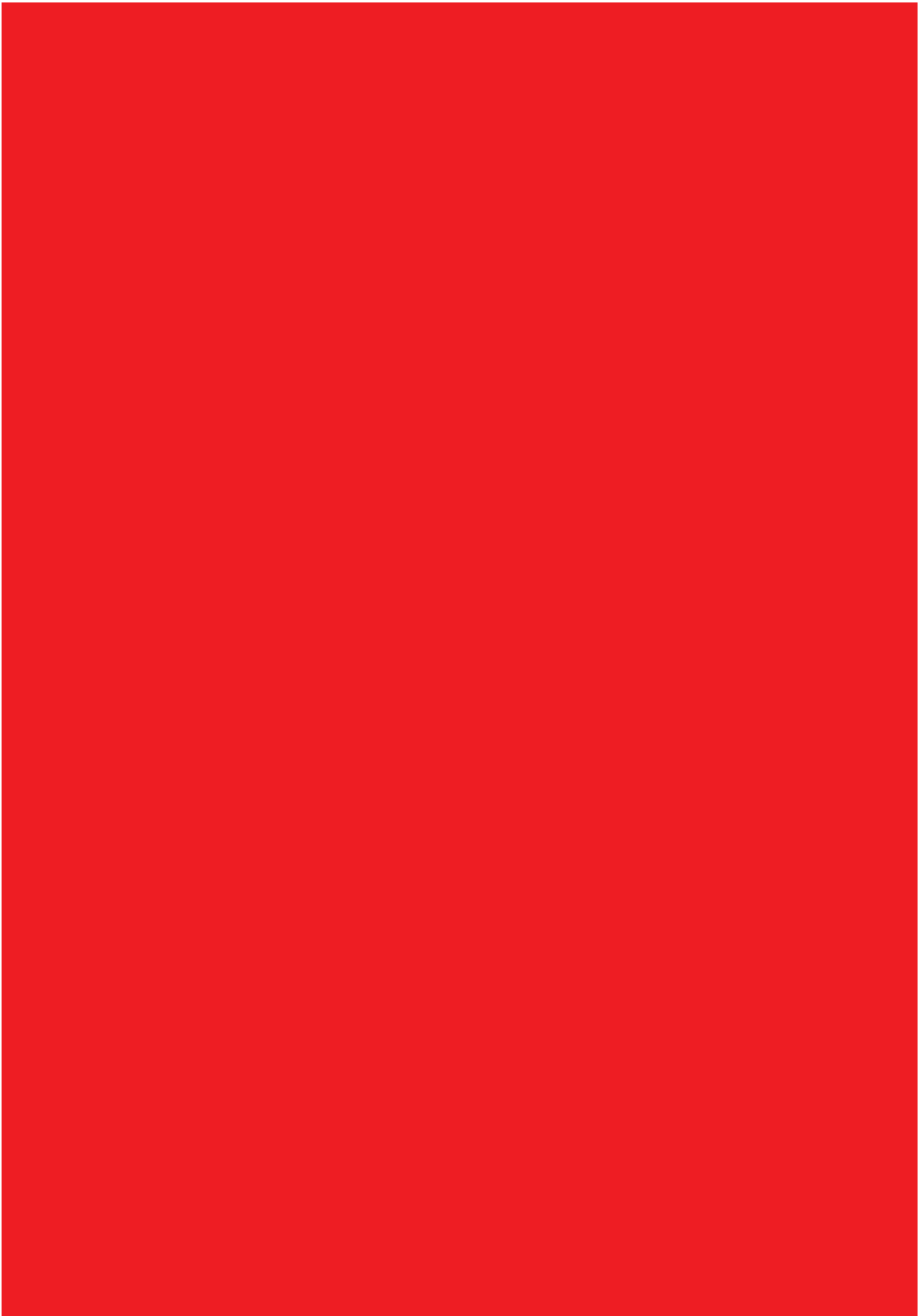manifesto

SOCIALIST EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION · SEA ·

Reimagining Education
Curriculum and Assessment
edited by Louise Regan and Ian Duckett

manifesto

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Contents

Athenian Tetradrachm representing Athena. *Wikimedia Commons*

The front cover shows the Owl, the symbol of learning and wisdom, an olive branch and a crescent. The back cover shows the head of Athena, wearing a crested Attic helmet decorated with three olive leaves and a palm leaf with necklace and earrings.

The Greek Goddess Athena, the goddess of heroic endeavour, later mythologised as the Roman Goddess Minerva is associated since the Renaissance as a universal symbol of wisdom, the arts and classical learning.

Introduction

This is the second in our series of books 'Reimagining Education'. In this second book we are focusing on the curriculum and assessment. The first in our series looked at what we would want to see in an education system post pandemic. This book focuses more sharply not only on the content of the curriculum but also how we would envisage an assessment system that is appropriate and relevant for children and young people going forward.

We currently have a top down education system, dictated by government with a narrow and heavily test based curriculum. Children are tested as soon as they enter the system and this testing continues throughout their primary schooling. These tests are narrow and show not what children know but rather test a narrow skills range often labelling children as 'failures' from a young age. They are based on the view that there is only one way to learn or to show your knowledge and skills.

This test-based philosophy follows young people through to their secondary education where a narrow knowledge-based curriculum stops children from showing their true potential.

If the pandemic has taught us anything it should be that a different world is possible. Our children and young people deserve a curriculum and an assessment system that not only reflects the modern world but also allows them to show their true potential. Our job as educators is to reclaim education for ourselves but more importantly for those that we educate.

'We have nothing to lose but our chains.'
Louise Regan and Ian Duckett

How private interests came to run English schools – and why it matters

England's second-largest chain of academy schools, with core funding from the government of approaching £200 million a year, is in the control of a single family. This means that when its "sponsor" – a businessman and Tory peer – dies, the right to control its system of strategic decision-making, via the ability to appoint the majority of its board, will pass to his wife and children.

A group of 10 academies, as above effectively run by a Conservative Lord who has been a major donor to the party, appears to be in the complete control of this person and his wife. The latter has been described as the driving force in the creation of its curriculum, apparently able to take controversial decisions such as its primary schools not teaching ICT, or even omitting mention of the 1945 Attlee government in its history textbook, with little sceptical scrutiny from the Department for Education or Ofsted and with unhappy parents seemingly left feeling powerless.

More generally, school leaders, religious groups and, in some cases, leading figures from private businesses, have set up charitable trusts which, under the academies policy, have been allowed to take complete control of state-funded institutions via their governance structures, such that the communities which depend on these schools are left on the outside looking in, with few rights.

After more than 20 years covering England's structure of school reform, which centres on the academies policy, and having been moved to set up a website to give expression to the constant stream of tip-offs from communities frustrated with its questionable effects on the ground, I have become ever more sceptical. If you wanted to set up a regime which kept the control of public services as remote as possible from those who depend on them, which concentrated risks around corruption and service failure, and which incentivised the prioritising of institutional interests over those of all children, you would be hard-pushed to come up with a more effective structure than this.

Essentially private control

The key concept to understand about the academies policy is that it has made possible the essentially private control of what are overwhelmingly publicly-funded schools.

Labour, of course, launched the policy back in 2000, with the first of what were then called City Academies opening two years later. Originally this was a small-scale initiative. Modelled on the similarly small-scale previous Conservative policy of City Technology Colleges, it was a radical approach to school improvement which had been targeted at, in the first instance, inner city secondary schools, many of which had been struggling.

Labour funded the relaunch of these schools, often in expensive new buildings, and with private "sponsors" – often wealthy businessmen (they were in all cases of which

I'm aware male) – initially asked to contribute £2 million. In return, they would be given sweeping powers including over the curriculum and staff pay and conditions.

By the time Labour left office in 2010, there were only 203 academies, almost all of which had been previously struggling institutions, and with primary schools not included. But the micro nature of the policy changed rapidly after Michael Gove became Education Secretary, as he sought to put "rocket boosters" under the scheme by allowing primaries and already-successful schools to convert, and amid a widespread belief that institutions could benefit financially by doing so.

There are now approaching 9,500 academies, with 79 per cent of secondaries and 37 of primaries having this status.

Whatever the debate around the academies policy under Labour, viewed from the perspective of how taxpayers might expect their schools to be controlled, its expansion under the Conservatives now seems especially controversial. For a policy allowing essentially private control of state assets has grown to the extent that it is the structure behind schools which now educate a majority of school-age children in England.

The more jaw-dropping implications of this are occasionally visible on digging through the constitutional documents of academy trusts.

The key structural feature to understand is that each trust has a top tier of governance called the members. The DfE has described members as "akin to shareholders", in that they have key rights including amending the organisation's constitution and hiring and firing the trust directors, who preside over strategic leadership. There are rarely more than five members in a trust, and usually the founders – who can be a married couple, or a group of friends – are the trust's first members. They are therefore essentially in control of the organisation.

Two years ago, I was looking through the articles of association of an organisation called the Meller Educational Trust. This was named after David Meller, a Conservative Party donor and former Department for Education board member who was in the news in 2018 after having had to stand down in the wake of investigative reporting around the Presidents Club charity fundraising event, at which women were reportedly groped. Meller had been one of its two joint chairmen.

But what had staggered me about his academy trust, which until collapsing in the wake of the scandal had been running two schools and was closely involved in the management of another three, was that it was essentially in the control of one man: Meller himself.

Its constitution – those articles of association – listed Meller as "principal sponsor". He was a member of the trust himself, with the right to appoint up to five additional members and up to 12 of the trust's "governors". Unless the government chose to appoint additional governors – and this has happened very rarely – only six more governors could serve. So the board's control was centralised – many would say, privatised – under Meller.

At a much larger scale, the Harris Federation now controls 50 academies from its

base in Croydon, south London. That it is named after the carpet magnate, Conservative peer and donor Lord Harris is well-known.

However, it was only in 2019 that I reported that its constitution, which dates from the federation's foundation in 2006, allows Lord Harris as, again, "principal sponsor" to appoint up to 32 board members. Perhaps most staggeringly, there is a clause in this document stating that the title of "principal sponsor", and with it those appointment rights over directors, will pass to Lord Harris's wife and two sons when he dies.

The Harris chain has been successful, in both Ofsted and results terms. However, its record, including staff turnover, relations with unions and, on occasion, the number of pupils leaving its schools early, can be subject to controversy, as can the amounts it pays its leaders: its chief executive's pay and pensions package topped £525,000 in 2019-20.

Is it right that a chain of schools whose funding comes overwhelmingly from the taxpayer – its core General Annual Grant funding via the DfE was £186m in 2019-20 – should be in the control of, effectively, one person and their family?

The implications on the ground for families for what looks like private control have been coming through most strongly in recent weeks on investigating goings-on at London-based Future Academies. This chain now has seven secondary schools – including two which were handed to it last year by the government having been run by the collapsed Meller Educational Trust – and three primaries. It was set up in 2008 by Lord John Nash, a Conservative-supporting former venture capitalist who would go on to become academies minister, and his wife Lady Caroline.

The Nashes are a white couple with combined wealth reported last year at £120 million, who preside over schools whose populations, at least in London, are overwhelmingly ethnic minority and disadvantaged. The couple are in control of Future via its governance system: they currently make up two of the trust's five controlling "members", with hire and fire rights over trustees. The other three members appear to be longstanding associates of Lord Nash. Lord Nash also chairs three of the 10 "local governing bodies" associated with Future's academies, with Lady Nash also sitting on these committees and with Paul Smith, the trust's chief executive so presumably appointed in a process overseen by the Nashes, chairing another five of them.

Perhaps most relevantly to controversy on the ground, Lady Nash, whose brief biography on Future's website lists no teaching qualifications, is described there as its "leading force for curriculum development".

Lady Nash is a history graduate. Its primary curriculum is overwhelmingly skewed towards this subject: in March I revealed how pupils receiving three lessons in British or ancient history for every one they were taught in science. One of the schools appears not to have had religious education taught this academic year, while, since 2019, as I understand it none of the primaries have seen pupils taught computing/information technology, with sources stating that the Nashes' dislike of the subject is the key factor.

Even resources within the teaching of history are controversial. Staggeringly – though perhaps not surprisingly if the risks of private control of schools by individuals

with political sympathies are thought through – a British history textbook for primary pupils includes un-nuanced coverage of Churchill as a wartime leader, mention of his 1951-55 government, but no mention of Labour's Attlee governments in between.

In January, a letter sent by a governor to the governing body of Millbank Academy, one of Future's schools, chaired by Smith, warned of parental unhappiness. The letter said: "There is an overall lack of satisfaction with the 'academisation' of Millbank. This, it is felt, has led to an imbalanced curriculum and reduction in parental input in decision making." One parent told me the Nashes were seen as "untouchable" within the trust: able to do as they chose and with neither Ofsted nor the Department for Education likely to exert any influence over them.

The trust has also been attracting media attention this spring, after the school where it has its headquarters, Pimlico Academy in Westminster, faced student protests over changes including new uniform and haircut rules which had been described as racist – an allegation the trust denied – and the alleged cancellation of Black History Month. Critics see this as reflecting a structure which has seen change imposed on a community from on high.

These trusts may appear extreme manifestations of centralisation of control under the academies policy. But they are not alone. In late 2019, I calculated that schools educating more than 100,000 pupils were within academy trusts which were in the near-complete control of businessmen.

To take other examples, the David Ross chain, named after the Carphone Warhouse co-founder who is a friend of Boris Johnson and David Cameron, was as of 2019 in control of 35 academies educating 13,000 pupils, via a charity he set up which can hire and fire the academy trust's directors. And Lord Laidlaw, another major Tory donor, controls a six-school group of academies, with 4,000 pupils. Its constitution gives Laidlaw the right to be one of its controlling members, with the ability to appoint additional members, and with the members then allowed to appoint up to 10 trustees out of a minimum of 13.

More broadly, the academies policy has institutionalised control of state-funded institutions by, in some cases, an individual and his or her friends or family members, or by particular organisations. England's largest chain, the United Learning Trust, for example, is in the control of just a single "member": the United Church Schools Trust, an organisation linked to the Church of England which previously was only running Anglican fee-charging schools.

Oasis Community Learning, another of the largest chains, has as its single member a related charity which has listed as its first aim "the advancement of Christianity". Another major chain, Aspirations Academies Trust, saw a husband-and-wife team among its four founding members, with the members having the right to appoint up to 15 directors. The husband and wife have been paid around £400,000 between them per year by the trust in recent years – a development made possible by the academies policy of deregulated pay and conditions.

Surveying these structures, in which the system seems to be that individuals or

organisations can set up a trust, apply to the DfE for permission to take control of schools and then be in complete charge of their governance through appointing close associates, it is possible to wonder what other countries would make of it.

As a friend from New Zealand, which in recent decades has seen school governors entirely appointed by community election, put it to me when told of England's academies arrangements: "What: so, you can set up a trust, appoint your mates to the board so you are in control and that's it?" With a minor wrinkle – there must be two parents on each board, who will be in the minority – yes, that's essentially it.

There are several problems with the model. First, the idea of handing individuals' complete control of what are state-funded institutions seems morally very dubious. To put it another way, what qualifications does Lady Nash, for example, have to shape the curriculum at Future Academies, other than forming one half of a wealthy married couple running the schools?

Second, the concentration of power in the hands of academy founders and those they appoint can and has created the practical problem of intensifying risks. These are glimpsed when a trust collapses, with implosions which can be spectacular.

For example, Wakefield City Academies Trust (WCAT), which ran 21 schools, saw its former chairman, Mike Ramsay, become its chief executive, with the trust reportedly paying almost £440,000 to IT and clerking companies owned by Ramsay and his daughter before it was shut. A chain called Bright Tribe, presided over by the businessman Michael Dwan, saw allegations on the BBC's Panorama programme that false claims had been made for hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of building and maintenance grants, although police later said they had "insufficient evidence" to pursue a prosecution.

Scandals have happened on a scale not seen in the days before academies: my job as a reporter has been transformed under the policy, as issues of possible conflict of interest, for example, contracting and sky-high leadership pay barely featured on the investigative landscape for schools pre-2000.

School control made private in other ways

Aside from the way that academies are controlled via their governance structures, influence over what happens to our state-funded schools has been made private via the policy in other ways.

First, the system through which academies are set up is one of a private contract between the Secretary of State and the academy trust. This is negotiated in private, with communities not getting sight of what is agreed, via what is termed a funding agreement, until after the event, and with funding agreements not being subject to scrutiny by Parliament or elected local councillors.

Second, governance of state-funded schools in many cases has been made more remote, with the favoured multi-academy trust structure seeing key strategic decision-making power sitting at the level of the central trust, whereas in local

authority-maintained schools it rests with community-facing school-level governing bodies.

Third, the government's decisions over whether a school should become an academy in the first place, or whether an existing academy should be transferred from one trust to another, take place at behind-closed-doors meetings.

These deliberations of Regional Schools Commissioners – civil servants taking advice from regional "Headteacher Boards", then reporting to ministers – are held in private, with journalists having had to fight to see even the briefest details as to why decisions have been taken released.

The secrecy of such a system, including via school and trust governance meetings which are also held behind closed doors, contrasts with that operating in other countries, including Canada and even in relation to United States charter schools. The latter are often seen as archetypes for academies. However, transparency rights, including access to decision-making meetings, can seem much stronger there.

Finally, there is no requirement for Regional Schools Commissioners – who, again, preside over decisions within the academies system which can have huge significance for communities, such as whether a school transfers to a trust which might have a very different ethos – to answer to those communities. That is, decisions are taken by unelected officials whose duty is to report back, in private, to ministers, who themselves have no formal elected relationship with those on the end of their decisions, rather than being accountable to those communities. When a decision is taken, there is not even a public announcement to the affected community. This system, drawn up in haste by civil servants under Gove as Education Secretary, is rotten.

Fragmentation, competition and its impact on vulnerable pupils

Another effect of fragmenting England's system of school control from the old structure of 152 local authorities to, as of February 2021, the current one of 9,469 academies organised via 2,612 trusts has been to raise questions about vulnerable pupils falling through the cracks.

Running a system in which semi-autonomous multi-academy trusts compete with each other for the best results, as measured by test and exam indicators, has not seemed to this observer to be a good recipe for safeguarding the interests of young people felt unlikely to achieve top grades.

Concerns have been repeatedly voiced about "off-rolling" – the practice of encouraging children to leave a school's care because of their likely impact on institutional results, including by the Chief Inspector of Schools.

All schools face results pressures, in a system which, beyond academies, controversially hangs success on competitive performance indicators via league tables. Yet the semi-autonomous academy structure, which sees trusts given control of admission arrangements subject to some oversight via local authorities and the schools adjudicator, would seem to exacerbate problems.

Eighteen months ago, a Commons Education committee inquiry saw multiple claims made, in evidence from organisations including London Councils; the local authorities of North Yorkshire, Rochdale and Northamptonshire; and the campaign group Special Needs Jungle, that academies were less likely to support children with special educational needs and disabilities than were other types of school.

In March, even Sam Freedman, a former adviser to Michael Gove, conceded that academies should not be in control of their own admissions arrangements, with local authorities given a role policing exclusion from school, in the interests of "protecting vulnerable children".

What should happen?As the above should indicate, the academies policy is complex. Part of the problem, in seeking to understand it, has been tracking goings-on through the thousands of trusts now operating across England, with details emerging through local developments, and the individual legal documents through which the trusts are governed.

However, more than 20 years after the policy's introduction, and with little good evidence of any great national transformation of results under academisation versus the alternative, it seems reasonable to call for a fresh look at it, from first principles.

Specifically, we should ask: is it right that control of state-funded schools can be handed to individuals, small groups of connected people or organisations wholesale? Should decision-makers be allowed to take decisions without being answerable to the people affected by those decisions? Should decision-making mainly be in private? And are we really doing all we can to protect the interests of children which organisations might be incentivised not to help them?

In my view, the above questions answer themselves. Public funding of schools must surely come with public, locally answerable control of those institutions, and with the principle that decision-making must be in public, rather than in private.

Communities need a say over the schools they use and fund. At thousands of institutions, now educating the majority of children in England, this has been taken away from them. At the core of the story of England's academies policy is a deficit: a sense that control of schools has been made more remote from those they are meant to serve. As well as being wrong in itself, unsurprisingly for this government perhaps, this has been a recipe for cronyism and scandal.

The academies model was controversial enough as a vehicle for a small number of troubled schools. As the template for the entire state-funded sector, it is fundamentally flawed: as ethically dubious as it is practically problematic. This is a system crying out for systemic reform.

Warwick Mansell

The curriculum and assessment wars

If we are to look for any positive outcomes from what has been a terrible time, it is that the Covid pandemic has focused attention on the English education system and has solidified what was a more widely growing realisation that the current arrangements are not fit for purpose and that, if we are to build back better, we have to do things differently.

The weakness of the current exam route march of GCSE and A level qualifications is readily apparent. Putting all the nation's eggs in the exam basket has proved to be a very fragile arrangement which broke two years in a row as the exams were cancelled. The scandal of the 2020 'algorithm' which went from being described by the Prime Minster as 'world beating' to 'mutant' was a major embarrassment for the government. Gavin Williamson's insistence that exams were the best way to assess achievement fundamentally undermined, when those exams could not take place for a second year, his then professed trust in teacher assessment over any 'algorithm'.

The Government's lamentable performance has had another effect. It has increasingly brought into open question the current arrangements, particularly at GCSE and A level.

There are, as I write, a growing number of commissions looking into the secondary curriculum and qualifications, with organisations as diverse as the National Education Union and the *Times* newspaper establishing high level commissions on what changes to the current arrangements on curriculum and on qualifications at 16 and 18 are needed.

Opposition to the status quo is to be found in unusual places. The One Nation group of Conservative MPs have written, as part of a series of covid recovery papers, a booklet on the future of education which asserts that radical changes are needed because of England's stagnation in the PISA international league tables and because of the widening attainment gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children and young people.

The authors do not pull their punches when making their recommendations about education recovery and, as a central proposal, advocate the abolition of GCSEs and primary school SATS to increase learning (rather than teaching to the test) time in schools.

Education think tanks are also generating policy proposals on qualification reform. In the first section of a two-part report Tom Richmond of the education think tank EDSK (Education and skills) calls for GCSEs to be replaced by online assessments, arguing that the exams have remained largely untouched since 1988, yet the education system around them has changed dramatically in that time. A high-stakes and hugely expensive set of school-leaving qualifications for 16-year-olds no longer makes sense, he asserts, when young people are required to remain in education or training until age 18.

The second part of the EDSK report concludes that A levels have also had their day. The authors argue that: 'Instead of allowing A levels to overshadow every other option available to young people, students should be able to pursue whichever academic, applied or technical courses suit their own interests and abilities within a challenging and aspirational 'Baccalaureate' that promotes progression and gradual specialisation.'

These challenges to the status quo, and the growing realisation that other high performing nations do their qualifications differently creates conversations which the architects of the current exam dominated qualification system find very uncomfortable. But it is important to recognise that, occupying powerful positions in and around government, the advocates of a knowledge rich curriculum assessed by timed exams are coming out fighting.

Writing for the 'Conservative Home' website, Nick Gibb, the school's minister defended the Government's reforms of the curriculum and its assessment.

> *'We are determined to return to full exams from next summer. Put simply, unseen external examinations are the fairest and most valid means we have to assess what pupils have learned in their time at school. And our reformed GCSEs are the gold standard of validating pupils' attainment. Those who seek their abolition are profoundly mistaken. GCSEs help to deliver a well-structured and broad academic curriculum. For a significant minority they will be the only academic qualifications they hold – hugely important for any future career change. And GCSE results help to hold schools to account.*
>
> *We must strongly resist the calls from those who talk about ripping up our curriculum to make it more 'relevant' or to make it solely about preparing pupils for work. This would be to deny children their birth right – and it's the most disadvantaged in society who would suffer the most, who may have less access to this rich knowledge in the home.*
>
> *I believe that the purpose of education is to open up a pupil's mind to the finest examples of human endeavour – what Oakeshott called "an inheritance of human achievements" – unlike the tepid child-led progressivism of the Left.'*

I have quoted Gibb at some length because he articulates here, in one place, all the shibboleths of the Right's beliefs about curriculum and about assessment. His assertions are all, of course, open to question and challenge. Do GCSEs as currently constituted deliver a broad academic curriculum? I would say that they do not. I am minded of the words of a retired Chief Examiner who argued that GCSEs in their current form, tested and retested a candidate's ability to write an essay in 30 minutes – the subject content of which was interchangeable and of less importance than the one skill – essay writing – being tested.

Another shibboleth, and one that the Left have found it hardest to counter, is Gibb's reference to 'rich' knowledge – more commonly referred to by the traditionalists as 'powerful' knowledge – as defined by E.D. Hirsch in the USA and MFD Young in the UK. When defining what is 'powerful' the Right resort to inadequately quoting Matthew Arnold's famous saying that children should be educated in 'the best that has been

thought and said' It is important to note that the Right short- change Arnold when they reverentially cite his phrase 'the best that has been thought and said'. Routinely excised are the last three words of his statement 'in the world'.

It is an important omission which has resulted, in England, in a national curriculum which is wholly insufficient in its consideration of England's place in the world, and which ignores and downplays so much of the shameful aspects of our nation's history. A national curriculum which is notable for the absence of the experiences, achievements, and voices of black people and women.

What is counted as 'powerful' knowledge by its adherents, as Oakshott defines it, is 'an inheritance of human achievements'. But only some humans get to have their achievements inherited – and they are overwhelmingly male, white, and powerful. The achievements of those who have not, historically, been powerful – because of their class, their gender, their race and their sexuality, are excluded from the canon and the record of human achievement. When marginalised and oppressed groups are included, it is usually by exception – and those individual examples used to justify the dominance of the status quo.

I was, most recently, involved in a twitter spat with Katherine Birbalsingh, the founder of Michaela Free School, favourite of Nick Gibb and a strong and public advocate for powerful knowledge. She responded to a tweet from me arguing that the Sewell report, in its advocacy of ED Hirsh, never considered whose works and achievements were deemed to be powerful and whose were not. That the selection of what is deemed powerful enough to be included in the national curriculum is not gender, race, or class blind. Birbalsingh tweeted:

> Because we clearly don't want poor black kids learning Shakespeare etc and having the cultural capital necessary to successfully negotiate their way in the world. Let's save that for the boys at Eton. THAT is institutionalised/cultural racism. Can you see it?

Somewhat surprised I responded:

> But we do want everyone learning Shakespeare, there are very good reasons why he bestrides the literary cultural canon. But we also want good literature from other traditions. Can't you see it?

> And can't you see how the boys at Eton would benefit enormously from seeing the paintings and knowing the life history of Artemisia Gentilschi or the plays of Aphra Benn or the novels of Toni Morrison or Robert Tressell's classic 'The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist?

> There are more things in heaven and earth (Kathryn) than are dreamt of in your philosophy – Hamlet (1.5. 167 – 8).

Birbalsingh did not respond largely, I think, because this is now dangerous territory for the Right which, as I have argued, has very weak answers to the question of who decides what powerful knowledge is and on what basis. And in the light of the scandal of sexual violence and harassment of girls in single sex public schools, and in mixed

state schools, the question of where boys learn about women's achievements as artists and painters, as scientists and mathematicians, is also extremely problematic to the Right's narrative.

There is another front on which the concept of powerful knowledge can be questioned. There can be no doubt that the Right have used Hirsch very cleverly, particularly over the past ten years, to position themselves as the protectors of poor children who may, according to Gibb, have less access to rich knowledge than their more advantaged peers. So, the argument goes, children, and in particular deprived children, must be taught 'rich knowledge' in schools. This is their 'birth right' and those who question this transmission of human achievements are failing the poorest, dumbing down their education and succumbing to the soft bigotry of low expectations.

The truth of the matter is that education alone is inadequate to the Herculean task of changing the material conditions of the poor. The dissemination of knowledge (and schools have always taught knowledge that each generation considered to be 'powerful') has rarely enabled the vast majority of poor children to escape the social and economic exclusion that poverty inflicts upon their childhood and subsequent lives. The exceptions to this – for example in the 1960s where working-class young people did gain access to professional, well paid jobs – were because of the expansion of the welfare state and the pressing need for more nurses and teachers and social workers. A growing economy provided the conditions for working class youth to realise their aspirations to a better life with greater access to skilled, secure work.

Advocates of powerful knowledge promote the benefits of an education in shared cultural values, a shared inheritance of the immaterial, but say nothing of the pressing need to create a society where children and young people, and their families, have a fair share of the material wealth of our society and the effects of this result in social and economic exclusion. Ofcom estimate that between 1 million and 1.85 million children in the UK do not have access to the internet or to lap-tops. How they were meant to access remote learning during the lockdown, or to live fulfilled lives without access to the wealth of knowledge available through the internet, is anyone's guess.

Powerful knowledge has been such a useful concept to the Right, masking the effects of austerity which has been so destructive of the lives, the hopes, the health and the achievements of deprived children and young people. The concept ignores fundamental and uncomfortable truths. One such is that 40% of the education attainment gap between rich and poor children is set in stone before they start school. The expectation on schools, enforced by the toxic school accountability framework, to make up this gap, is unfair and it is undoable. It is like climbing Everest without crampons and oxygen.

It is not the Left but the Right who have the soft bigotry of low expectations through their acceptance of the mantra that the poor will always be with us and so will the consequential damage and destruction that poverty brings to those condemned to live in it. Far more important than powerful knowledge to the life chances of disadvantaged children is the eradication of child poverty.

Two days after Nick Gibb's blog was posted on the Conservative Home website something very unusual occurred. A trenchant and at times savage rebuttal by the Chair of the Commons Education Select Committee – Robert Halfon.

Halfon came out, guns blazing.

'A knowledge-rich curriculum with a narrow focus on traditional subjects, and a tired system of assessment, can only get us so far.

Yes, knowledge is important – people need to reach a certain level to contextualise their learning and development. But skills-based learning must not be crowded out by overemphasising this.

The Department for Education's Employer Skills Survey, the CBI, the OECD and the World Economic Forum all suggest that the jobs of the future will place much stronger emphasis on skills such as collaboration, communication, problem solving, emotional awareness, creativity and entrepreneurship. Time and again, my parliamentary committee has heard the same.

There must be enough space to develop these skills – and, crucially, the aptitude to adapt and retrain as knowledge quickly fades (as will increasingly become the case); currently, we do not spend enough time on these things.

This harms us all, but it deals disadvantaged pupils the heaviest blow. For these children, the current approach has reached its limits: while the GCSE attainment gap (the difference in academic development between them and their peers) closed from 20.4 months in 2011 to 18.4 months in 2017, progress has ground to a screeching halt (between 2017 and 2019, it remained stuck at 18.4 months).'

Make no mistake – this is a declaration of war on Gibb and on the knowledge rich proponents from a powerful back bench MP who, as Chair of the Education Select Committee, has heard witness testimonies from experts who strongly question the current English education obsession with a narrow form of academic knowledge assessed by timed exams. Halfon's declaration that powerful knowledge has not resulted in the narrowing of the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their more advantaged peers goes to the heart of the matter – undermining from within the falsehood on which the powerful knowledge mantra is founded. Halfon is clear, also, that a new approach is needed – one which focuses on skill development, personal skills and a concentration on developing what makes us uniquely human.

It will be very important for the Left not to be left behind in this debate. Covid has opened a space for important thinking and potential reform of England's inflexible curriculum and qualification system. We have a window of opportunity to envision and campaign for a kinder, more creative curriculum which respects the cultures of all children and young people and treats them as meaning makers and co-creators of knowledge. An education system which ceases to be dominated by timed exams which corrupt knowledge, reducing its expression to pressured regurgitation in 30-minute timed essays done under duress in exam halls.

But if we on the Left are going to seize this opportunity, we have to get our arguments

together. It is comparatively easy to say what we object to. The harder question is what education we do want for our nation's children and young people?

So, here is my starter for ten on new thinking about the curriculum and assessment. Let me begin by being clear. I do not think an education system should only inculcate skills or only inculcate knowledge – it should inculcate, and celebrate, both. You cannot teach skills in a vacuum. You need content, a knowledge base in which to develop skills. But neither can you ignore skills, not consider them, and hope that they will develop naturally. Skills need to be fostered, nurtured, and evaluated. If they are ignored – those pupils with social capital will develop them outside school. Those without run the risk of leaving school without the social, emotional, and personal skills they will need for a successful adult life.

I agree with Andreas Schleicher, head of the education division of the OECD who argues that we now educate children and young people in a world which is changing faster and more furiously than ever before, for jobs that have not yet been created, to tackle societal challenges that have not yet transpired and to use technologies that have not yet been invented.

An education system needs, concurrently, to prepare children and young people for an interconnected world in which countries cannot act alone if they are going to preserve the planet and humanity – a truth that the Covid pandemic and the emergency of climate change has made a real and urgent priority.

Schleicher is clear that the focus on skills and a global perspective should not diminish the importance of knowledge. He addresses this directly:

> *'Of course, state-of-the-art knowledge will always remain important. Innovative or creative people generally have specialised skills in a specific field of knowledge or practice. As much as learning to learn skills are important, we always learn by learning something.* But he adds the centrally important caveat – knowledge is not enough. The success of an education system is how it enables its students not to merely reproduce learned knowledge in timed exams but, in Schleicher's words, it must be about *'extrapolating from what we know and applying that knowledge creatively in novel situations'.*

By contrast to Schleicher's dynamic concept of learning Hirsh and his advocates barely engage with the crucial question of how children learn. They view knowledge as a fixed entity to be transmitted to pupils who must receive it and learn it before they can make any use of it. Powerful knowledge advocates unashamedly argue that children cannot create art until they have learned the history of art; they cannot create music until they have learned to read music; they cannot conduct experiments in science until they have learned all of the theory that the experiment was designed to test.

In the Hirschian model, knowledge is inert, fixed, stable – ready to be delivered, more like a sack of potatoes than a box of delights, to the next generation, in life, though, even in the rarefied life of academic communities, knowledge isn't like this at all. It is dynamic, shifting, uncertain, argued over. It is the stuff of debate and uncertainty, not of lists and certitudes.'

Language – and in particular – oracy – is central to learning. Language allows the examination of your thoughts through their utterance, and the interplay of different views and experiences through conversation where you can learn from one another.

'Language is not the same as thought, but it allows us to reflect upon our thoughts, the metaphor contained in 'reflect' is here highly appropriate; what we say mirrors our thought processes and enable us to take responsibility for them. Thus, children and adults alike are not only receiving knowledge but remaking it for themselves'.

Remaking knowledge for ourselves is, I would suggest, the most important element in the Left's thinking about the curriculum. The transformation of knowledge through its use in real life situations, supported by a clear focus on skills development and a shared understanding of the importance to all children and young people of their cultural heritage which they deserve to see reflected in the curriculum, are the richest resources for teaching and learning.

It is time for the Left to get involved in the current debate. Let's put forward our proposals to radically transform the curriculum and its assessment for the benefit of our children and young people and our future.

Mary Bousted

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The curriculum post pandemic

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For the government, the pandemic has been a time of improvisation. So far as schools are concerned, the improvisation has been of two kinds. The first is a forced and chaotic response to circumstance, exemplified by the rapid policy shifts around examinations and school reopening. The second is more calculated: its innovations prefigure longer-term changes, new elaborations of privatisation and centralisation. The Oak National Academy, through which an online curriculum has been established, and the National Tutoring Programme, contracting private sector organisations to provide 'catch-up' for disadvantaged learners, are evidence that disruption is always an opportunity for new initiatives, on a scale beyond that which is possible in ordinary times.

These initiatives will endure: Schools Minister Nick Gibb has long dreamed of a system in which pedagogy and the enacted curriculum have come under closer government influence. They are intended to reinforce rather than challenge the order which government intends to restore as soon as possible. The Department for Education has announced the return of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 SATs in 2021/22, along with the new Reception Baseline Assessment and a new Early Years Foundation Stage. It is likely to take the same approach to secondary assessment, in the belief that, in the words of Secretary of State Williamson, *'exams are the best form of assessment we have'*. So far as government is concerned, the basic architecture of the post-pandemic system should be much like that of its pre-2019 predecessor, albeit with substantial new demands on teachers' time and some new annexes, such as the tutoring programme.

The government has not gone unchallenged during the pandemic. Its plans to keep schools fully open at times when scientific advice suggested a different policy were defeated. Likewise, its installation of a temporary grading system at 16+ and 18+ which produced manifestly unfair outcomes was ended with a hasty backtrack. These reversals were not simply the result of a rethinking among policy-makers: they were accompanied by, and were in part of the effect of, a mobilisation without precedent among students and education staff. Students took to the streets in August to protest about their exam grades. Staff, prevented by the conditions of the second lockdown, from mobilisation of a physical sort, assembled in tens of thousands at Zoom meetings organised by the National Education Union; on 3rd January 2021, at a point when government was about to announce the full reopening of schools, more than 400,000 people showed up at an NEU 'Make School Safe' meeting on Zoom and YouTube.

The flashpoint for mobilisation on this scale was, of course, the perception that government policy was putting lives at risk. But this sense of biopolitical urgency was not the only driver of action. Throughout the pandemic education staff, and students, were involved in responding to what Richard Horton, writing in the Lancet, referred to as a 'syndemic' – a situation in which a crisis of health was combined with and exacerbated by a longer-term social condition: Covid-19 was 'clustering within social groups according to patterns of inequality deeply embedded in our societies' (Horton

2020); the economic impact of the pandemic was likewise unequal. At this conjunction of the social and the epidemiological, in which an awareness of medical risk was sharpened by a knowledge of injustice, the murder of George Floyd marked a particular point, where the limits of the endurable has been passed and protest became a necessity.

It is this double experience, medical and social, which has contributed to a new phase of educational politics; exposed to the stresses of the syndemic, the norms and practices of the post-1988 era have been increasingly called into question; commitments to equality have been revived, in some cases on a larger scale than previously.

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The syndemic, and the strains it imposes on the English education system, are unique. But they do not stand outside history. Sixty years ago, in The Long Revolution, Raymond Williams identified three contending tendencies which fought with each other to shape the direction of education in Britain: 'the old humanists', the 'modernisers', the 'public educators'. In the present conjuncture, in England at least, these paradigms remain alive and forceful, even if the balance of power between them has shifted since Williams was writing. 'Old humanism' has mutated into a hybrid form, in which political nationalism and educational traditionalism have fused with a data-driven system of accountability. Marginal in the 1960s, it now constitutes the dominant curriculum discourse in England – that of government and its associated agencies, networks, think tanks and supportive intellectuals. In this discourse, the curriculum is centred on 'powerful knowledge' derived from academic disciplines, organised on the basis of strong boundaries between subjects and intended to promote the acquisition of 'cultural capital' – the 'essential knowledge that children need to be educated citizens' (Ofsted 2019) . Progress for students is defined (Mansell 2018) as 'knowing more and remembering more'. System quality is assured by test metrics and assessment thus assumes a high-stakes character. The whole ensemble of ideas, practices and measurements forms a doctrinal orthodoxy to which teachers are required to conform. So far as its advocates are concerned, nothing has happened during the syndemic that should destablise this orthodoxy.

Although it is forcefully promoted and strongly systematised, this discourse does not completely command the educational stage. The OECD (2018), supranationally, and at a national level the Edge Foundation argue for a different set of principles, said to be more in line with changes in employment, society and technology and with an 'interconnected' world, where 'responsible action towards sustainability and collective well-being' should be a priority. These views, which influence policies in Wales and Scotland, are voiced in England by among others the former Secretary of State for Education, Kenneth Baker, and the Conservative Chair of the House of Commons Education Committee, Robert Halfon. In Halfon's interventions, the 'modernising' tendency identified by Raymond Williams has found an articulate voice. Noting the

enduring problem of a 'skills shortage' and the persistent inequality which the effects of Covid-19 have widened, Halfon decries a system based on 'calls for knowledge at the expense of all else' and calls for the replacement of GCSEs, the exam system which was reshaped to respond to such calls. Preserving GCSEs, Halfon states 'cannot be the best way to create the flexible, resilient, multi-skilled workforce and society that is needed for the future'. As we consider 'the world after Covid', 'let's take the advice of international experts like the OECD to blend together knowledge, skills and attitudes in our assessment system and in the teaching that underpins it' (Halfon 2021).

With the modernisers as with the (reconfigured) 'old humanists', it is possible to speak of a systematised discourse, that links principles with questions of content and curriculum purpose, that has well-developed ways of disseminating its positions, even if they cannot be in toto implemented. But what of Williams' third paradigm, that of the 'public educators'? By this term, Williams meant much more than a commitment to a public, rather than a private education system: in this way of seeing, education was a public good, whose aims were personal fulfilment, active citizenship and social equality; it should be informed by a sense that culture, meaning-making and learning were ordinary qualities of life, not properties of an élite. It would not take its bearings from appreciations of business need.

These aims were not, as it were, abstract products of his own thinking, but were already embedded in social and educational practice, not least, for Williams, in movements of adult education. In the three decades that followed *The Long Revolution,* it was possible to find other embodiments of public education – in schools, in university departments of education, in a multifarious world of educational publications and social movements (Jones 2015). Since the late 1980s, and the period inaugurated by the Education Reform Act of 1988, the institutions and practices which sustained the discourse have been weakened. The opportunities to elaborate a systematic approach to the principles, design, and detail of an alternative curriculum, outside the newly dominant framework, have been few. Unless they have been able to demonstrate their alignment with government agenda, educators have been excluded from participation in policymaking. Tight management control and the demands of workload and accountability have inhibited teachers from 'curriculum-making' activity. Ideas have been dispersed across an unfriendly system, held on to or developed as matters of personal belief rather than markers of a collective identity.

In the period of the syndemic, these arrangements have been disturbed, opening a period in which the regime established in 1988 and consolidated by governments of the right since 2010 has been forced to confront new challenges. At the centre of these challenges is a reassertion of education's social dimension. The tendency of Conservative policy have been 'asocial' in a double sense: first, it has separated education from its social context; secondly, it has denied education's character as a form of social interaction between the experience of students and the more formal knowledge of the school. These positions have policy effects. Schools are required to close the attainment gap between poor students and their better-off peers, even while the gaps in income and wealth are growing. In matters of curriculum and pedagogy

the cultural experience that students bring with them to school is discounted, in favour of the emphasis on 'powerful knowledge' and 'cultural capital'. Culture becomes a relatively fixed set of ideas and practices into which students are supposed to be inculcated; it is not an open field of difference and contestation.

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Responses to the syndemic on the part of those who work in education have involved a strengthened understanding of the social. When schools began to reinvent themselves as a social safety net, delivering food parcels and learning resources to students and their families, (QSG 2020; Moss 2020), they helped to rescue the system from the disasters that would have followed from its failure to provide the elementary means of social reproduction. In the process they also discovered a deeper engagement with issues of poverty and inequality, a stronger sense of their own responsibilities and capacities and a sharper critique of the government's long-standing neglect of education's social preconditions. In successive research-based interventions, Gemma Moss (2020) has tracked these developments. During the summer of 2020, she writes, the highest priority of most teachers and headteachers working in deprived areas was 'checking how families are coping in terms of mental health, welfare, food'. They came to see that:

> 'many children would go hungry during the crisis if schools did not help their families with food. They knew that many children were without access to the internet, or a private space to study at home or outside space. They knew that home itself might not be a safe environment and worried about families they thought were struggling with mental health issues.'

Experiences like these led teachers towards frustrated criticism of government and a sense of new educational possibilities. As one of Moss's respondents argued:

'We have such a big opportunity now to really listen to children's and their families' needs […] We have to let go of the rigid structures the government have put in place and allow teachers to make decisions as professionals who know the children best.'

As teachers recognise unmet needs in their own communities and note the incapacity of the post-1988 model of education to meet them, so they articulate more strongly principles of curriculum and pedagogy which are at odds with dominant perspectives. The impact of Black Lives Matter was in many schools to intensify this engagement – to encourage teachers to rethink curricula in the light of experiences that had no place in the framework established by governments of the right in the previous decade. Googling, for instance, 'primary schools' + 'Black Lives Matter' gives an indication of the energies ignited by the protests of last summer: hundreds of schools have revised their curriculum in response to them.

The school-based presence of thinking that finds a prominent place for social and cultural dimensions of education can be traced more widely than in the response to BLM. The *Celebrating Education* network recently surveyed members of the National

Education Union about their views on the curriculum. More than 3000 replied, in ways which are of particular interest because of what they suggest of a consistent educational mentality, in which processes of learning and the qualities of learners are as important as curriculum content, and in which the purposes of education are defined in terms of personal development and democratic participation as much as preparation for a working life. Thus, in the teachers' responses, questions of knowledge, culture, and history, of 'critical thinking', 'creativity' and 'empathy' are brought into play in ways significantly different from those of the dominant discourse and distant too from the language of the modernisers. Because the reconstruction, in contemporary terms, of the positions of 'public educators' is so important to establishing a radical presence in curriculum debates, it is worth elaborating the responses to *Celebrating Education,* even at the risk of flattening out a diversity of ideas.

In speaking of culture, they echo Williams' famous claim that *'culture is ordinary'* – a property of social life and an everyday process of meaning-making to which schools should be attuned. Closely connected to 'culture' is 'history' – less a discrete subject than a pervasive form of orientation, a perspective on the present that should be adequate to the tasks of making a 'connection between the history of the past and current affairs' and understanding the shaping influence of colonialism on Britain's past and present. In respect of 'knowledge', the central claims of Conservative curriculum theory are called into question. What counts as knowledge, respondents suggest, is not self-evident, is always open to challenge and redefinition, and arises from reflection on experience as well as from encounters with formalised bodies of thought. The conversion of the flow of human thought, enquiry and argument into knowledge packages has done little for learning except to develop a facility for memorisation. In contrast, responses tended to prioritise another set of dispositions, most comprehensively summed up as:

'the skills of questioning, enquiry, investigation, theorising, testing ideas, creativity, problem solving, negotiating, perseverance, debating, persuasion, initiative, team-working, record-keeping, communication, researching, evaluating, refining ideas, critical thinking'.

For these skills to thrive, the affective environment of schools must change, so that they become places of 'empathy, compassion, resilience through self-awareness' and experiment. The domination of the curriculum by exam-focused demands for accurate memorisation and factual recall should be counteracted by different approaches to pedagogy, for which 'creativity' is often given as a shorthand term. Many respondents were concerned to stress that they were not presenting 'creativity' as an alternative to established bodies of knowledge, more as a means of engaging learners and opening new areas of learning.

IV

Though they overlap at points with the discourse of modernisation, the positions outlined above are distinct in their social aspirations as well as their conception of a

pedagogy and a curriculum which works with the grain of learner experience. Perhaps most significantly, they are connected to a model of change which places an emphasis on activity in the here and now of schools and classrooms – not at the expense of reform at a political level, but as an essential complement to it. In the period of the syndemic, the terms of educational argument and practice have shifted: the dominant model of curriculum and assessment is under some pressure, even from Conservatives, while work in schools has moved in new directions. The obstacles to further change are of course formidable. It is enough to read the *parliamentary intervention* of the Minister for Equalities, Kemi Badenoch – voted their *speech of the year* by readers of the website 'Conservative Home' – to get a sense of the continuing ferocity of the right's response to educational radicalism and its insistence that whatever space for initiative has been reclaimed at school level must be closed down as quickly as possible: the injunctions to 'catch-up', to 'keep your head down and focus on tests and exams' are versions of the same demand. Nevertheless, the insufficiency of what is offered by government – as a means of post-Covid recovery, as a response to deepening austerity – is clear to large numbers of those who work in education. The period ahead is going to be exceptionally difficult for many schools – but it is also likely to be a period of reflection, argument, and change.

COVID has exposed the fragilities of running an education system in this way. Yet none of this meets the acute needs that teachers have identified in their own local communities, or the strategies for recovery they favour (Moss et al, 2020). This in turn is producing a political crisis in education in England which has yet to fully play out. This paper assesses the possibilities of re-integrating learning and wellbeing into the responsibility's schools hold and strengthening deliberative discussion between stakeholders over how else education can run.

Ken Jones

"Some of the boys make comments on a lot of the girls in our years bodies and the girls just have to ignore it because no one thinks it's a big deal. The boys also slap the girls butts and touch their breasts without any consent." – *Female student* "I was in a French lesson in year 8 and a boy sitting next to me kept groping my bum and tried moving his hand to my front." – *Female student* "Boys often lift skirts up and whistle and treat girls in a sexual manner and nothing gets done about it." – *Female student* "Some of the boys in my primary would air hump behind girls when they weren't looking" – *Male student* "A boy touched my bum and try to touch my boob. I felt uncomfortable and I didn't tell him because I was scared but I tried to ignore him." – *Female student* "Some of the boys in my primary would air hump behind girls when they weren't looking" – *Male student* "A female pupil disclosed a class mate had 'groped' her at lunch time. She was disciplined when she retaliated but did not want to tell a male colleague about the incident." – *Secondary school teacher* "Boys touch girls inappropriately in corridors and at lunch/break time…they seem to find this normal" – *Secondary school teacher* "In class boys talk about girls bodies and what they would do to them…they make advises at the teachers and at girls, ask girls in class if a particular photo is them or the size of what their chest looks like. Girls have cried in class several times due to abuse of intimate photos." – *Secondary school teacher* "Female teachers have been sexually assaulted by male pupils in corridors and classrooms. This often happens when there's a crowd or disruption so that they are more likely to get away without getting caught or identified. Male pupils regularly make inappropriate remarks and gestures to female staff and pupils." – *Secondary school teacher* "I have been whistled at whilst trying to teach, grabbed at and a boy has rubbed his erect crotch against my back to intimidate me. The boy was removed from my lesson once and then I was asked to accept him back in." – *Female secondary school teacher* "You often hear boys being told to 'man up' or 'not be such a girl' because people think being called a girl is an insult." – *Female student* "The term 'like a girl' is often used to describe boys and girls when they have weakness/act in a weak manner…I feel its ok for boys and girls but the term shouldn't be used as its hurtful on all girls who aren't weak or rubbish." – *Female student* "Being called a slag just because I mostly had friends who are boys or acted in a boyish manner were female in school. Told to 'act like a girl' because I didn't used to wear make up in early years of secondary school." – *Female student* "In school a teacher told me to man up when someone was bullying me" – *Male student* "I have seen this occurring in school when a teacher has told somebody else to 'man up', this is easily sexist as girls (females) can also become braver than boys (males). Boys have also told girls that they are not allowed to play sports such as football because it's a 'boys sport'." – *Male student* "Often crosses over with homophobia: boys being called 'gay' if they like things seen as girly or show emotion." – *Secondary school teacher* "Teaching a subject with classes dominated in number by boys, I am often trying to stop conversations about girls that are degrading, sexualised and offensive." – *Secondary school teacher* "I have [heard] a male member of staff saying to another member of staff 'Don't be such a girl' in a derogative manner, which is particularly strange because we work in a girls' school." – *Secondary school teacher* "In a staff briefing, staff as a whole were told to take 'Man Up Pills' in regards to high levels of staff sickness and staff feeling tired." – *Secondary school teacher* "Frequent serious violently misogynistic language used by a number of boys about and towards female staff and pupils. Very worrying sense of entitlement to belittle and make sexually unacceptable/threatening comments to females" – *Teacher at Pupil Referral Unit* "I thought I was going to fail maths and science but the teacher told me it's okay because girls tend to be better at expressive lessons." – *Female student* "I wanted to play football but because I'm a 'girl' they said that I'm not as good as the boys and how I'm too 'weak' to play. This happened in primary school." – *Female student* "At my secondary school girls were not allowed to play rugby or other stereotypically male sports like football instead we had to do dance and gymnastics which are sports the boys never had to do." – *Female student* "I love to play football with the boys as I did this on a weekend and played at their standard, but in a PE lesson I had to go with the girls group" – *Female student* "I was told not to bring the table in from the other classroom for me to use and rather the teacher asked a boy to lift it for me. Even though I was perfectly capable of doing it myself." – *Female student* "In things like PE it was always girls play one sport boys play another. I always liked sport until I moved up to secondary school." – *Female student* "I didn't like playing football and preferred spending time with girls so was teased because of that." – *Male student* "Was constantly bullied for being in the choir and enjoying drama. As a result of that I lost my passion for the arts." – *Male student* "A group of boys was bullying a boy in a lower year because of his love for drama. Me and a number of my friends put a stop to it quickly but the school couldn't do anything about it." – *Male student* "We were packing away and a student took something and put it in the cupboard but the teacher said 'leave it, that's a boys job, you go and sort the books'." – *Male student* "Once during an observation, I was told that instead of washing 'babies' in the water tray, I should have put knights to engage the boys. Because of course none of the boys will grow up to be fathers who might bathe their own children. And childcare concerns females only." – *Teacher* "I teach design and technology. Every day I see sexist slurs towards cookery being only for girls and engineering for boys and that's coming from other teachers." – *Secondary school teacher*"

"It's just everywhere"

A study on sexism in schools – and how we tackle it

national education union

UK FEMINISTA

Challenging sexism and sexual harassment in schools and colleges

In 2017, the NEU and UK Feminista launched a study about the experiences and views of students and teachers on sexism and sexual harassment in schools. The report found that sexual harassment, sexist language and stereotypes are widespread

Key findings

● Over a third (37%) of girls at mixed sex schools have been sexually harassed while at school.

● Almost a quarter (24%) of female students at mixed-sex schools have been subjected to unwanted physical touching of a sexual nature while at school.

● 66% of female students and 37% of male students in mixed sex sixth forms have experienced or witnessed the use of sexist language in schools.

● A quarter of all secondary school teachers say they witness gender stereotyping and discrimination in their school on a daily basis.

Since the publication of this report we know that the situation in schools and colleges has not changed and in some cases has deteriorated.

The NEU recommends that schools should adopt a 'whole school approach' to tackling sexism.

This involves building an institutional framework, staff capacity and empowering students.

What can you do to get started:

1 Listen to girls and women. Often behaviours are under the radar and students and staff are not reporting them. You should survey staff and students to identify what the problems and experiences are and what needs to change. Don't be afraid to ask about these experiences- sexual harassment is happening in every school – primary and secondary. You can use and adapt some of the questions used by the NEU in the 'It's Just Everywhere' report. UK Feminista has some templates for students and staff.

2 Create momentum for reflection and change. Establish a working group with members of STL, colleagues and union reps to drive forward institutional change. One person cannot do this on their own- know who your allies are!

3 Use your national and local curriculum. Think about the role of the curriculum and audit the representation of girls and women. Many schools are auditing their curriculum at the moment. Evaluating what is already happening is key; and learning more about what are the barriers to encouraging girls and boys to speak up about sexual harassment and stereotypes about gender, race and LGBT+ people. How can preventative work on attitudes be embedded in the curriculum? What local history projects can you plan about women who have challenged sexism and fought for women's rights in your local area?

4 Raise awareness of what sexism and sexual harassment is and why it is harmful. Assemblies, tutor time and staff CPD and Inset will need to be used to start a conversation amongst the whole school community and feed into curriculum teaching and learning. Often staff are not at all confident about what level of behaviour and stereotyping needs to be challenged, and how is the best way to do it. Talk, share, plan. Reflection and collaboration is key.

5 Use student activism and voice. Sexism affects students' daily lives: they know what the issues are and have ideas of what would make a difference. Young people very often want to take action themselves through particular projects, research or campaigns. What girl clubs or sports activities might be needed? Do you have a dedicated LGBT+ student space? AGENDA provides excellent and practical examples of the power of using student voice to promote social justice.

Resources to support this work:
Stereotypes stop you doing stuff is a bank of resources produced by the union.

They provide an overview of how different schools have looked at the impact of gender stereotypes on young people and considered how they could begin to unsettle some of the established assumptions about what girls and boys might like or do.

Changes to Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSE) are vital to support the social and emotional development of children and young people.

AGENDA is an online school resource that can be used to support children and young people to understand and make positive relationship choices.

Government also has a vital role to play in supporting schools to make change. We need to campaign for:

● A national education strategy to tackle sexism and sexual harassment. Education policy must support a wider vision of education as we recover from Covid-19. Schools must be empowered to develop the social and emotional aspects of learning and use the curriculum to challenge sexism and sexual harassment.

● Greater support for schools to meet statutory Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) requirements. Teachers must have access to training to embed a gender equity approach to RSHE.

● Properly resourced schools, local authorities and specialist services. There needs to be strong systems of pastoral and specialist support within and around the school to ensure that cases of sexual harassment and sexual abuse are managed effectively and with positive outcomes for children and young people.

Louise Regan

The Diverse Curriculum Charter

The charter was developed out of conversations with local schools, following the eruption of Black Lives Matter protests last year. Afzal hopes the Charter will allow schools in Manchester Gorton to develop their anti-racist teaching and ensure all local children benefit from a truly diverse education.

The Diverse Curriculum Charter

Skills Without Jobs?
The Further Education White Paper and beyond.

For the last decade and more the policy consensus has been on 'rebuilding a vocational route to employment'. Tory politicians in particular have insisted that, rather than more graduates, there should be greater emphasis on 'intermediate' technical and vocational qualifications. Remember Lord (Kenneth) Baker's crusade to promote the disastrous University Technical Colleges (UTCs) for the 14-19 age group. Then the Sainsbury Review of post-16 qualifications which led to new T (Technical) levels. More recently still, the Augar Report on post-18 provision argued that more sub-degree level vocational courses were needed in Higher Education. And so it is with the latest, long awaited, but underwhelming White Paper on Further Education, Skills for Jobs.

The WP sets out plans for greater employer involvement in colleges to 'put them in the driving seat' of an expansion of Higher-Level Technical qualifications and Apprenticeships. A £2.5 billion skills fund is promised, with more resources for post-16 learning – though not for teachers. This money, if it materialises, received a cautious welcome from principals of the surviving 240 English colleges but it will not be enough to reverse ten years of cuts. For many FE teachers, the WP is a further stage in the 'businessisation' of learning which began with the 'incorporation' of colleges nearly 30 years ago. Now the government is handing FE colleges over to employers, but it retains central control over the sector, the White Paper proposing 'new powers for the Secretary of State for Education, so the government can intervene quickly and decisively in cases where there are persistent problems that cannot otherwise be addressed, either with colleges not delivering effectively or where local providers are unable to deliver the skills priorities for that area.' (p.12) In addition, 'we will consider introducing new statutory powers for the Secretary of State to take a more active role in regulating the provision of initial teacher education [for schools and early years, as well FE and Skills] if the improvement we need to see is not achieved.' (p.62)

For years, schools and colleges have been blamed for young people not being 'work ready'. However, in recent surveys employers report they are as likely to have staff who are 'over-qualified' for the work they do. There may be skills shortages in some areas – for example in construction or engineering, but data shows only a minority of vacancies due to a shortage of suitably qualified applicants. A major reason given by employers for not employing young people is that they lack 'experience' – so young job seekers face a familiar catch-22: without experience they can't find a job but without a job they can't get experience.

There are also wider questions about the jobs that are available. All serious analysis of changes in the occupational structure at the start of the 21st century recognises an increasing polarisation of work – a recomposition of the class structure. Professional and managerial 'lovely jobs' are growing, though nowhere near as much as Tony Blair and Gordon Brown predicted when they promoted 'education, education, education' for social mobility into them. At the bottom, alongside traditional 'lousy jobs', there have been big increases in low-paid, low-skilled work in the retail, leisure, and hospitality sectors. Most of this is 'precarious' – often part-time, insecure or temporary,

highly labour intensive with low rates of productivity and has been badly hit by Covid closures. A third of the workforce in these sectors is under-25, even if many of these continue to be 'students'.

Data also shows a collapse of 'middle-work' — declines in basic clerical and administrative jobs as a consequence of the digitisation of the office. But there has also been a fall in the number of people working in skilled manual trades, a result of automated production, but also a general slowdown and over-capacity in manufacturing, as consumer trends change and production is outsourced to lower-wage economies. According to the OECD's *Employment Outlook for 2020*, in the UK demand for middle-skill jobs has been contracting twice as fast for low-skill occupations, and 40% more than for high-skill occupations. So, rather than the post-war occupational pyramid being replaced by Blair and Brown's socially mobile 'knowledge society', it is increasingly 'hour-glass' shaped – though if data on income inequality is used and the titles of many jobs are disregarded, it is fast becoming 'pear-shaped'!

The WP harks back to the 'good old days' when thousands of mostly young men made the transition from school to manual employment through 'time-served' apprenticeships with day-release to college for a day a week. It ignores the fact that until recently, the majority of 'reinvented' apprenticeships have been at GCSE standard -- a level that many young people have already reached – or employers use the money to train existing employees. The WP largely focusses on Higher-Level apprenticeships, though these represent just over one in ten of all apprenticeship starts and are almost non-existent for school or college leavers -- there are examples of employers using funding to put their management trainees on MBAs. It is also not always understood that it is employers, not colleges, that initiate apprenticeships and it also needs to be remembered that private providers continue to deliver over half of apprenticeship training. The WP considers this should continue and, indeed, celebrates apprenticeships as 'extremely successful' (p.14).

Why then create new T-levels, the first three of which are currently being rolled out – albeit online – in a few further education colleges, as a classroom-based 'middle' route tying students to vocational areas that may soon become defunct? Needless to say, there are no T- levels for much needed new green jobs. It is disappointing too that the last two Labour election manifestos fell in behind the T's, promising more resources for their delivery. Practitioners doubt whether these are a sensible creation or can ever be successful. They point to the existence of tried and tested certificates like BTECs, that can be delivered in school sixth forms, which many 16-18 olds continue to attend and where they are popular with teachers and – especially if combined with academic qualifications – serve as routes to university as much as the workplace. The same can be said about the new Higher Level Technical qualifications; being introduced from 2022. It is not clear whether these will be an extension of T-levels --the WP refers to a 'progression' (p.36) -- who will award them, or how they will differ from many of the vocationally orientated degrees already on offer in HE, or whether universities – as desperate for students as colleges – will also try to offer them, as Augar recommends.

That the WP contains no analysis of current changes in work and occupation -- apart

from some contradictory footnotes, might appear rather strange. It is not, if you accept that the real aim is political — to reduce the numbers going to university through promoting vocational and technical routes as 'alternatives'. But many young people know very well which sorts of qualifications will get them further up the labour queue and that degrees are increasingly necessary to get any sort of secure employment, which is why so many of these alternatives have already been shunned. As a result, despite the fees, those young people that can, continue to flood to university. Yet the Tories want to return universities to 'what they used to be' – elitist institutions, organised through the Russell Group with an emphasis on high status, theoretical knowledge for the few and accessed through 'established' A-level subjects.

Universities further down the pecking order are now told that financial support will only be available if their courses provide 'value for money' and they become more like the former-polytechnics, linked to specific types of employment – as many already are! But there's also another reason: even though Augar recommended fee reductions from £9,250 to £7,500 a year, fees may instead be differentiated by subject and institution to match cost of degrees against estimated lifetime earnings to reduce the total loan book, forecast to be £560 billion by mid-century. With some estimates showing up to half of student loans will never be repaid, there are huge implications for governments still attached to neo-liberal ideas about balanced budgets and reducing public debt, as they grapple with the implications of post-covid economics.

Improved relationships between educational institutions and employers would be welcome if they genuinely enhanced young people's labour market prospects, but employer representatives have always sat on committees overseeing vocational qualifications, just as they have for new apprenticeship standards. Now, with more than enough graduates from which to recruit, many employers have lost interest in and lack knowledge about post-16 vocational qualifications while looking instead to recruit people with high status academic awards, particularly from more prestigious universities. By contrast, vocational learning and 'non-academic' students strongly correlate with working-class young people remaining in schools and colleges because of the absence of jobs.

Campaigning on the economy

The changes in the occupational structure and the inequalities that have resulted, will only be reversed by proper job creation and a job guarantee scheme for young people, to replace Rishi Sunak's limited *Kick Start* programme. Changes to education and in particular increased 'skill creation' can make an important contribution to this, but it is increased investment in new green jobs that are needed to replace furloughed 'zombie jobs'. Clearly the WP was drafted before the effects of the pandemic on employment became apparent.

Without these new jobs, teachers and lecturers will continue to be blamed for education failing to 'deliver'. In other countries (Germany is cited in the WP), vocational and technical education links into high quality apprenticeships that are also part of a wider 'social partnership' involving employers, trade unions and local state bodies.

Despite globalisation, neo-liberalism and increased numbers of young Germans signing up for higher education, apprenticeships still survive as a major route into employment providing a 'licence to practice' in many occupations. The UK's free market approach to qualifications and labour market entry is a million miles from this.

Campaigning on education and the curriculum

While recognising the need for wider economic changes, we should still campaign for an alternative post-16 Tertiary Education entitlement. First of all, we should reject the 'over-education' thesis – you may be 'over-qualified' due to a lack of jobs, but you can never learn too much! So we should advocate lifelong entitlement to free college and university participation, as part of the Tertiary level of a National Education Service, for those over 18 in or out of employment. But this should not be because young people feel there is no other option. The WP promises 'access to flexible student finance' (but from 2025) implying it will be an extension of the current student fee and loan scheme.

FE colleges should be about more than improving employment opportunities, even if many students attend them for that reason. Rather than becoming 'Business Centres', colleges should be local public resources, including for creative and recreative activities. Different types of learning should be integrated through an 'overarching' certificate or, better still, there should be a 'common core', avoiding the separation of 'vocational' from 'academic' tracks for post-16 level 3 learning. Where specific vocational courses exist at level 4 for those over 18, then – like academic ones – they should include some general education (as is the case in Germany) with opportunities to study social and political issues – for example, the balance between work and leisure, the role of trade unions, the benefits and dangers from increased workplace automation.

Rather than being answerable to local business consortiums and skills committees, with funding determined by employment outcomes, colleges – like other local services – should be democratically accountable to students and the local community. It might be too late, or even inappropriate, to bring colleges back into LEA control but they should work in cooperation not in competition with school sixth forms (most of which are no longer under LEA control) to ensure broad based, not duplicate, tertiary provision. Likewise, there should be supportive rather than competitive relations with nearby HE institutions.

Martin Allen and Patrick Ainley

Black Lives Matter: What is BLM about?

Black Lives Matter to me is number one accepting there have been many injustices against the black community based purely on the colour of their skin.

This can be from being bullied at work or school, sacked from a job, not getting a job, missing out on that promotion, followed around a shop, stopped in an airport, experiencing monkey chants at a football game, only allowed to play certain roles on television as a black actor, abused online or in the street or more fatally killed as we saw with the murder of George Floyd.

Before George Floyd's murder there had been many more fatal killings including those of Eric Garner and Trayvon Martin and here in the UK with Stephen Lawrence and Anthony Walker.

I think an important point to make is that the statement Black Lives Matter was birthed from the killing of Trayvon Martyn an unarmed 17-year-old black man murdered in the US in 2012. His murderer was acquitted, and the Black Lives Matter statement was created.

Once an individual accepts that these injustices are very much the lived experience of every single black person in society every single day then it is time for them to help end the suffering of black people within society, and within systems such as education, the arts, social care, the police force, criminal justice, sport, and office culture to mention but a few.

We need to be doing more than Black History Month (BHM) and diversity days. We need to address the real issues: decolonisation of the curriculum; tackling racism and integration of anti -racist and multi-cultural initiatives across the curriculum.

My experience is that while BHM has a role to play it is all too often nothing more than lip service.

As for diversity days, unless they are part of a much wider approach to anti-racism, they often achieve little and end up providing racists with the language to hide behind without changing their behaviour. We need something far more robust.

Decolonising the curriculum means a major reconsideration of not only who is being taught, but also what is being taught and how it is being taught. This will require a positive anti-racist approach to teaching and learning. Challenging racist language, providing a wider definition of 'English' literature and a greater awareness of the social contexts of histories are all part of decolonisation of the curriculum.

How it affected me

The death of George Floyd affected me in a way I never had imagined, the two emotions I have been feeling since the day I saw that video and that I'm still feeling right now eight months later is emptiness, sadness, anger, hurt and hope.

Before this my conversations about racism which happened nearly every week were

with a select group of people. Then suddenly more people wanted to join the conversation or even worse stay silent. Many of the conversations I had were a train wreck which led to friendships ending and having to create boundaries for who I now speak to about the Black Lives Matter movement and racism, so it does not increase my feelings of anger, hurt, and lose my dream of their being hope.

I could not believe I was friends with people who in a nutshell were racist, ill informed, not informed at all, or continued to stay silent. To add insult to injury some even posted a black square on Instagram and have not continued with that pledge of action or to continue learning and to help make the important changes.

Although there were many painful conversations and horrendous comments online from Twitter and Facebook trolls there were some moments and conversations that came like a breath of fresh air.

Some people just got it and speaking to them would infuse me with a small boost of positivity and confirmation that not everyone is racist, and some people do really have my back.

One of those friends who gave me that boost back in April called me and simply asked what I can do to help, and I went through several things as I did with everyone who asked. She simply listened without minimising my experience, without challenge or gas lighting, like I had experienced with other friends.

The conversation left me feeling hopeful and grateful for the friendship. Then only last week she called me to tell me she had challenged the organisation she works for to stop using the word BAME and wanted me to listen to the email she had written to them explaining why this word should be banned and asked for my input.

The email did not need much of my input as she had explained it in such a well-informed articulate way and really did echo the voice of the black community. After the phone call I just felt relieved that some individuals had practiced what they had preached, she simply asked what she can do to help and did it, it is that simple.

It is important to educate/re-educate ourselves around terminology and to stand up to what offends or oppresses us. The term BAME was not chosen by us but given to us and used over years to describe us. It is important to reflect and to speak up against its continued use for convenience. Take a look at the links and explore the issues for yourself:

https://carbonliteracy.com/collectively-stopping-using-bame/

https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jul/25/the-term-bame-isnt-fit-for-use-we-need-a-new-political-language

The devastation of George Floyd's death and the affect it has had on my life, emotions and friendships has been life changing. However, out of this painful time I have gained so much clarity.

I have clarity on how much work needs to be done, how I can continue to use my voice to help individuals within the black community, and what people I allow in my circle of friends.

Most importantly I have learnt that regardless of the backlash and the negativity surrounding the Black Lives Matter movement we can still fight for change and not be silenced.

Within our workspaces and homes, we have been having our own discussions about racial inequalities. We focused on the experiences of our grandchildren/adult children and ourselves as parents/grandparents' perspectives on Black Lives Matter.

We wanted to know what conversations around race and inequality might look like within other households, and to ensure that both children/young people, parents, grandparents, relatives, and foster carers felt safe to approach the topic.

We hope that a positive outcome of our discussions will be an increase in our collective ability to better recognise and understand the experiences of our staff, family members and carers. Through understanding lived experiences of racism, we hope we can begin to explore practical ways to provide better support in our everyday practice.

As an organisation committed to promoting equality, tackling all forms of discrimination, and fostering good relationships between diverse groups of people, we acknowledge our responsibility to work hard towards ensuring people/communities experiencing racial inequalities feel safe and hopeful in a stable environment where they are not treated any less favourably because of the colour of their skin.

We realise and understand how emotive and sometimes difficult this conversation is for many of us. This is an ongoing conversation and one which we are encouraging staff and families to have to ensure we all work together to create a safe, hopeful, and stable environment for the children/young people in our family bubble.

Black Lives Matter: Black children in the UK care system

Statistics taken from the Department for Education (DfE) suggest that black and racially diverse children are hugely over-represented in the care system, making up just over 16 per cent of all Looked-after Children and Young People (LACAYP) even though people of African/Caribbean descent make up three per cent of the population as a whole.

Often, children enter the care system as a result of family breakdown, abuse, neglect, alcoholism, domestic violence, or refugee status, yet instead of the care system being a safe haven for these children/teens, their lives are turned upside down.

Due to the difficulties of accessing culturally sensitive and inclusive services, Black/racially diverse families often experience the escalation of minor problems which cause family breakdown.

Single parenthood and an unstable home environment are likely to bring Black/racially diverse families into contact with children's services more often than families from other groups.

Studies have shown that when they do enter the care system, they often have to contend with racial and cultural stereotypes which in turn feed into institutional racism.

According to the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE):

"Foster children from ethnic minority groups have particular emotional and behavioural needs in addition to those of other children".

However, research suggests the social care system is hugely failing to meet those needs.

Dr Sinclair Coward, from Buckinghamshire New University, who conducted the research by interviewing black and mixed heritage looked after children/young people as well as black social workers, identified a range of challenges.

According to his research, three issues need immediate attention: the first is the lack of genuinely warm relationships that BAME children experience with foster carers and social workers, which negatively impacts on their emotional well-being.

The second is the 'horrible' school experiences they have, especially in their relationships with teachers who are described as being 'insensitive', 'prejudicial' and 'judgmental'.

Finally, there is a lack of attention paid to the cultural and ethnic background of these children/young people by the social work professionals whose job it is to care for the 'whole' child, and not just their physical needs.

These issues have come about as a result of the system's inability to focus on the particular needs of different groups under its care and protection.

This universalising of experience treats all looked-after children/young people as homogenous whereas some groups have specific needs that need addressing.

Why is it that some foster carers – irrespective of ethnic background – fail to provide genuine care to black children?

The young people themselves suspect that foster carers are motivated more by the money available for the job than a wish to genuinely care for them.

It also raises the question of how keen are caregivers to form emotional bonds and have young people feel that they belong to their substitute family?

Carers urgently need to find culturally acceptable ways to communicate warmth and affection to black looked-after children/young people.

There are many actions social workers can take in their everyday interactions with looked-after children to make a difference.

Professional policy makers and social workers don't put enough emphasis on the emotional damage about separation and loss. These children/young people leave care and find it difficult to move forward.

Black children need therapeutic input from day one, from the day they go into care. Social workers/their managers and foster carers need to be trained in a way that they are constantly working in a culturally sensitive therapeutic way.

There is a lack of culturally sensitive education and lack of recognition that it is needed which is why this training is not happening.

Black and racially diverse children/young people, if they are lucky, get referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services for therapy, which is another story

altogether as that service is described as being in a state of 'crisis' and is struggling to meet the needs of the large numbers of young people now presenting with mental health issues, let alone meeting the needs of black/racially diverse children/ young people.

Black/racially diverse children/young people should be placed in environments where they can develop an understanding of their own culture and receive support in dealing with racism and discrimination.

They need living/learning spaces where they can make sense of their history and be able to express pride in their heritage.

They need to know about their history, to learn about black/racially diverse achievers and to have positive black/racially diverse role.

They should be allowed to keep ties with their families/communities and to feel secure and comfortable in their skins and in the company of other black/racially diverse children/young people and adults. Sadly, for many young people, the realities of living in care for these children/young people is damaging, stressful and can lead to a lack of self-worth and value.

Having a strong sense of identity helps children/young people to grow into happy and healthy adults.

As a carer, there is much you can do to help the child you are caring for to become more confident and prouder of who they are.

I understand that it is difficult for some children and young people to know about their background, and this can be even more confusing when their carer has a different ethnic background to them.

Think about the positive experiences you already have as a family to help you socialise with black/racially diverse communities. For example, think about the social parts of your life, people you meet, newspapers your read, social spaces you frequent, food you eat and films or music you like.

Think about the similarities you have with a child/young person before you look at the differences. Write a list of things you have in common, for example interests you have, emotional, psychological, physical needs, shared interests, friendship circles, need for family and for praise/recognition/value, needing someone to talk to.

Take time to think about the language you choose to use, for example the word 'immigrant'. Think about your feelings towards the many British people who leave to make a new home in Spain or the USA for example, and how the word 'immigrant' relates to them. (is it used in that way or are you discriminating based on your conscious/unconscious prejudices?)

When you are thinking about the needs of Black/racially diverse children/young people, it is not enough to just provide the right foods, skin care or hair care. You should think about the 'whole' child or young person you are caring for.

Much has been made of the unfairness of teacher assessment and unconscious bias. The case for 'blind' assessment is as follows:

- they are dispassionate and anonymous.

- they are standardised thus fair.

- they allow for results that are easily understood.

- they enable schools and teachers to be held to account by providing a way of measuring school achievement in terms of how many students achieve "good" results.

This final point is the critical one as it is the most significant reason why many politicians are loathed to replace exams. It is also why ending exams as we know it would be such as a radical transformation as it would shift the balance of power in favour of classroom professionals in a way politicians are unwilling to do as it would create a self-confident profession possessing autonomy on an inconvenient scale.

You can do this by looking at their social and emotional needs, including self-awareness, respect, identity and taking part in community activities and cultural events.

What is 'White Privilege'?

One of the many things 'White privilege' means is that there are issues and topics that white carers/parents often don't have to think about, including the realities of racism. We can't control our ethnicity – but being more conscious of how racism does and does not affect the children in our care system, schools and communities helps us to make things fairer for children/young people across the board.

Talking about white privilege means looking at how our own actions maintain and support racist systems and structures – regardless of intent, and that's going to be uncomfortable. Sit with that discomfort, expect hard work – white privilege is reinforced in all aspects of everyday life, and acknowledging, understanding, and unravelling it is a constant process of learning and changing your behaviours.

You will likely make mistakes – and that's okay. But it's important to do this – it's the right thing to do. Systemic racism affects children and young people across the UK – Black Caribbean children are more likely to be disciplined, young carers can struggle to access support, and Black children are disproportionately likely to be arrested.

But it's crucial that we look at the flip side of this – while some people are clearly suffering because of institutional failures, this means that there are others who benefit from these oppressive systems. We are asking – what is white privilege and how can you use your privilege for good?

Racism is very real in the UK education, criminal justice systems, NHS, and more areas of society. It's not always as visible and obvious as physical or verbal abuse – it exists in our institutions, and it affects our children/young people from childhood to adulthood.

White privilege is the multiple social advantages, benefits and courtesies that come with being a member of the dominant race.

This doesn't mean that, as a white person, you haven't worked hard for what you have, or that you haven't suffered. In reality, society was designed by, and to benefit,

the small subsection of people already in power. Because of the intersectional nature of society, this means that it's incredibly likely you have experienced some form of oppression.

■ While white British women are paid on average £11.21 per hour, Pakistani women make £10.10.

■ Black/racially diverse young carers and their families identified language barriers as one of the key reasons they're unable to access support.

■ 2% of BAME LGBT employees lost a job because of being LGBT, when compared to 4% of white LGBT staff.

■ In the justice system, 94% of police officers are white, and there are 2,564 white court judges but only 30 are Black.

■ In education, 92% of teachers are white.

■ Only 1% of children's books feature leading characters from Black/racially diverse backgrounds.

■ White staff are paid on average 23.1% more than Black workers with the same qualifications.

■ It's likely that your manager, director, and senior officials are white.

■ If you work in a FTSE 350 company, it's likely that you won't have any ethnic minority representation on your board at all.

■ You feel safer at home and in your local area – unlike 37.4% of Black people and 44.8% of Asian people, and when you are on public transport, you probably won't experience a hate crime because of your skin colour – but you might witness one against a person who is racially diverse, because hate crimes on railway networks increased by 37% in England after Brexit.

■ ou help your children get ready for school, where they are likely to be taught by white teachers, and see plenty of examples of people like them achieving great things in history and literature. Over the years, they are more likely to avoid being excluded, achieve better results at GCSE and A-Levels and go to a Russell Group University than their Black or Asian peers.

■ If you have committed a crime, you're more likely to be arrested by a white police officer, reviewed by a white judge, and you're more likely to get off – because the rates of prosecution and sentencing for Black people were three times higher than for white people.

■ Your ethnic background also plays a role in health and life expectancy; Black African women not only have a mortality rate four times higher than White women in the UK, they are also seven times more likely to be detained under mental health legislation in hospitals in England and Wales.

■ The rates of infant mortality are also up to twice as high among Pakistani, Black Caribbean and Black African babies.

■ You can generally assume that when you apply for a job, you will be treated fairly, and

your name won't mean that you won't even be considered for the role – or if you get into a job, you won't have to work much harder to get recognition.

■ You are more likely to get promoted, and less likely to face disciplinary action. When you interact with institutions like the police, the private sector, or the Government, you are more likely to be treated with respect too.

These are just a few of the experiences that people/communities experiencing racial inequalities have to deal with regularly – you may have even failed to notice – until now – that you don't' have to deal with the same barriers.

It is important to be aware that being born with a certain skin tone affords people certain advantage in life that people of another skin colour are not afforded. By creating greater awareness and understanding we help to build a fairer and more equitable society for future generations.

If you are a parent/carer/grandparent or guardian:

Do:

● Be open to start the conversation with others who are interested and willing to learn, even if they don't understand.

● Share fact-checked resources, examples, information and statistics with others.

● Look after your mental health and take breaks where needed.

● Keep cool – stick to the facts and show some patience.

● Pause the conversation with someone refusing to listen – suggest they continue their research.

Don't:

● Make assumptions – just because someone is white, it doesn't mean they haven't faced challenges.

● Entertain heated arguments.

● Tolerate racial slurs or abuse.

It is important to do your homework, and not to expect people/communities experiencing racial inequalities to educate you on this – asking them to explain how institutions disadvantage them and relive, often traumatic, experiences can be painful and time-consuming.

Concrete steps

Knowing what it is, is only the first step – now it's time to think about what you can do to lessen or end it.

● Continue to educate yourself – unlearning takes time and dedication

● Listen to and amplify Black voices and experiences

● Teach your white friends, family, and colleagues about their privilege

● Campaign for change – sign petitions and open letters

● Confront racial injustices, even when it's uncomfortable

● Let your cash do the talking – take part in Black Pound Day and support organisations doing the work

Our hope for a better future for all children is the source of our inspiration. But we can't achieve this ambition if Black/racially diverse children/young people, continue to be held back by systemic racism.

After a racist incident at her son's predominantly white school, a friend of mine was forced to think long and hard about the trade-offs many black parents and parents of mixed-race children have to make when it comes to their educational options.

It is a "head versus heart" dilemma. That is the frightening realisation that while a certain school may be a better option academically, if it lacks racial diversity there is almost always a price that black children will pay in terms of their sense of self and identity.

As a parent, your head tells you putting them in a high-ranking public school or private school is a smart decision. But your heart aches at the thought of what your child may have to endure in these environments.

Even when there are no major racist incidents, your child faces an assault of daily challenges: not having teachers who look like them, the isolation of being an "only," which often comes with social exclusion, the burden of being the representative minority who has to explain or represent all black people all the time.

In these environments black children can never come to school with the freedom to just learn. They are forced to carry so much more with them every day along with their backpacks. That should be heart-breaking to all of us.

Other concerns for black parents include how black people are represented in the curriculum, overrepresentation of black children in special education and how the parents themselves are treated by school staff.

Too many black parents say they're ignored, talked over, talked down to, and will speak of the radio silence they experience with school administrators except when it comes to the school staff wanting to discuss 'behaviours'.

School governors and teachers are overwhelmingly white and lack the racial analysis or awareness, which means that black parents have to accept this trade-off.

Some parents do their best to mitigate the risk by seeking out sports programmes, after-school programmes and Saturday schools that are more diverse and more culturally affirming.

When selecting a school for their children parents need to be wary of schools that say, "We don't see colour" and schools that exclude parents from the classroom and from decision making processes.

Parents need to lead with the mantra:

"Nothing about us without us."

Alyson Malach

If it's not Green, we're all dead

This chapter is not simply one in a list. The issue it covers determines whether any of the other chapters have any future or not.

There was a joke in the Austrian Empire, as it waltzed its way towards 1914, that *"the condition of the Empire is fatal, but not serious"*. So, it is with us in the strange disconnect between the accelerating breakdown of the climactic conditions for human civilisation, and any appropriate sense of urgency and priority in dealing with it on the part of the powers that be; and therefore, how little it appears in the school curriculum. The things that crowd to the forefront of our attention, or are shoved there by a noisy and manipulative media, distract our awareness that the ice we are standing on is thin and melting fast.

Using a straight analogy with bacteria, David Attenborough has argued that we may have already reached "peak human"[1]. That the increased demands we have put on the planet's resources in the vertiginous acceleration of wealth, power and exploitation that has taken place since industrialisation, and especially the last 70 years, are outrunning them to such an extent that our numbers must plateau and crash in the coming decades. Coved is a symptom, the rapid acceleration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere the underlying condition. The melting ice caps, burning forests and declining fertility of the soil mean that the conditions for our survival are degrading, we are in a sixth mass extinction with crashing vertebrate and insect populations. And we're next. And it's our fault.

Unlike bacteria, however, we are conscious of what's going on. We know what's happening, why it's happening and what we could do about it; and are even doing some of them, though nowhere near enough.

So, why the distractions? Why are we not facing this existential threat by clearing the decks of second order issues and bending all our effort and inventiveness and capacity for co-operation into working on solving it?

There may be a clue in two statistics.

- 92% of historic carbon emissions – those that have got us to the crisis we are in – are the responsibility of the Global North – the wealthy industrialised countries of which the UK is one.
- The richest 1% of the global population produce double the carbon emissions of the poorest 50%.

And these are the countries and people in charge.

Antonio Gramsci argued that any given society and social order reproduces itself through its education system. That reflects the level of skills required for its level of development, and the social attitudes required for it to function; so that the mass of people require

- enough skills to be economically productive and useful,

● a range of attitudes that condition social conformity, or dissent within limits.

The parameters of the curriculum,

● its form and content,

● what is taught and how it is learnt and tested,

● the forms of learning experience that are made orthodoxies and those that become heresies, the range of views that are acceptable to explore within it and the indexing of those that are not,

● are all political decisions designed to reinforce the power structures of that society and whatever passes for its dominant (hegemonic) systems of ideas which, broadly speaking, keep a social order intact and challenges contained?

These ideas have to have *some* connection with reality, but are invariably distorted by the class interest they represent and, in their distortion, limit the possibility that the next generation might be able to imagine other possibilities. But as a society falls into crisis, the disconnect between its dominant ideas and reality becomes greater. One reaction to that is the imperative to generate irrational solutions can become overwhelming for those who think they have the most to lose. The old gods are never worshipped so hard as when they are being seen to fail. In the case of climate breakdown this ranges from outright denial to delusions that just doing the easy stuff is going to be enough, or some terribly bright boffin will come along with a technical fix that will enable us to escape with one mighty bound.

At the same time, the pressure of reality tears cracks in these ideas, letting the light in for those with eyes to see.

Covid is an analogy, the first stage of the pandemic was characterised by operatic levels of denial from people like Trump and Bolsonaro and the political current they animate, spiced up with widespread belief in culturally comforting folk remedies – tea and tumeric in India, bleach and inappropriate drugs in the USA. Climate denial, like Covid denial, is funded by wealthy and powerful interests in completely bad faith. The fossil fuel companies understood the greenhouse gas effect earlier than anyone else. They sat on the information, because their short-term bottom line came first. This is not rational or safe for the rest of us, but its what drives them. The extent to which fossil fuel corporations donate to Parties like the US Republicans or UK Conservatives has a huge impact both on limiting action and what is perceived to be "common sense" in the media, and popular discourse; and therefore, what is allowed to be considered mainstream in schools; and what is consigned to the fringe.

Following the science is however an imperative for the climate crisis as much as it is for the pandemic – and the consequences of a failure to do so are far more far reaching and, likely to be terminal within the lifetime of the children currently in our schools; unless we up our game sharply.

This is not lost on them. Recent research indicates a growing sense of anxiety about the future among young people as the climate crisis overlaps with the shrinking horizons of Late Capitalism. This is an entirely rational response that can either

generate activism or despair, collective mobilisation or nihilism. Generating the passivity of hopelessness – of course – suits those currently benefiting from the status quo far more than the explosion of hope and energy we saw from so many of our students between 2018 and 2020.

That explosion – around slogans like "Teach the Truth" and "I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change, I am changing the things I cannot accept", "System Change, Not Climate Change" – came about because many students were becoming increasingly aware of the disconnect between the intensification of the climate crisis and the almost complete failure of the school's curriculum to deal with it. This generated a surreal sense that they were being prepared for a future that was no longer possible; that the set of extrinsic values for the purpose of education that I once heard in assembly from a well-meaning primary head teacher "We're all going to work hard, get good results in our exams, go to University and get good jobs, so we can all live in big houses and drive big cars" – was dangerously misleading as a prospect, and damaging as an aspiration. This was for the most part among students who might otherwise have expected to have a good future. As one Science teacher commented at the time, "It's all my top sets that are coming out on strike".

Given that the society we have got is going to kill us, our job as educators is not to replicate it, but to anticipate the society we need, and educate for that. This can't be covered by setting up a Climate Science GCSE – which shunts an issue that we all have to deal with into a specialist siding.

The government's legal responsibilities are clear. Article 12 of the Paris Agreement states the following

> *Parties shall cooperate in taking measures, as appropriate, to enhance climate change education, training, public awareness, public participation and public access to information, recognizing the importance of these steps with respect to enhancing actions under this Agreement.*

To put this in plainer terms, it means that governments as a bottom line have to educate their population – all of it, not just students – in

- the scale of the crisis
- what is causing it
- what needs to be done to stop it
- what the consequences are if we don't
- how everyone can participate in doing that
- how people can acquire the skills required to do the jobs that need to be done.

This is an agenda to mobilise society to save itself. Education International, which is the global union federation of teachers' trade unions with 401-member organisations in 172 countries representing over 30 million education personnel from pre-school through university and is the global voice of teachers concurs with this in its April 2021 statement calling for Universal Climate Change Education[2]

*"Education International is calling for climate change education to be ensured for every learner – from early childhood to adult education. Climate change education must be recognised as an integral part of quality education, equipping students with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to take climate action. Governments must fund the implementation of quality climate change education across their country – **ensuring that it is prioritised in curricula and that teachers are provided with the necessary time, resources, training and support.**" (my emphasis)*

Since signing the Paris Agreement however, the UK government has done nothing to fulfil Article 12.

The scale of the task in the UK is shown in the 66% of adults surveyed who had no idea what the term "net zero carbon emissions" actually means. Only 34% had some idea. So, most adults have no grasp of a key issue that will determine whether they have a viable future or not. There's a job to be done there.

Among students, a survey for Teach the Future carried out in Spring 2021 revealed that just 4% of feel that they know a lot about climate change, while 68% want to understand it more. Putting that the other way around 96% of students don't know a lot about climate change and only 32% aren't bothered about that. There's a need and a hunger there that has to be met right across the board.

At the same time, only 30% of teachers feel that they have received adequate training to teach about this issue with any confidence.[3] So, 70% of the teachers currently in our schools do not. The need for retraining and for this issue to become an essential core of initial teacher education jumps out from this. If done right, this could be an exhilarating collective renaissance in educational thinking and practice; which we will all have to help each other to do.

This petition from *Teach the Future*, which grew out of the student strike movement is a bottom line.

"I want the Minister/Secretary of Education to ensure that all students are substantively taught about the climate emergency and ecological crisis. I want this to become key content in all subject areas, not just geography or science. I want teachers to be trained in how to teach about these difficult topics sensitively and to be given the funding and resources to do this.

I want vocational courses to include the green skills necessary to bring the UK to net-zero emissions by 2050 and make us world leaders in sustainable technologies and I want all education buildings to be retrofitted to net-zero emissions by 2030.

Therefore, I want the minister/secretary to implement a Climate Emergency (and Biodiversity) Education Act and include the climate emergency and ecological crisis in teacher training."

It is positively perverse that the current UK government doesn't just say thank you to the students and get on with doing this. The £29 billion cost of the retrofitting for schools up to 2030 is the same as the cost of their roads building programme in the same period, would have been a better use of the £21 billion they have just earmarked

in increased military expenditure and is less than a tenth of what's been spent on the pandemic.

Support for this should be the starting point of Labour's stance the forthcoming curriculum review, due to report by 2024. In the meantime, Jim Knight's Private Member's Bill, currently in the House of Lords calling for sustainability to be built into the National Curriculum should also have solid and vocal support as an initial step in the right direction.

In the meantime, many teachers are working with supportive Local Authorities, colleagues in higher education and environmental NGOs to develop schemes of work and lesson plans that can be squeezed into the current curriculum, pushing for climate themed learning weeks, special assemblies and so on. This is often at local or regional level, like Schools Climate Education South Yorkshire[4]. Organisations like Thoughtbox, Aim Hi and Reboot the Future have produced a good array of learning materials that teachers have found very useful[5]. At the moment numerous organisations are trying to curate the vast range of what's out there into an easily accessible whole, including the education unions. [6]

In this way some of the spadework for a curriculum review is being done, but this is still nibbling at the edges. What we need from the curriculum review must be far more wide ranging, cover all subjects and the entire curriculum from first principles right down to values.

Under pressure from having to chair the COP this year, the UK government has made a minimalist gesture in launching an official COP26 page encouraging schools to "start a conversation with their students about climate". In some schools, of course, that conversation was started by the students themselves three years ago on a far more advanced level than the government's official materials can cope with. While these include some useful resource links, the Model Green Assembly is embarrassingly anodyne, and attempts to shift responsibility for dealing with the crisis onto hopelessly inadequate individual gestures, like walking to school and turning switches and chargers off in a timely manner. If only... This is underpinned by a warning that teachers have a "legal responsibility to maintain political balance" when raising this issue, which is a threat to anyone tempted to point out how skimpy the Emperor's clothes are. Whether they think it would be "unbalanced" to cite the report of the joint Party Commons Climate Committee – which is chaired by a Conservative and as good a definition of "political balance" as any – that current government plans would only reach 20% of their target to reduce emissions by 78% by 2035 and explore why that is...is not clear.

Nevertheless, the official endorsement of climate themed learning weeks around the COP means that even the most cautious schools have no excuse not to take this on and start to rise to the level of the challenge.

After the COP, we will not be beyond COVID, as it continues to evolve, and the climate crisis will intensify. The need to match our education system at all levels to the scale of the challenge that threatens to overwhelm us will be driven home

harder by each turn of the screw and we have to strain every sinew to lever up our response. As Education International put it

> *"As the teaching profession and as a global union federation, we must do our part to avert climate catastrophe. Be it through lobbying our governments, sharing climate change education resources, greening our workplaces or calling out climate denial, our activism is sorely needed. There is no time to lose."* [2]

Paul Atkin

Notes
1   *A Life on Our Planet*
2   Statement | Education International Calls for Universal Climate Change Education (ei-ie.org)
3   *Teach the Future*: Campaign for climate education
4   www.scesy.org.uk
5   ThoughtBox Education, AimHi | Climate Course Teacher Pack
      Reboot the Future
6   COP – Climate Learning Events (ucu.org.uk)

Appendix
On the basis that the climate catastrophe has to be the framework for a review of the entire curriculum, not just Science and Geography, here are some thoughts about the way we think about and teach History.

> *He who controls the past controls the future. He who controls the present controls the past."* George Orwell (1984)

In a civilisation facing an emerging climate catastrophe that its education system is ill equipped to cope with – we face the difficulty of having to imagine a future within a mental framework dictated by the limits of the society that is creating the crisis – and by people in charge who seem content to run on with business as usual until its too late. The way we teach and learn History is currently part of the problem and needs to be part of the solution. Those who control the present want to lock us into a narrative about the past that suits them; and prevent us imagining any future that does not.

The limits of a "national" framework"
History is usually taught within a national framework – and therefore looks at the world in a distorted way. The way that each significant country prints maps that show it at the centre is a similar distortion in Geography. US maps split Eurasia in half to show the Americas as middle Earth, European maps centre on the Greenwich Meridian, Chinese maps centre on the Pacific and East Asian region – where most of the world actually lives to be fair. In these, the Americas are a fringe continent on the right and Europe tucked away and barely noticeable in the top left corner, while Britain is barely visible as a little blur of islands almost beyond Ultima Thule and of no significance whatsoever. Seeing one for the first time comes as a shock when you are used to seeing it smack in the middle.

So it is with the national framework for History. The use of History as "the national narrative" ("Our Island Story") tends to be promoted by the centre right – as "national

epic" by the far right. But, even without this being that explicit, looking at the world through the lens of a particular nation – which means through the views of the people who run it – is as disorienting as mapping the world in your head by absorbing Mercator's projection. When I was in First Year Juniors in 1961, we had a huge world map on the wall – lots of it still coloured in pink – and – being a day dreamy sort of child – I spent a lot of time looking at it – the shapes, the colours, the relative sizes. Many years later, as an adult, I found it almost impossible to accept the reality that Brazil has a larger land area than the United States; because the map in my head was Mercator's and – on his map – it doesn't.

The purpose of nationally framed History is to create a shared mental space, a common imaginary identity built around a self-image of a "people" with certain fundamental characteristics in common (which comer-inners have to integrate into) and a presumption of allegiance to time hallowed institutions and ways of doing things. This is the way "we" do it. The stories that are told may or may not be true. The way they are framed frequently owes more to myth than truth. The *Washington Post* ran a story last year about the way British History is perceived in Britain and the way it is perceived in the rest of the world. In Britain, people thought that the most significant and archetypal experience in British History was World War 2. In the rest of the world, *without exception*, the most significant and archetypal experience in British History was seen as the British Empire. I suspect that the rest of the world – a large part of which was on the receiving end of it – has us bang to rights on that.

Eric Hobsbawm remarked (in *Fractured Times*) that no one knew how to teach History in Vienna in the 1920s. The old text books glorifying the Austro-Hungarian Empire were still in the schools, but the seemingly eternal Habsburg Emperors were no longer holding sway from the Hofburg, and the Empire had shattered, under the crushing pressure of world war, into disparate components run by nationalists with smaller, fiercer stories told in a vernacular closer to home. Some Austrians were soon to find their own version of this, but in the meantime, the history text books were glorifying a ghost.

At the time of America's "unipolar moment" in the early 90's – declared to be the "end of History" by Francis Fukuyama – there was a globalising version of this, with all previous human societies and social orders as preparations for the American way of life; now posed as a norm for the rest of the world to match up to; rather than the extraordinarily hollow, wasteful and precarious existence we know it to be. Rather like the way Hegel – teaching as he was in Berlin – interpreted the whole of human History – and the ultimate working out of the Weltgeist – as leading inexorably and benevolently towards its perfect incarnation in the Prussian state of the 1830s. Both these flatten out a key point about History – that human societies have been very diverse and there is no one model for them. They have changed. The present is unlike the past in many respects and the future need not be like it either.

None of these frameworks are of any use at all in understanding how humanity got to the current crunch and, if what we understand of history is to be anything other than stories we console ourselves with – or use to blame others – as the planet burns, it needs to be.

An environmental framework

We need a framework for history that looks at forms of human society in relation to their environment. All human societies have a definite mode of surviving that is defined by – and transforms – the environment in which they develop and lead to characteristic social relations, political and religious forms which define the character of conflicts and struggles within them.

What follows is a draft and meant to stimulate discussion and development. There is no attempt to look at pedagogy, nor what to teach when; more an attempt to sketch an initial brainstorm of what kind of understanding we need. There are huge gaps reflecting the limits of my own learning. This is not a chronological list. The list of examples at the end of each section is just that – not an attempt to be exhaustive nor to suggest that each of them has to be studied.

References

Guns Germs and Steel Jared Diamond.
What happened in history. V.Gordon Child.

Hunter gatherer (paleolithic) leading to Early Farming (neolithic)

Emergence of human species. 95% human existence has been as hunter gatherers.

Humans as social animals. Speech. Tools. Art. Polytheism. Matriarchy or patriarchy or both?

Currently existing hunter gatherer societies in rain forests.

Impact on environment. Extinction of mega fauna in the Americas and New Zealand after human arrival.

Farming emerging from and generating denser populations. Why did this happen in some places and not others?

Which plants could be grown and stored in sufficient amounts to be viable for farming and where were they?

Which animals can be domesticated and where were they? Diets and disease.

River based early local Empires

(Bronze Age Eurasia – advanced stone age Americas)

Common features. A big river and/or irrigation. Ships for bulk transport. In Eurasia wheeled transport – carts and chariots. Bronze tools and weapons. Storage for surplus food. Armies. Specialisation of trades. Ploughs. Animal power – horse, buffaloes, camels, Llamas (in South America). Writing, keeping accounts, partial literacy. Monarchical theocracy with partially animal based gods. Priesthoods beginning to investigate the stars and develop mathematics. Oral story telling in poetic form. The first written stories and Holy Books. Monumental building. Life bound up with natural cycles and vulnerable to them (the years of the lean cow). The spread of the local empire dependent on the limits of horse power and the extent of controllable space.

The Maya as a study of a society hitting ecological limits? How did the Inca Empire get so big?

Possible examples. *Mesopotamia, Indus Valley, Egypt, Shang Dynasty China, Maya, Inca,*

Large Empires (Iron Age – medieval)

As above but more so. Iron tools and weapons. Water power. Roads. Emergence of more human like gods and development of monotheism in Rome and Arabia.

Monotheism as a cultural/moral/legal framework allowing expanded trade in medieval Christendom and Caliphates. Heresies and schisms.

Slavery and economic implosion (Rome). The impact of (natural) climate changes on agriculture after the "Roman optimum". The impact of drought on nomadic movements.

Vulnerability to disease and climate shifts (effect of volcanic winter in 530's and subsequent plague in Byzantium and elsewhere).

Early Chinese industrialisation – what stopped it taking off?

Rome. China. Caliphates. Khanates.

First Globalisation

Oceanic exploration – Ocean going ships from China and Europe. Why did China stop? Global trade, gunpowder, plantations, slavery and slave trade, racism, pandemic genocide of native Americans.

The "little ice age". Why did it happen?

Industrialization

Surplus capital from above – Steam power. Machines. Mines. Factories. Mass production. Canals to railways. Mass transit. Mass migration. From sail to steam. From flintlocks to rifles. From wood to steel. From villages to cities. Massive rise in population.

Unevenness of development. World Empires, world wars 1740's – 1815. Science turned to production, the production of science. Increased scientific exploration of everything. Mass education. Mass entertainment. Mass politics. Mass struggles. Gas power, electricity, chemicals, oil, motor vehicles.

Rise and fall of Pax Britannica. Sea based global power.

Carve up of Africa – colonial genocides and famines – resistance to and within Empires.

Empires turn on each other – WW1 and WW2. Revolutions and civil wars – Russia, China.

Cycles of growth and collapse. Great depression. Fascism. Holocaust. Dust bowl.

The Anthropocene

When did it start?

Atomic power and nuclear bombs.

The American Century? Rise and decline of the Pax Americana. Air based global power.

Decolonisation and neo colonialism. Cold wars up to 1989. Hot wars since. The collapse of the USSR and the rise of China.

"Green " revolution and land degradation. Patenting nature. Industrialised agriculture and factory farming. 6th mass extinction.

"Just in time" patterns of global trade. Containerisation and the shift away from manufacturing in developed countries.

Space – the final frontier?

Climate change awareness. What is happening? Who is responsible? Who is already paying the price? Contemporary movements for change.

The curriculum and social class: a swansong to teaching

Class and curriculum

Human beings need powerful knowledge to understand and interpret the world. Without it they remain dependent upon those who have it. This is both the heart of the debate for academics and theorists and the battleground for teachers and practitioners. The current pandemic has illustrated this with desperate scramble for information to help other communities and links with the work of Paolo Freire in particular, power imbalance and Marxists in general. Shared and powerful knowledge enables children to grow into active citizens. Adults can understand, cooperate and shape the world together. It is fair and just that all children should have access to this knowledge. Powerful knowledge opens doors: it must be available to all young people. It leads to active citizenship and the promotion of social justice. The curriculum of the future needs to draw together a holistic, inclusive, independent and personalized approach to learning and place assessment in its proper place as the servant of learning[1]. The wider survival skills, that can be seen as working-class street wisdom, seem to be undervalued and undermined by those who decide on what the curriculum is and who it is for. Furthermore, it is difficult to measure skills lie such as teamwork, problem solving, self-reflection, time-management, networking, project management, creative thinking and conflict resolution; skills that many growing up in working class communities have developed to a much higher level than middle-class counterparts, who are much more used to having these things done for them.

Curriculum development has, for me, always been concerned with three interwoven strands: the development of skills and knowledge, and its relationship with general education and enrichment fortified by entitlement as its strong backbone[2]. Coupled with a customised, learner-centred model that is committed to the Every Child Matters agenda and other welfare initiatives, that is genuinely personalized[3] it forms the true heart of all learning and teaching practices. As educationalists concerned with building a more meaningful curriculum we have to articulate this loudly and clearly. As Freire said towards the end of his life: "language is the route to the invention of citizenship."[4] in order for educators to help transform the world and to enable learners and teachers alike become different kinds of human being.

In this attempt at what is essentially a pedagogical history and historical pedagogy of the significance of skills since the early 1980's. The term 'skills' refers to the various incarnations of government sponsored generic skills initiatives that have emerged, including but not exclusive to 'Common skills', 'Core skills'[5], key skills a brief dalliance with 'Essential skills' and, more recently 'Functional skills'[6] as they relate to mostly a narrow vocational curriculum. Yet at times, there have been attempts to develop a broad and more meaningful curriculum, engendered to cross the academic/vocational divide and generate a genuine learning curriculum. These more personal and developmental skills are concerned with specific expertise or performing

an action with competence are sometimes called 'soft skills' (or even working class skills) and include skills that are more difficult to measure such as teamwork, problem solving, self-reflection, time-management, networking, project management, creative thinking and conflict resolution[7].

While skills such as problem-solving, teamwork and communication have a crucial role to play in the notion of either a knowledge-free curriculum or a content free pedagogy is a manifest absurdity and the distinction between education and training or academic and vocational learning remain impediments. As the 'basic skills' only model of skills development remains the dominant model over a fuller, more developmental version of skills that provides opportunities to improve ones' own learning, collaboration with others and problem -solving, the need for a core module becomes all the more pertinent

A personalised approach to curriculum development and pedagogy

As a young teacher influenced by Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*[8], his crusade for humanity and educating, comparable to an act of love, enabled me see dehumanization both as a historical reality and as an individual experience in the lives of many of the learners I worked with and later informed my own teaching practices for my entire teaching career. Barriers to learning in the traditional sense or barriers to our current teaching practices, dominant discourses and neoliberal values we impose upon our education system have all been accentuated by consumerism, competition, globalisation, performance related pay and industrial models of education have all added to this notion[9]. Other factors impacting on the development and then entrenchment of this position have been sociological[10] ; rooted in the sociology of education[11]; sociolinguistic[12]; concerned with learner empowerment[13], political with both a large[14] and a small[15] and[16] 'p', to do with qualification reform[17] and aspirational[18].

Barriers to learning are neither purely educational concerns to be addressed by teachers nor problems to be solved by social workers. In almost all cases they existed and continue to exist at the cusp of education and social care[19] and along with the collapse of the welfare system and absence of a mutually understood moral code[20] have led to big holes in schooling.

In 1995 the Royal Society of Arts published *14-19 Education and Training: implementing a unified system of Learning*[21]. This wasn't the beginning, but it was before Tomlinson and it brought into sharp and clearly defined focus the main issues. In it Richard Pring and others asked questions about a fast changing society facing an unpredictable future requires "a learning society – and a genuine one at that'. How will society solve the problems it is facing? How can industry adapt to the increasingly competitive world market? How can people experience fulfilment a human beings, when increased leisure opens up fresh opportunities? For me it was Freire's antidote to "the learning-teaching disorder in the classroom" placed in a modern capitalist context.

These questions are all the more relevant and have become prevalent given the

contemporary issues surrounding the recent pandemic, a changing society and even generation Z. Still successive governments have failed to address the skills gap.

Some history

The context in which skills-based education is, of course, one in which employers wanted cheap labour, but required a workforce who knew their place, yet had sufficient literacy and numeracy skills to follow instructions, and an increasingly important and complex British industry also needed increasing numbers of skilled workers like mechanics, clerks and accountants[22]. In terms of a meaningful timeline this period starts pretty much equates with the industrial revolution and goes on until the 1960's. A traditional Marxist perspective of the role of education – perhaps a link to Marx's "work objects" workers valued only for their ability to perform a task that is pre-defined and not valued for their individual creativity in *The Communist Manifesto*[23].

The rebirth of community education in the 1960s and 1970s absorbed more a Marxist influence, writings such as those of Gramsci[24], Bourdieu[25] and Freire developed what remains of the Marxist tradition[26] now in post-Gove retreat with the most regressive *Education Politics* since the 1940's and concluding that in a capitalist system that remains deeply unequal and globally exploitative. Marxism still offers a valuable framework of analysis through which educators may be able to engage in a dialogue with emergent social movement; learning to learn and developing skills to survive, cope with the challenges in their lives and perhaps even, prosper. The importance of critical thinking and an awareness of the social, political and economic factors that influence so much of everyday life is rarely given enough value in formal education and not included within 'training' in FE.

Clearly skills, be they termed common, core, key, functional or anything else should relate to either generic learning skills or the specific learning skills relating to a subject and have a major role to play, especially, one might argue, with students from less traditional backgrounds and are essentially learning skills. Similarly, those genuine assessments for learning that have not just been state-sponsored assessment objectives aimed at perpetuating a system that required the many to fail so that the few can succeed in the system have fostered a genuine progressive curriculum; in short, the myth of meritocracy and the dangers of neoliberalism in an educational context expounded by Radice[27]. Curriculum development and delivery and assessment methodology alike need to be matched with both the appropriate skills, and attitudes and the syllabus aims, objectives and specifications, including an identification of skills and attitudes, the aims of a specification and demystify the hidden curriculum in Bowles and Gintis[28] with the emphasis on culture within institution, processes, social interaction.

A teacher can, where these conditions exist, work collaboratively with learners to enhance the student learning experience, impact – while largely discredited since its fashionable boom in the 1990s does have some merit if the emphasis is on reflection on a learner's own practices – on teaching and learning styles and develop the

curriculum in its broadest possible capacity. The diverse nature of FE, the delivery and acquisition of these 'skills' make them difficult to quantify, for example: the former personal, learning and thinking skills(PLTS) embedded within apprenticeship programmes, (knowledge, skills and behaviours) now informs the most recent standard, professional guidelines – embedded within the assessment to meet industry standards. Professions require diverse yet sometimes overlapping skills, however FE is the sector that sweeps up the 16-19 cohort, both "Academic" (under the remit of sixth form colleges) and "Vocational" (Colleges, training providers, employers). Many learners within FE with around 23% in 2017/18 [29] having a SEN, despite being heterogeneous, there are plenty of these particular learners whom will require the acquisition of a completely different set of skills – highly individualised. This may further reinforce your argument about the need for a personalised, individualised and customised approach to curriculum design.

The problematic nature surrounding the assessment of such generic and transferable skills in addition to the general educational aspects of vocational education such as liberal education, general studies, communication skills, social and life skills and more recently functional skills and place empowering individuals, core knowledge and transferable skills, ethics, values and civic engagement at its heart. Perhaps it is because now, these 'core'; 'key'; 'transferable' or 'generic' skills are, for the first time, making an impact on traditional academia as well as vocational further education[30].

Social class and the curriculum now

There have certainly been a number of false starts under the last Labour, Coalition (Lib Dem/Conservative) and Conservative governments and a general failure to develop and bolster a meaningful skills-based curriculum with transferable skills as its spine and entitlement at its heart[31].

Arguably elitist and narrow curricula, the 2013 GCSE reforms implemented by then Education Minister Michael Gove, enters its second decade in terms of the skills agenda and continues to present some fresh challenges. 14-19 curricula have been riddled with re-inventions and re-branding[32] since the advent of YTS in the 1980s and before, but its emphasis on "common", "core", "key" or "essential" skills has played a significant part in the personal, learning and employability potential of many learners during that time enabling them to get a foot on the ladder of employability. There is little provision available for SEND children in formal (mandatory) education, access arrangements, yet we still expect the children to jump through the same hoops, for example, Robinson's[33] mainstream expectations of conformity, institutionalise our children are often those who find it most difficult achieve in the UK's targets and standards driven curriculum. As such the most vulnerable in our education system are often those most reliant on the life-line are often those most reliant on the life-line provided through various skills development programmes, while imperfect are in their most recent incarnation, known as functional skills. Accessing these qualifications is for many the best or only chance of getting a foot on the first rung of the employability

ladder (given that many students undertaking these qualifications hail from areas of higher social and economic deprivation).However, concerns have been identified about the potentially negative impact of content, consultation and engagement with expert groups, along with a review of the available research, indicates that the risk of disproportionate impact on the protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation is low. The problem often lies with the overall perception of vocational education, FS needs to serve a purpose for employers, (relevant) etc. However, schools, parents, student, wider society often see vocational education as the lessor. Also, the raising of the school leaving age – schools attempt to keep hold of their best and brightest.

The DfE claims that where this presents challenges to students with protected characteristics, there are a number of appropriate and available means of mitigation. The practicalities and logistics of delivery of functional skills – qualifications of practitioners, specialist maths and English tutors are not always readily available – FE doesn't belong to colleges alone, such as those with SEN or EAL status. The quality of SEN teaching is central to ensuring pupils with SEN are given the best possible opportunities to achieve results in any of the Functional Skills qualifications considered here. Further means of mitigation are already embedded in legislation or guidance, such as reasonable adjustments. While the curriculum has been getting narrower and more functional with each re-write, innovative teachers have found ways of promoting and developing the wider skills of team -work, problem solving, self-reflection and learning to learn alongside the basic skills of English and maths[34].

A bigger, braver and more rounded curriculum that is truly broad and balanced, is a longstanding aim of progressive educationalists[35], bolstered by a National Education Service (NES)[36] the aim of the next Labour government, if it has the courage to take on the siren voices of the right now embedded in the education establishment and the media, has to be exactly that. This means implementing, in the 14 to 19 phase, a unified developmental curriculum, where the academic and vocational are equally valued. This was a supposed aim of the Conservative Government in 2016, with a commitment of three million apprenticeships by 2020, a view to embolden vocational studies and remove the stigma and is as old as the hills, or at least as old as Plato, who had it that craftsman is not capable of becoming a philosopher At its heart, it should be developing the skills and knowledge in our young people, necessary to engage fully with the modern world in a critical and reflective way. Communication in all its facets, problem-solving, collaboration, critical thinking and reflection must feature. Diverse skills often not acquired during compulsory education, those in FE often have to pick up the pieces of the broken system It must also be flexible and personalised, allowing young people to choose courses which suit their aspirations and interests. Finally, the assessment model should recognise the achievements of all learners, including those with special needs, rather than segregate them through crude pass/fail measures. We have been close to achieving the above on occasion, notably the Tomlinson reforms[37] proposed in 2004 and the short lived curriculum 2000 agenda. Sadly, never fully acted on.

Nevertheless, a progressive 14 to 19 curriculum must remain the mission of radical educators and would be reformers:

● develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions to enable young people to be responsible citizens and independent thinkers. Students should be prepared for employment, competent to make choices and learn throughout their lives.

● prepare 19 year olds to progress to employment or continue in education, with useful social and learning skills and qualifications that are valuable and understood by both employers and education institutions;

● be sufficiently engaging to retain young people at risk of leaving education, employment and training[38].

The Conservative Party on the other hand conducted the Sainsbury Review[39] which they have accepted in full. The Sainsbury Review was flawed from the beginning as its terms of reference only included 'technical education' as opposed to the academic which would continue its role in selecting the elite to run the establishment, untouched Although the review was only ever to tackle technical education it serves to illustrate the start of a new narrow vocationalism in the sector. Further it only considered post 16 study and was therefore prevented, unlike Tomlinson, from recommending courses and programmes pre-16 to provide progression onto more vocational routes post 16. It is now the case that pupils at Key Stage 4 have to meet tough entrance criteria based on success in academic GCSEs to be able to study A level. If they do not meet them they are most often 'guided' into vocational courses like BTECs or into apprenticeships. Vocational courses are often not, therefore, viewed as a positive choice for students but a fall back reluctantly undertaken because they have 'failed' in their academic courses. The government's insistence on ever higher proportions of pupils taking the EBAC combination of subjects at GCSE serves to reinforce the perception that vocational courses are only for those unable to succeed academically.

Skills

The most recent edition to the commoditisation of skills rises from the Sainsbury review and proposed for post 16 study maintain and reinforce the existing academic vocational divide. There are many similarities between Conservatives latest offering of T Levels and the ill-fated 'diplomas' which New Labour, at great expense, failed to make a permanent feature of 14 to 19 education in the 2000s. The subsequent similar employment areas with minor amendments to their titles will become available for study e.g. Business and Administration. Again, as with the diploma, when students opt to take a T level they will find there is no room for other options. Like the old diplomas they are all encompassing and will contain elements of English and Maths no doubt 'relevant to the sector', taking students to higher skill levels than GCSE. Again, similar to the diploma, colleges and now some schools, have to show they have the expertise and resources to deliver the T levels and have to gain approval before offering it.

In New Labour's case the Diploma, which ended up covering vocational subjects only, arose out of a failure to implement the key recommendations of the Tomlinson report

which would have incorporated A levels and GCSEs as well as vocational qualifications into his new diplomas. An imaginative implementation of Tomlinson would have allowed students to mix and match academic and vocational elements. Fear of the right's reaction, as articulated by the *Mail* and *Telegraph*, in the lead up to an election to what they chose to present as the abolition of A levels was the reason. Instead, A levels, so strongly rooted in post 16 academic education in the minds of parents and favoured by the Russell group, would simply wither on the vine as diplomas became the 'qualification of choice' as Ed Balls put it. The National Union of Teachers (NUT) at the time were right. They saw the decision as a clear reversal by the government saying 'the decision to ditch Tomlinson's 14-19 reform proposals was fundamentally wrong'. It was wrong because it would perpetuate the academic vocational divide and the low status of vocational education. The proposed new diplomas unlike Tomlinson's originals were not as inclusive either. A foundation diploma was still well beyond the reach of many SEN learners.

In contrast, the day after its publication, the Tories announced that they had accepted the Sainsbury Review in full. Its recommendations are being progressed via the government's Post-16 Skills Plan. Accordingly, there has been no consultation about the merits or otherwise of the Sainsbury recommendations.

While unsurprisingly welcomed by the Association of Colleges (which may well see benefit in the assumption that FECs will deliver the new T-level qualifications) there have been wider criticisms including of the implication that certain routes are associated with particular qualifications, the requirement for students to choose routes at 16 and the suggestion that students who want to transfer onto 'academic routes will have to spend time 'transitioning' from one pathway to another a large portion of transferable skills are required.

T-levels have been criticised as being ill-thought out and for which schools, colleges, students and employers are ill-prepared. The simplistic claims made in the Sainsbury Report that T-levels will lead to certain jobs have also been debunked as unrealistic and far-removed from the real world in which vocational qualifications are already studied by many students and where so-called academic routes often include vocational and technical education and vice-versa.

Students, parents and employers will not buy-in to T-levels which are cobbled together and are only targeted at young people. Quite rightly, qualifications in the UK are not age-dependent and need to be fit for study for people of all ages including those who want to return to improve their career options later in life. The challenges of improving the UK's productivity and skills base will not be met without a lot more work, resources and joined-up thinking[40].

A model for present and future
The dangers of excluding this human perspective from vocational education and training as currently proposed means that cultural and scholarly advantage accrues only to the chosen few and perpetuates social inequality. Access not only to the education system itself, but to general education is a prerequisite enhancing the quality of life for those previously excluded. A model where of students from areas of high social and economic

deprivation are denied access and participation name of economic necessity and opportunities is something envisioned in dystopian novels since Huxley and Orwell and serves to promote the kind of social engineering currently apparent in the South East Asian education systems in post-industrial British society alike.

At least something of the bluster of the he Blairite call for "education, education, education" missed the point as much as did Gove's return to basic values did.

The benefits of language, culture and history which accrue can act as real force, not only for tackling the inequalities of economics, class, gender and race, but also for the promotion of democracy. The development of skills, namely communication, improving own learning and performance, working with others and problem-solving is an important feature of academic writing and academic success generally. Furthermore; a skilled communicator, one whom reflects on their own learning, an effective team member and one with sufficient problem-solving skills becomes an academically more able scholar. The skills verses scholarship remains for many, a 'red herring'.

It can also be argued that is far more useful to possess the skills required to improve a learner's knowledge base than to have an enormous body of knowledge at one's disposal that is seen to be finite. Understanding argument, improving learning and developing critical skills are three components of core skills and scholarly habits which together underpin academic success as well as being hugely significant life skills. Those who promote the narrow definition of skills so liked by recent governments at present fail to recognise that these skills cannot be developed in a moral, political or cultural vacuum and that skills, like problem-solving, for example, are about why as much as how. Good teachers, whatever else they are, do recognise those factors and spark learning through imagination and emotion (skills we're taught from the beginning of our formal education to ignore in pursuit of literacy and STEM) and not some dull, narrow or mechanistic pedagogy. For example; the most important thing is finding a topic which fires the imagination of the student and challenges established notions of learning and then hanging a variety of strategies for improving writing skills on the chosen subject. In short, reflective practice is also a contributory core skill Certainly. It is within professional practices such as teaching, healthcare and psychology and provides far wider benefits for our children too.

The method is most effective when the 'Big idea' is a real problem which means something to the student and generally and provides greater access to the enriching aspects of the curriculum, is a curriculum about real education. These enabling skills, while not yet anything to sing about, must be seen as going beyond the basic skills model which fires their imagination. The problem, say race relations in the student common room, or lack of space in the home environment, is a real one and therefore more likely to fire the imagination and provide that crucial spark apparent in the work of many published writers but sadly lacking in much student work.

The empirical evidence base for this may appear somewhat flimsy, but radical teaching and pedagogical modelling and the practice, which has been dynamic and driven by action research throughout springs from a range of sources. As well as Freire and Guevara, there have been others who have influenced and, in some cases, shaped this practice: class-

riven pedagogy, Simon[41]; comprehensive in its focus, Chitty[42]; real world and problem-solving based Flower[43]; 'social constructivism', Yytgotsky[44] and 'dialogic teaching', Mercer[45] and Alexander[46].

In practice
A career long sharing of effective practice and distillation of some of this practice has provided a model, which is in some demand[47].

Phase 1: Early teaching career in further education, characterised by an initial teacher education that was guided by what was then called 'student-centred learning'.

Phase 2: Engagement in curriculum development initiatives and characterised by flexible approaches and open-ended outcomes which explore pedagogical projects through the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative and Extension (TVEI/TVEE).

Phase 3: Developmental work through education action zones (EAZ) and a commitment to the development of generic skills through core learning as a safety net with scaffolding.

Phase 4: Projects developed and managed as a development advisor at the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) characterised by a value-added and evidence-based approach and an acceptance that not all assessment models are easily measurable.

Phase 5: A more open-ended approach, with pupil referral units and excluded pupils, developed at Shaftsbury Young People, with the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) and the current Learning and Skills Research Network (LSRN) Ways of Engaging project, which is due to be piloted with Norfolk YMCA in Norwich and is characterised by engagement through personalised objectives and meaningful projects with a negotiated learning framework. An emergency curriculum could and should have been braver and more meaningful. It could easily have been concerned with the development of communication and problem-solving skills and been project-based and allowed learners to explore interests in the things that will change their world, notably, de-colonisation of the curriculum and education for climate change.

Detailed accounts of these approaches have been published every few from the mid-nineties to the present[48]. Furthermore, as this has been something of a journey of personal discovery, I would like to acknowledge some of the practical guides that have helped me along the way [49.]

A new phase
In 2009, the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) and Institute of Education University of London (IoE) undertook research in the best ways of supporting young people described as NEET (not in employment, education or training). This was

published as *Tackling the NEETs problem Supporting Local Authorities in reducing young people not in employment, education and training*[50]. Building on earlier research[51] the study noted that reducing the amount of 16–18-year-old NEETs is the most popular national indicator among local authorities' Local Area Agreement targets. It interesting to note the considerable impact that the recent pandemic has had or has the ability to have on current and future cohorts of students aged 16-19? .In terms of equality and diversity Black Lives Matter and the work of the National Education Union (NEU) through its Celebrating Education Conference and decolonising the curriculum initiative[52] along with the fallout from the recent pandemic and the likely to disproportionally high impact upon working class students[53] has provided even more evidence to suggest a further impact on black and minority ethnic (BAME) students as far as centre/teacher graded assessments are concerned (unconscious bias) to support claims made by Burgess and Greaves[54] in their work on test scores, subjective assessment and stereotyping of ethnic minorities.

The curriculum of the future

Young people need powerful knowledge to understand and interpret the world. Without it they remain dependent upon those who have it. As Marx said: "Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it"[55]. The current pandemic has illustrated this with desperate scramble for information to help other communities and links with the work of Freire in particular, power imbalance and Marxists in general. Shared and powerful knowledge enables children to grow into active citizens. Adults can understand, cooperate and shape the world together. It is fair and just that all children should have access to this knowledge[55]. Powerful knowledge opens doors: it must be available to all young people. It leads to active citizenship and the promotion of social justice. Future curriculum design and development need to draw together a holistic, inclusive, independent and personalized approach to learning.

Curriculum development has, for me, always been about the development of skills, knowledge and general education that enriches. Learning to learn takes centre stage in this model. It is concerned with engaging in the real world, yes, the world of work, but also far beyond. Arts and humanities are about being and becoming human and work exists only in the context of human life itself. In short, skills for employment are skills for life. The transferable skills of communication, teamwork, problem-solving and learning to learn are fundamental to entitlement, enrichment, empowerment, vitality and joy and are as significant for learning about ourselves and empowering us all, as they are to the world of work[56].

Educators have the opportunity to build back different and better with a bigger, broader and braver curriculum[57]. Only then will a pedagogy of skills development that works for a personalized skill, knowledge and enriching entitlement curriculum is within the grasp of all and active citizenship be a concrete feature of human life.

Ian Duckett

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OFSTED's role in delivering the right's agenda

"Is it progress if a cannibal uses a fork?" (Stanislaw Jerzy Lec)

Measuring Progress in Schools. Levels and Beyond.

The Progress 8 measure, the main performance indicator for secondary schools, quantifies pupils' attainment at the end of key stage 2 and then again at the end of key stage 4; the distance travelled by pupils between the two averaged out for the school, then becomes the progress 8 measure. The two attainment measures are controversial in themselves. Should knowledge of arcane grammar terminology be part of the key stage 2 measure? Is the bucket system of grouping subjects at GCSE to give the core and EBAC subjects more weight, fair? Regardless of these questions, this quantitative definition of progress became the driver behind tracking systems in secondary schools, even though level descriptors themselves had been abolished. Spreadsheets and flight paths, became measures of progress with pupils often rag rated. On entering classes OFSTED inspectors would be given copies of class sheets showing what percentage of a class were on track or achieving above 'expected levels. (This could often be counter-productive for the school as inspectors could make a bee line for pupils coloured red to see why their lack of progress was not being addressed). Option blocks too still are often subservient to the progress measure ensuring pupils pick subjects across 'the buckets' so the school maximises its progress 8 score.

The National Curriculum levels, though constraining, did enable schools to describe progress more clearly to parents. The motivation to abolish them altogether seemed strange coming from the very party that had devised them in the first place. Indeed, many schools continued using a version of them, after they were abolished to help assess and report progress. Was the abolition to be a liberation from the shackles of levels giving more power to teachers to define progress in their own way? Or was it to presage an even narrower definition of progress to be imposed on teachers? If this was the case who would be responsible for the imposition?

At first, as the reality that levels were going sank in, schools started to develop their own approaches to assessing progress. The Education Endowment Foundation at the time (2014) was optimistic. Their advice to schools on setting up non level-based assessment contained the following bullets.

● Assessment policies should focus on supporting children's progress towards *learning of knowledge, concepts and skills;*

● Assessment tasks should provide teachers with *meaningful, useful insight* (assessment for formative purposes) in the form of information about a child's learning and ability to apply their learning to a broad range of contexts;

A broad definition of progress then appears to include 'knowledge, concepts and skills' Furthermore, the child's aptitude to apply their learning to a range of contexts is also included.

Cultural capital

However, along with the abolition of levels, the National Curriculum was subjected to radical surgery. Apparently, this was because as Tim Oates said in 2010, it failed 'to adequately draw from emerging analysis of high-performing systems around the globe'. Most high performing systems e.g. Alberta or Finland characterise their curriculum in terms of the desired qualities learners will develop. Instead, the Tories' national curriculum catalogues the knowledge pupils must learn i.e. what, in the view of its designers, is the 'best that has been thought and said'. It is a top-down approach in which the elite decide what is valuable knowledge and children simply become receptors of it.

Nick Gibb, Schools Minister, made a speech launching a pamphlet called *The Question of Knowledge* in 2017, interestingly a few months after Amanda Spielman took over at OFSTED. This pamphlet was sponsored by the ASCL (before the current general secretary took up his post)) and Parents and Teachers for Excellence. This group is funded by Vote Leave, Chair of Finance Jon Moynihan, venture capitalist. It also lists as a director Rachel de Souza of Inspiration Trust. Gibb refers to E.D Hirsch in his speech.

> 'the influence of E. D. Hirsch on educational thinking has been profound. At its heart is the idea that returning to a traditional, academic curriculum built on shared knowledge is the best way to achieve social justice in society. His work has also encouraged schools to focus on the concept of building cultural capital as a way to close the attainment gap'

This argument is duplicitous and elitist. The cultural capital referred to is that defined by the ruling class and assumes that black and working-class children arrive at school with little or no culture. It then goes on to state that a traditional academic curriculum is the best way to achieve social justice, deliberately omitting that knowledge of it will be used to select children for elite universities. It is beyond obvious that children from backgrounds which value the liberal academic tradition and those that attend private schools which promote this type of education will always have an advantage whatever state schools do to cram their pupils with the necessary cultural capital. As well as the increase in factual knowledge in the curriculum, pupils are assessed in one way only:-the ability to regurgitate learning in a two to three hour exam. Again, it is beyond obvious that linear assessment of this type benefits those who have access to a space where they can revise without distractions. The combined effect of the imposition of a 'traditional academic curriculum' and linear examinations is borne out by attainment data showing the attainment gap widening between disadvantaged and other pupils before the pandemic.

OFSTED: Shifting the paradigm

Levels abolished, a curriculum focusing on factual knowledge, and new examination system in place, something was missing. Who is going to ensure schools teach the new curriculum? Who is going to ensure schools focus on the knowledge listed in it at the expense of skills, pupils' creative development and knowledge which may lie outside that which is prescribed? Who is going to make sure that this curriculum is delivered to all even if this means significant numbers of pupils being labelled as failures? Who is going

to shift the paradigm away from innovation in teaching, differentiation and challenge to a utilitarian view of teaching as simply a mechanism to deliver the required knowledge to all? The answer is OFSTED and its new framework (the EIF) introduced in 2019. If anyone doubts the link, OFSTED's advisory committee on the new framework set up in 2018, includes the only two academics the DFE listens to, Tim Oates and Sam Twisleton plus Christine Counsell (Inspiration Trust) and Ian Bauckham (Tenax Academies) who are both listed on the website of the lobby group "Parents and Teachers for Excellence" as supporters. The group advocates "*a challenging curriculum that stresses the importance of knowledge and learning facts*".

From this group and senior HMI at OFSTED the new framework EIF emerged. The move away from using performance data and away from judging teaching overall towards the school curriculum was widely welcomed. However, the fundamental shift of emphasis and its implications have on the whole not been recognised by schools. No-one has come out and said that the new framework is a mechanism for right wing Gove apologists to further tighten their grip on what goes on in the classroom, but this is exactly what it is.

Below are two word-maps built from criteria in the OFSTED handbooks describing a good school. (for those in know the first uses a combination of teaching and learning criteria and outcomes criteria, the second uses quality of education criteria) The first is from the inspection handbook pre 2019 and the second from the new post 2019 framework (EIF).

Some features of the first map:
● Knowledge, learning (process), skills, understanding, improving all feature as important, but relatively balanced components.

● Progress is central and the criteria often links it to the phrase 'from starting points' which at least recognises the range of attainment in most schools

● Teachers are also recognised as central to the education process

● Disadvantaged pupils feature as a concern

● Words indicating a generic approach to teaching are evident, 'deepen, challenge, consolidate

Some features of the second map

● The curriculum comes out of nowhere to be fundamental and all encompassing

● Whilst skills are referred to, knowledge takes pride of place and understanding is less important

● Teachers and teaching appear to be of reduced importance

● The word 'progress' has disappeared altogether

● Well 'sequenced', 'cumulatively', 'coherently', 'consistently' 'planned' all point to OFSTED's favoured attributes of a well-drawn-up curriculum

● There are no references to generic qualities of strong teaching

● SEND pupils more of a focus than disadvantaged pupils

OFSTED: Role of enforcer

OFSTED decrees in the new framework that giving pupils 'cultural capital'. must be a main intent behind the curriculum. To be a good school, leaders must 'adopt or construct a curriculum that is ambitious and designed to give all pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils and including pupils with SEND, the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life'

With the bravura of the Party in 1984, OFSTED is using a kind of doublespeak when it comes to using Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital. He used the concept to demonstrate how it reinforced social inequality in society by creating another impediment to those without economic capital, succeeding. The idea that education can simply reverse its effects

by cramming pupils with knowledge has been comprehensively debunked. Even Michael Young a supporter of the knowledge rich approach says 'As was argued nearly 50 years ago by the sociologist Basil Bernstein, 'education cannot compensate for society'. Only in a very different society would the aims of the national curriculum quoted by Ofsted become a reality." Diane Reay, a Cambridge education professor, says: "This new requirement is a crude, reductionist model of learning, both authoritarian and elitist. The key elements of cultural capital are entwined with privileged lifestyles rather than qualities you can separate off and then teach the poor and working classes'. On the controversial issue of 'cultural capital', OFSTED have unashamedly taken the Hirsch, Oates, Gibb line and is enforcing it in schools.

OFSTED inspectors are instructed to take copies of the National Curriculum with them in a change from the previous framework. They will expect to see it being delivered in the subjects they inspect. What about the freedom given to academies (now making up 80% of secondary schools) to come up with their own curriculum? This is illusory. Criteria make clear a school's curriculum must be of comparable 'breadth and ambition' with the National Curriculum and because GCSEs encompass the national curriculum, most secondary schools follow it anyway. The promised choice and innovation in the free school programme never materialised. Steiner Schools opened as part of the free school programme with the aim of giving parents the choice of an alternative education perspective have all been taken over by MATS and have had to abandon their Steiner based curriculum offer.

The idea that OFSTED is somehow an 'independent' inspectorate is clearly compromised. Rather it is being used as a willing police force to ensure government policy on the curriculum is being delivered in schools. Unlike previous versions of the National Curriculum, the current one was hardly consulted on and has been the subject of controversy in the following areas and more:- Phonics, EBAC, monocultural perspective, poor coverage of the climate emergency, lack of applied learning and skills opportunities, downgrading of the Arts, decolonisation etc. We have already seen how OFSTED supports the Gibb line on cultural capital, it also has written into its criteria support for two other government obsessions: – Phonics and the EBAC.

To be judged good schools must make sure that 'reading books connect closely to the phonics knowledge pupils are taught when they are learning to read'

What this statement is doing is preventing pupils being able to read 'real books' e.g. Michael Rosen's The Bear Hunt' because they might learn words by recognition rather than phonic decoding. No-one is suggesting that phonics does not have an important role in the teaching of reading, but to actively prevent learning to read by other means is extreme and not based on any evidence. One would have expected OFSTED to have conducted an evaluation of the synthetic phonics initiative. It has not happened. Instead, it is accepted as doctrine. This was written in an OFTSED report;-

'Pupils' reading books are not always well matched to their reading stage. Books contain sounds they have not yet been taught. As a result, some pupils fall behind in their reading.'

The phrase 'as a result' introduces a huge leap of rationale which would need a proper evidence based study before such a conclusion could be reached.

Again to be judged good, a secondary school must have an aim 'to have the EBacc at the heart of its curriculum, in line with the DfE's ambition, and good progress' must have 'been made towards this ambition'. The DfE's ambition for the EBAC is 75% of year 10 pupils will follow such a curriculum in 2022 and 90% by 2025. OFSTED here are being used as an enforcer. If the DfE believes so strongly in the EBAC, why not legislate or use a statutory instrument to amend the national curriculum to make it compulsory? Instead, OFSTED is policing 'an ambition' and holding it against schools if they do not comply.

The EBAC is another contentious government policy with many questioning the need for it at all and others wanting different combinations of subjects. It is an ideologically driven project based on the Govian idea of the primacy of traditional academic subjects. Again, OFSTED takes a strong pro-government line.

Redefining progress:- Knowing more and remembering more

The current OFSTED though has gone further than monitoring and enforcing government policies, it is now one of the agencies which is implementing right wing ideology in schools through its 2019 inspection framework (EIF). The education world was taken by surprise and in my experience, schools still find the paradigm shift difficult to accept and keep referring back to old certainties. To address the demands of the framework, schools had to rewrite their strategic plans, review their curriculum, change the characteristics of effective teaching, abandon ideas of progress based on spreadsheets and much more all over a few months.

The school flightpath model of progress came with its problems. Quantifying learning and reducing it to numerical values feeds into the neo liberal view of education as some kind of production line. On the plus side though, some schools took great care to assess progress forensically, breaking down the skills and knowledge required to succeed in topic and then identifying where pupils needed to improve. Under the previous framework inspectors were given data showing progress made by different attainment groups so that schools could well end up with an area for improvement in their report around 'challenging the most able' or 'improving the progress of lower attaining pupils'. At least schools with cohorts skewed towards the lower end of attainment received some recognition for their work. OFSTED have thrown out the notion of progress from starting points. Indeed, the word progress is not even mentioned in the criteria for Quality of Education. Instead, they unveiled their new mantra in training sessions for the new framework:-

'Educational Progress is knowing more and remembering more'.

Sometimes 'doing more' is included but this is very much secondary because to Hirsch followers, core knowledge is essential to the development of skills. I do not have space to go into that debate here but suffice it to say that no one is opposing the teaching of knowledge. What we are opposed to is the primacy Hirsch et al give it and that if factual knowledge is the main content of the curriculum, questions have to be asked about why some knowledge is included and some not, and on whose behalf these decisions are being taken.

For many the above mantra is shockingly minimalist. It reduces teaching to the

implementing of basic selective psychology theories about memory. OFSTED insists 'the subject curriculum is designed and delivered in a way that allows pupils to transfer key knowledge to long-term memory'. (I should point out that they do not want to see a series of disconnected facts taught, hence the importance of 'sequencing' in the curriculum. The framework does reference understanding of key concepts and correcting of misconceptions). A level Psychology will tell you that rehearsal and retrieval practice help ensure knowledge is retained in the long-term memory. Assessment now is no longer just about checking understanding and informing teaching, the act of assessing (in reality testing) should 'help pupils embed and use knowledge fluently'. This results in the explicit teaching of factual knowledge and teachers setting a plethora of quizzes and tests to ensure it has been retained and can be retrieved easily. This is a selective view of how information or episodes transfer to LTM. Perrera's concept of 'Flash bulb memory' perhaps supports a more progressive pedagogical approach. Events, knowledge, which have an emotional significance for someone can pass straight into the long-term memory. Dramatic events are an obvious example. But facts too can be invested in significance depending on the context in which they are learnt and the importance of their meaning for the learner. For example, an Arsenal fan will remember a sequence of football results with ease whereas a football phobic would have to recite them several times to commit them to LTM. Surely pedagogies which engage the imagination and invest knowledge with significance would be successful in transferring knowledge to LTM as well as making learning exciting and stimulating? Such strategies are not recognised in the new framework.

Furthermore the whole art of teaching is missing from the new framework. It is seen merely as 'implementing the curriculum' which we have seen is mainly core knowledge and concepts. OFSTED under Wilshaw ran into trouble with Gove et al over pedagogy. The fear was that focus on identifying pupil progress in lessons was pushing pedagogy away from the traditional didactic teaching favoured by the right. Nicky Morgan floated the idea that teaching should not be directly evaluated by the inspectorate, which has now happened. OFSTED's response was never to indicate a 'preferred style' in teaching and try to remain neutral in such debates. This led to some conflict on inspections when evaluating teaching as comments like 'group work was used effectively' were certainly out as they might indicate a preference for so called progressive methods. The old framework in its criteria for good teaching states 'teachers use questioning skilfully to probe pupils' responses and they reshape tasks and explanations so that pupils better understand new concepts. Teachers tackle misconceptions and build on pupils' strengths'. These OFSTED references encouraged CPD programmes in schools where teachers from different departments might focus on the use of questioning to deepen understanding or designing tasks to enhance learning etc led by an SLT teaching and learning lead. Also notable are references to pupils' interests and strengths. It is astonishing that the quality of teaching has been removed from the new framework. Because of the power of OFSTED in driving the agenda in schools, the focus on generic teaching and learning in schools will decrease and be replaced by 'sequencing' the curriculum. Teaching is to become a mechanistic process imparting knowledge and ensuring it is retained.

Measuring progress according to OFSTED

OFSTED now refuse to look at progress data schools might produce. Some school find this difficult to believe. In the past an SLT member in charge of pupil performance/achievement would present inspectors with charts and tables showing how progress is being made by pupils across different subjects. If inspectors indicated that SEND pupils for example appeared to be lagging behind a leader would quickly produce data showing the opposite. Schools no longer have this option.

If progress is knowing more and remembering more, then the word progress is no longer necessary because it simply equates to curriculum coverage. Inspectors using what they call 'deep dive' methodology check the curriculum intentions through documentation and an interview with a subject lead, they then see how well it is being delivered in the classroom as well as scrutinise books to see what has been covered in the past, and that misconceptions have been tackled. Teachers know that checking books is an imprecise science. It is hard for an outsider to tell which is homework, classwork or simply noted down from the board. 'Not relevant', inspectors are told by OFSTED, the main purpose is to check curriculum coverage. How do inspectors know pupils do actually understand the content? They see work being done in lessons or questions answered by pupils and usually the final part of the deep dive process is an interview with pupils. The handbook describes this as 'discussions with pupils about what they have remembered about the content they have studied' These can become more like a test where inspectors will try to see if pupils can connect the current topic to prior learning or if they understand something written in their books.

Another aspect of the new framework schools find difficult to process is that progress is seen through the lens of the content not the pupils. Differentiated content which might mean SEND pupils for example missing out on a curriculum experience is frowned upon. Similarly stretch and challenge of the most able has gone from the framework too. What matters is getting as many pupils to curriculum 'end points' as possible. There will be many on the left who will see this aspect as positive.

Conclusion

Unlike many other jurisdictions including in the UK, the experience of education in our schools, what pupils learn and how they learn, is a carefully planned right wing ideological project. After the appointment of Amanda Spielman to OFSTED, the inspectorate not only became the policing arm of the strategy ensuring government policies on the curriculum were being followed, it also became a delivery mechanism for the strategy's implementation. As a result, progress is defined by how much knowledge can be crammed into pupils' long-term memories and the art of teaching has been reduced to knowledge transmission. What pupils bring to their education in terms of their own cultural experiences, interests and curiosities is ignored. They are mere vessels to be filled with cultural capital defined by the ruling class.

James Whiting

Assessment

This pandemic has been terrible for many. As I write this, the death toll has just passed 100,000. As so often happens at times of terrible crisis and human misery, in addition to the suffering, we have also learned much and have an opportunity to do things differently.

We have an opportunity to tackle the scourge of child poverty, which has been exposed in all its shame.

We also have an opportunity to create an education system fit for the twenty-first century – an education system which supports our children to grow and develop, rather than reducing them to units of human capital to be stretched and measured. But to do this, we need to talk about assessment.

I want to contend that the current assessment system is fundamentally unfit for purpose and that we need a complete overhaul of assessment at all levels of compulsory education.

I want to highlight four fundamental problems with our current assessment system. This list is by no means comprehensive, but I believe it is sufficient to make the case for a fundamental reform.

Firstly, our current system places intolerable pressure on children and young people, causing significant damage to their health and wellbeing.

Secondly, it is fundamentally reductionist. We have an assessment system which tells us very little about children's learning.

Thirdly, the growth of the testing system into an entire industry, and its high stakes nature distorts the education system it is supposed to measure, and in doing so renders itself inaccurate.

All of this is underlined by a fourth systemic weakness, subjected to dramatic public scrutiny in the GCSE and A-level fiasco of 2020 – norm referencing and the rationing of educational success.

I will explore each of these issues in turn, before briefly addressing the question of how we move forward.

Whilst there is no clear blueprint for an alternative assessment system, I hope that, in exploring each of these weaknesses in the pages that follow, we may find some pointers as to the principles which could underline such a system.

Pressure
The pressure that the testing system places on children has been well-documented, in particular in the *Exam Factories?* report produced by Professor Merryn Huchings of London Metropolitan University. This report draws the conclusion that, "Children and young people are suffering from increasingly high levels of school-related anxiety and stress, disaffection and mental health problems. This is caused by increased pressure from tests/exams; greater awareness at younger ages of their own 'failure'; and the increased rigour and academic demands of the curriculum."

In particular, it argues that "The current pattern of testing very young children is inappropriate to their developmental level and needs and creates unnecessary stress and anxiety for pupils and parents."

These conclusions are backed up by a worrying array of evidence over the report's 72 pages, including a 200% increase in counselling sessions related to exam stress between 2012-13 and 2013-14. Children described their experiences in detail:

Some people did [get really stressed]. They'd be crying for most of the exam, they were just so stressed out. I knew people that was crying before they went into the exams. (Year 12 pupil)

Well, I get nervous because I know it's going to change my levels and it's going to affect what I'm going to do and what school I might get into in a few years' time. (Year 6 pupil)

This latter comment fits with my own experience of the pressure put on by tests in primary schools. In a project interviewing KS2 students about the impact of setting and tests, I spoke to one 10-year-old student, who said that she had always thought she would be a doctor like her mother but that, following an average result in an end of term test and being moved down a set, she had decided she needed to set her sights lower. She had been moved from the top set to the middle set because her teachers thought it might boost her confidence.

Whilst the Exam Factories? report is the most comprehensive study of the impact of our testing system to be conducted, it is supported by many other sources. In *Education Forward*, edited by David Price, Madeleine Holt quotes a Year 6 child:

I get stressed in SATs and worry if I won't get a good job or something. I know the stuff in the tests but sometimes I forget how to do it, or I just make a little mistake and it'll affect the answer. If you want to be a writer, you can't really get a writers' job because you won't know the proper punctuations.

Similar stories can be found in *Teachers Undefeated* by Jon Berry, *The Elephant in the Classroom* by Jo Boaler, *Beyond the Exam Factory* by Terry Wrigley and a wide range of other publications.

Clearly, there is something deeply wrong with a system which places this level of pressure on children and young people.

Reductionism
However, it is not just the social and emotional damage that our testing system does to children and young people which is a concern. In educational terms, the constant use of standardised tests is both unsustainable and of little use. One of the main reasons for this is the reductionist approach which lies behind the standardised testing approach.

We are very familiar with this approach. So familiar, maybe, that we fail to consider its full implications. It is worth pausing to consider for a moment how standardised tests work.

Children and young people attempt a series of questions (often arranged in order, from

what are judged to be easier questions to those judged to be more difficult) in a fixed amount of time. Their performance in answering these questions is then reduced to a numerical score, which can be compared to tables of results from trials, and to live data, to show how the children perform in relation to the rest of the school population.

There are several levels of reductionism involved in this process.

First of all, there is reduction in terms of the material covered in standardised assessments. Not everything can be covered and what is covered tends to be limited to a selection from the material which can most easily be measured. This involves a reduction in the curriculum across subject areas, and a reduction within each subject area. The subject itself is reduced in scope in order to focus on the things that are most easily measurable. The introduction of Progress 8 measures is a clear example of the reduction of subject areas, and the obsessive focus on phonics at KS1, and spelling, punctuation and grammar at KS2 an equally clear example of reduction within a subject.

Then there is the reduction of individual questions to a binary 'right/wrong' result. For example, KS2 reading tests where children are asked questions about poetry like "The experience of the last line could best be described as: amusing, or shocking, or puzzling, or comforting?" with marking guidance that suggests one of these answers is 'correct' (example taken from a *Times* interview with Michael Rosen – https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/poetry-is-being-ruined-by-sats-says-michael-rosen-ex-laureate-j9pvzprnj). Whilst this is clearly a travesty in terms of understanding, it is a convenient way of reducing 'appreciation' of poetry to a numerical score.

A similar process takes place within the maths curriculum. Arguably the most important aspect of mathematics is the ability to reason, and yet this is rarely assessed in standardised tests. For example, on the 2016 KS2 maths paper, out of 110 marks, precisely 1 mark was given for a written explanation. Other questions were marked for correct/incorrect answers (with occasional marks for correct – government approved – working if the final answer was incorrect). This gives exactly the same result if a child makes a simple calculation error at the end of a question, or if they lack a fundamental understanding of any of the concepts involved. In both cases (which are significantly different in terms of the child's level of understanding and the support needed to help them develop in their learning), the end result is that no mark is awarded. It tells us very little about children's understanding.

Finally, the last level of reduction takes place when all of these individual binary points – right/wrong – are combined across huge subject areas into meaningless scores. Appreciation of poetry is combined with decoding skills, speed reading and the ability to structure written answers to create a 'reading' score, while the ability to draw reflections of shapes, carry out calculations and read a clock are combined with many other disparate skills into a generic 'maths' score.

By the time we reach this point, the data we have about an individual child tells us very little but, just for good measure, these are aggregated at a school and system level to produce 'objective' data which are then used to make high-level and high-stakes decisions. The problem is that this edifice is built on seriously insecure foundations, masked by the

perceived objectivity of numerical data.

The complexity inherent in the process of learning, and indeed in much of the subject matter, is reduced to the point of being completely meaningless.

Distortion

Once this data is used to take high stakes decisions, such as determination of national policy on curriculum and pedagogy, the future structure of schools and the career prospects of individual educators, it has a further effect in distorting the education system it is supposed to measure.

This is described clearly by Professor Richard Pring in his contribution to *The Mismeasurement of Learning.* Pring refers to 'Campbell's Law', namely that:

> 'the more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it was intended to monitor.'

The corruption referred to here is not just the regular cases of malpractice we read about in the press, involving students, teachers and schools where the pressure just gets too much, but also the ongoing pressure to teach to the test, to narrow the curriculum and all the other ways in which what is supposed to be a measurement impacts on the process it is supposed to measure.

This was noted by OFSTED in its 2012 report into the teaching of maths, *Made to Measure*. The report states that:

> "too much teaching concentrates on the acquisition of disparate skills that enable pupils to pass tests and examinations but do not equip them for the next stage of education, work and life.'

The *Exam Factories* report referred to above finds similar issues, stating in its conclusions that:

> "Pupils of every age are increasingly being required to learn things for which they are not ready, and this leads to shallow learning for the test, rather than in-depth understanding which could form a sound basis for future learning."

It goes on to identify the wider impact of this across the curriculum, in terms which link it directly with the issue of reductionism explored above:

> "The amount of time spent on creative teaching, investigation, play,practical work, etc. has reduced considerably, and lessons more often have a standard format. This results from pressure to prepare pupils for tests and to cover the curriculum; teachers' perceptions of what OFSTED wants to see (both in lessons, and in terms of written evidence in pupils' books); and teachers' excessive work levels."

The above issues can be roughly divided into two linked processes: on the one hand, high-stakes testing is distorting the very education system it is designed to measure; on the other, the scale of this distortion, and the extent to which it intensifies around the testing process itself, challenges the very accuracy of the results of these tests.

There is a real irony in the fact that one of the impacts of standardised testing is to make it impossible to accurately compare results year on year across the education system. Calls from education unions and others for a system of national sampling to replace high-stakes tests at key points such as the end of a key stage, would in fact increase the accuracy of information we have about the development of our education system over time.

Norm referencing and the rationing of education

Underlying all of these concerns is a crucial debate about the purpose of assessment. Historically, assessment and testing has played a key role in the rationing of education, ever since the creation of IQ tests by Alfred Binet and Theodore Simon at the turn of the 20th century. Binet and Simon were essentially tasked with creating a test to identify which children were uneducable and to be excluded from the French education system. They did so on the basis of theories of hereditary intelligence developed by Francis Galton. Galton hypothesised that intelligence was normally distributed across the population (the bell-shaped curve) with most people possessing average intelligence and small numbers of people at each end of the spectrum.

These ideas of intelligence still persist today in the relatively pure form of the 11+ test, which rations access to grammar schools in many parts of the country but it also has a significant influence on assessment throughout the system, including the persistence of norm-referencing (judging results against the wider group to show where in the distribution they sit) as opposed to criterion-referencing (judging qualifications against a clear set of criteria). This latter issue was the root of the GCSE and A-level scandal of 2020, where norm referencing was applied to teacher assessment grades with disastrous results.

A clear window into the thinking behind systems for rationing education was given by an anonymous DfE official in an interview with Stuart Ransom in his contribution to Selection, Certification and Control edited by Patricia Broadfoot:

> *There has to be selection because we are beginning to create aspirations which society cannot match. In some ways, this points to the success of education in contrast to the public mythology which has been created. When young people drop off the education production line and cannot find work at all, or work which meets their abilities and expectations, then we are only creating frustrations with perhaps disturbing social consequences. We have to select: to ration the educational opportunities so that society can cope with the output of education.*

This quote was published in 1984. We have to ask ourselves how far we have moved on from this rationing of educational opportunities

Alternatives

So, what are the alternatives?

I would argue that a starting point must be that any alternative must be able to answer the four charges above. We need an assessment system which does not place intolerable pressure on our children and young people. We need an assessment system which does

not reduce the learning process and the children at the centre of it to a numerical score. We need an assessment system which measures, rather than distorts, educational progress. Most fundamentally, we need an assessment system which is about enhancing, not rationing, educational opportunities.

Personally, I believe the answer to these questions must rely on a moderated system of teacher assessment, combined with national sample tests to judge progress within the system as a whole. I believe that in-class processes based on observation and portfolios of work would provide a much more robust system than the current reliance on standardised tests and give much more detailed and rigorous information for educators and policy-makers alike. However, I appreciate that this is a discussion that needs to be had within and beyond the profession.

That discussion must begin now. We have both the necessity and the opportunity to rebuild our broken system. We must seize that opportunity and not let another generation be failed by the legacy of the past.

Gawain Little

School assessment – an ongoing crisis

The Covid crisis has shown how deeply the Conservative government are committed to traditional assessment, however impossible to conduct. It took until month 5 of the 2020-21 school year for the Secretary of State to call off primary school testing and switch GCSEs and A-levels to moderated teacher assessment. This last-minute change left teachers with little time to learn how to do this well. As in many other fields, the pandemic has revealed the fault lines in education, particularly in England with its idiosyncratic policies. This provides opportunities to rethink and improve.

This chapter concentrates particularly on secondary schools, though briefly reiterating widely recognised problems in primary assessment. It will explain the ways in which GCSEs and A-levels, as now set up, are restricting students' education, and argue from a class perspective that this operates in ways which are deeply discriminatory. In particular, they leave no time for young people's initiative or the authentic investigation of real-world problems such as climate change, and side-line knowledge, skills and attitudes which are crucially important for all our futures.

Horses for courses
Assessment can serve a variety of purposes. These should not be mixed up, because the assessment purpose affects the design of the assessment method. For example:

i) Some assessment may be needed as a gateway to specialist courses – though it should be a check on whether candidates have sufficient knowledge (and appropriate attitudes) to begin, unlike the highly competitive selection in medicine and some other professions.

ii) It can provide feedback to learners (and their teachers) on gaps in knowledge, unclear understanding, or shortfalls in skill. Such formative assessment (often known as Assessment for Learning) is well recognised, though often distorted by the pressure of exams and accountability. Sometimes it is more forensically diagnostic, which has its benefits too in focusing remedial tuition.

iii) Assessment may be needed at the end of a higher-level course to ensure its graduates are fit to practice their chosen career.

It is worth noting that the traditional unseen written exam, highly dependent on memorisation, regurgitation and speed, suits none of the above purposes. For example, doctors wishing to practice as GPs go through a simulation which uses actors as 'patients'. The potential GP has to interview, examine, diagnose and prescribe treatment for around 10-12 'patients', and is assessed not only for knowledge but for problem solving, listening, communication and empathy.

The conservative heritage
The past weighs heavy on the present, and is always structured by class. From around the 1920s to early 70s (and in some areas to this day), the 11plus (formerly 'scholarship') was used to allow only a small minority of manual workers' children into a full time

secondary education; the rest (pre-1945) stayed at elementary school or (post-1945) entered low-status and poorly resourced secondary moderns, leaving at age 14 or 15 without qualifications. Those continuing to age 16 (i.e. the grammar school pupils) were expected to sit written examinations in around 6-8 subjects, which generally meant two whole years spent preparing (see Mick Waters' lovely soundbite quote, that the most studied curriculum subject is *past papers.*)

The introduction of qualifications for all 16-year-olds began as a professional initiative, as the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE). It was clearly invidious to educate children together in comprehensive schools but only allow a minority to receive a qualification at age 16. The CSE provided the opportunity to combine different forms of assessment, and schools were able to propose their own syllabus. Assessment by teachers was externally moderated, by inter-school panels and experienced teachers serving as external moderators for each area. Although the CSE was finally merged with the GCE O-level into the GCSE, with a scale of pass grades from A to G, right wing politicians and the media could never accept the validity of the lower grades; this discounting of lower grades persists.

This situation has become much worse since 2010. Michael Gove's backward-looking 'reforms' have finally outlawed assessment methods other than unseen written exams. This has a deep effect on the curriculum taught and the way it is taught. In effect, it provides a barrier to education for the majority of the population. The excuse is always that externally marked exams are fairer. This discounts both the unreliability of underqualified exam markers and the effectiveness of well-designed moderation procedures. Besides, the appeal to fairness is hypocrisy given the small classes and excellent cultural activities of fee-paying private schools, and the massive disadvantages suffered by the third of children who are growing up in poverty.

One major blow was the end of spoken English at GCSE. Actually, the private schools still assess spoken English as part of iGCSE – the International GCSE – which also includes coursework assessment. State-funded schools can't take the iGCSE anymore because it doesn't count in the assessment data! This is politically significant – the silencing of young people who attend state schools. If we understand 'working class' broadly to include all workers, all who rely on employment whether in manual or white collar and many professional jobs such as teaching, this amounts to silencing the working class.

Another impact on the curriculum is Gove's introduction of the EBacc, which recognises only GCSEs in 'academic subjects' (English, maths, sciences, history, geography, foreign language) but not technologies or the creative arts. This gives a clear signal that practical activity is seen as inferior, and prevents young people learning to express themselves in creative ways. Design and technology, art, music, drama, let along digital media, provide enormous intrinsic satisfaction; not just learning for a certificate. Limiting the curriculum in this way reduces education to drudgery.

Meanwhile, private schools have ample funds for the arts, technology and digital media, and judging by their adverts, this is a key attraction for potential parents. Indeed, Eton's prospectus mentions a music suite with:

three floors of teaching, rehearsal and practice rooms, together with a 250-seater Concert Hall, academic teaching rooms, a library and an organ room, recording studio, computer room with twelve PC workstations, a production suite, rock band studio, electric guitar teaching room, and twelve other teaching and practice rooms.

whilst drama facilities include:

a 400-seat theatre staffed by five full-time theatre professionals' with all the latest equipment.

The ruling class don't tolerate educational drudgery for their children. We shouldn't tolerate it for ours.

GCSEs – some alternatives

A recent initiative from a small network of state and private schools called for the end of qualifications at age 16. This could be difficult, given the feelings of many parents, but also given that many young people do not yet enjoy a substantial education beyond that age. It is however important to initiate a discussion about a range of alternatives.

Firstly, there is no need for students to spend two years of their lives rehearsing for externally assessed exams in eight or more subjects. The excessive memorisation, and the clever game of guessing what "might come up", are a distraction to real learning. Many countries do not require this. Finland has no external exams for this age group. Many parts of Germany use a combination of external exams, teacher-marked tests, and informal assessment of coursework by teachers. My visit to a school in Norway coincided with the exam days for 16-year-olds. Each year the education ministry sets an exam in a single subject, which is then used to moderate the school's judgements for the curriculum as a whole. That year's exam for the school was Norwegian. Day 1 was a trial run. The morning of day 2 was devoted to reading a range of texts on a particular theme, as a basis for an extended piece of writing in the afternoon.

Secondly, there are many forms of assessment which support more active and desirable forms of teaching and learning and encourage the development of important skills and strategies which are now needed more than ever. I will present two examples, both of which can be assessed on an individual or small group basis.

i) An experimental school in New York City, Central Park East Secondary School, set itself the challenge of 'reinventing' secondary school culture. Its aim was to offer students from low-income and African American or Latino families an education which was both intellectually rigorous and relevant to their lives.

https://www.innovations.harvard.edu/central-park-east-secondary-school

The final assessment at this school required students to satisfy panels of teachers, parents, community members and specialists they had successfully completed each course through a presentation or performance.

ii) About 20 years ago, the State of Queensland set about redesigning the curriculum around what it called the 'new basics', in response to the changing needs of work and life. It was felt that traditional forms of assessment could undermine the necessary pedagogies.

They hit on the concept of 'rich tasks', which would draw on a range of knowledge and skills, be problem based, and connect to the world beyond the classroom. A rich task had to be 'authentic' in the sense of being worthwhile in itself – not just a contrived assessment requirement. Like the New York example, they would frequently involve a presentation to peers, teachers, parents, and a wider community. Example specifications include:

The shape we're in   Students use mathematical skills to investigate alternative shapes and / or dimensions for a container, a domestic object, a mechanical device and an object from nature. They then present an alternative design for one of these, explaining the mathematics.

Opinion-making oracy   Students will make forceful speeches on an issue of international or national significance to different audiences.

National identities   This project involves the planning, production and presentation of a powerful, filmed documentary including information from research and interviews with people from different cultural backgrounds.

Ideally assessment at age 16 should involve initiative, collaboration, communication and other important "21st century skills" as well as the ability to interconnect knowledge from different specialisms. Furthermore, they would become much more satisfying to young people if they were presented to a meaningful audience, not just the teacher as assessor. This might involve *researching* a significant local issue, or an original design of clothing, a building or a garden, for instance.

Another meaningful form for assessment is a *portfolio* – standard practice for applicants to art college. Students are given a specification and asked to select and present a range of their work. This then forms the basis of a conversation with the teacher and others. This could be much more meaningful to parents than receiving a mark or grade. Portfolios can also be used for transition to the next stage of education, and similarly convey a richer sense of what each student can do.

A-levels too
England's post-16 curriculum is exceptionally narrow, the standard path still involving specialisation for two years in three A-levels, often in closely related subjects. This is narrower, in fact, than almost any other European country. Scotland expects 17-year-olds to study five subjects at Higher, generally including English and maths and often with both sciences and humanities. Ireland, for example, offers its young people a year of more general study after the school leaving exam and before embarking on more specialist studies; this generally involves reading a much wider set of literary texts than normally required for close study for an exam. In Germany, a wide range of subjects is expected at age 18 or 19. Norway presents an interesting example: almost all 16-18-year-olds attend a kind of sixth form college where they can choose either a vocational specialism or a

general academic course. However, to maintain breadth and keep options open, the vocational students continue their general education for a third of each week in Norwegian, maths, science, English, and citizenship. They can if they wish transfer to the third-year academic track prior to university.

All of the points made above about GCSE apply to 16-18 years old too, albeit at a more advanced level. Conservative politicians' claims that A-levels represent the "gold standard" of English education need to be challenged; A-levels often require passive forms of study and do not develop students' autonomy or initiative. Secondly, there is too big a gap between this academic pathway and vocational preparation. Vocational qualifications at this stage also tend towards compliant performance rather than skilful and intelligent problem-solving. For many young people, indeed, the experience of post-16 study is fragmentary, and may involve shuffling between insecure employment and low-level vocational certificates.

Another problem with post-16 studies *en route* to higher education is the competitive nature of English universities, with its unofficial (but officially fostered) hierarchy of prestige as well as the status differentials between different degree specialisms. It would be far better if young people were free to choose a university course provided their qualifications showed a sound foundation of knowledge, rather than in a competition to obtain the highest grades in order to enter a particular kind of university.

Primary schools

It is well established, thanks largely to the More Than A Score coalition involving the National Education Union, parent campaigns such as Let Our Kids Be Kids, early years associations and academic allies such as BERA (the British Educational Research Association), that primary school assessment in England:

- limits learning and narrows the curriculum
- does not close the attainment gap
- does not improve the overall quality of education.

It reduces children to a number, leading to early demoralisation and low self-esteem for many. It takes teachers' attention away from all-round care of the child.

Primary tests have had to be cancelled for two years running due to Covid. To return to them would be simply immoral and show a desperate lack of imagination and ability among government ministers.

The way the SATs and other tests are now set up is educationally damaging. Even the parts which teachers mark, such as writing, is designed so that it forces children to deploy technical features such as 'fronted adverbials' and semicolons regardless of meaning. Writing, which should be an authentic expression of ideas and experiences, has become simply a technical display – an artificial exercise in jumping hurdles. This is alienated learning.

The phonics test is inaccurate and focuses on just one aspect of reading. The new multiplication tests will distort maths.

Baseline will label children as potential failures almost from their first month in school. It includes the racist absurdity of testing four-year-olds in English who have spoken little English at home.

This entire system is anti-education and discriminatory. There has been a kind of standoff in recent years, with teachers and parents each hoping the other would have the strength to initiate a boycott. Some kind of breakthrough is urgently needed, and it is heartening that headteachers joined the call for tests to be abandoned in 2020-21. *Children are more than a score. Education is more than a test.*

Accountability

All the problems presented above are exacerbated by systems of accountability by which schools and individual teachers are judged. Schools are ranked and judged according to the data generated by the exams. This leads to curriculum narrowing, as teachers are constrained to focus excessively on the test. It provides an incentive for schools to reject more challenging or lower attaining students.

This in turn forms the basis for Ofsted judgements, so it is not surprising if schools serving areas with considerable poverty and limited employment have a much greater chance of damaging Ofsted grades. The accountability system distorts patterns of study, as it encourages schools to steer students to courses which will generate the best data for the school, rather than identifying the most satisfying curriculum for the student. It stifles student development, since there is so little scope for students to pursue particular passions and interests or investigate issues which are socially and environmentally urgent.

Even where the system appears designed to promote social justice, this is illusory. For example, Progress 8 calculates the gains made from ages 11 to 16, allowing for different starting points. However, it takes no cognizance of the material challenges which many young people now face of poor housing, inadequate nutrition, parents' insecure employment, a lack of books and IT for study. It is blind to the demoralisation occurring in areas with poor employment opportunities such as deindustrialised towns like Middlesbrough or Knowsley, or former seaside resorts such as Blackpool. It does not allow for differences in parental levels of education, a factor which is known to make a great difference to children's school success. It does not register radically different experiences of poverty: for the accountability system and Ofsted, disadvantaged can range from a parent being unemployed during any school term in the past six years, to chronic experiences of near destitution. There is no fair 'accountability' in as unequal a society as ours.

The Covid crisis has shown how deeply the Conservative government are committed to traditional assessment.

Terry Wrigley

Literature and the English curriculum

'We cannot simply look back as a way of moving forward'

English for the few or English for the many?

The study of literature in the English curriculum, as Eagleton (1983) suggested, only gained status within universities in the early part of the 20th century. It came to universities after it had become popular in the Mechanics Institutes and was initially seen as a subject for women and the working classes, but it quickly gained status and by the 1930s had become an established subject.

Over the 20th century many different approaches to the teaching of literature and of English have developed as teachers adapted their pedagogy to the needs of the students they taught and some of these were highlighted in the Cox Report (DES,1989). These adaptations often involved finding new contemporary texts that connected with the diverse experiences of students and used the cultural and linguistic assets of the students as a source of active engagement with literature. (Coultas, 2020).

But the authors of the Black Papers, for example Marenbon (1994:16) characterised more child centred approaches, developing in the 70s, as the 'new orthodoxy'. Opposition to child centred approaches and comprehensive education was deeply rooted in the traditionalist and selective view of education and the Black Papers (1969-1984) coalesced in opposition to progressive ideas among English teachers. Marenbon was concerned to institute a 'body of knowledge' that involved re-establishing the prominence of the English Literary heritage (ELH) and the explicit teaching of grammar and standard English.

The 2013 English curriculum draws from this elitist tradition in reasserting the absolute dominance of the ELH for example. In an excess of nationalism, Gove justified this approach by stating:

> 'Our literature is the best in the world….it is every child's birth right and we should be proud to teach it in every school' (2010:41)

A member of the National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE) was sharp in his response suggesting that as Michael Gove had not studied all the literature in the rest of the world how was he able to justify such an arrogant claim!

The argument that Gove makes is that all children must have access to the dominant cultural capital to have access to 'powerful knowledge'. But in suggesting this he simplifies the arguments of Bourdieu (1993) for example who argued that although there was a dominant bourgeois cultural capital operating in schooling, working class pupils brought their own cultural capital into schools and that their cultural assets are too often dismissed in western education systems.

This is precisely why NATE for example does not argue for canonical literature to be jettisoned but for a balance of literature, including contemporary literature, world literature and multi modal texts to be included in the English curriculum alongside the

canon. The literary diet of 'dead white men' has therefore been described as 'impoverished' and 'too narrow' by NATE. (Garner, 2013).   Students voices must also be nurtured in engaging with all texts and there need to opportunities for the creation of their own texts and poems.

There are many other aspects of the Gove inspired English curriculum that, while pretending to support meritocracy, dismiss the cultural and linguistic values and practices of working-class students. The GCSE English exam and the original English National Curriculum, (DES,1989) valued speaking and listening as the first strand of English and this was reflected in the examination requirements. Developing the oral skills of all the pupils in engaging with literature boosts their confidence in writing (Coultas, 2007) but Gove dismisses the importance of oracy and the exam boards have downgraded speaking and listening in all the new exams. For example, the oral response to literature option has been abolished at GCSE; writing development and reflection is no longer valued and the course work elements of literature exams at GCSE have also been abolished. At A level students no longer can compare a set text with a text of their choice.

The National Curriculum (DfE,2013) explicitly encourages teachers to suppress students' voices and dialects and impose standard English on even informal discussions in the classroom. The emphasis on the recitation of poetry is also problematic. For while the choric reading of stories and poems can increase the enjoyment of poetry and literature, if poetry reading is simply returned to an individual memorising drill it will obviously lesson student engagement and enthusiasm for literature and poetry. The notion of a canon also influences and narrows the primary English curriculum with a focus on long-established writers and less reference to new literacies.

The renewed dominance of the transmission mode of teaching

The overwhelming demands of the 'hard knowledge', 'standards' based English curriculum, coupled with the impact of performativity cultures, have put pressure on English teachers to teach traditional texts and decipher them by rote and this can lead to a lack of real understanding and engagement with literature. The focus on critique and analysis of the work of others through identification of the literary features of the text in a didactic manner, sometimes without a fuller discussion of the narrative and meaning of the text, can lessen the possibility of an insightful and original personal response from the students.

This approach gives fewer opportunities for pupils to interpret literature through talking and bringing their own thoughts and ideas to bare on the text. It clashes with the views of those writers such as Meek (1988) who suggest that stories and literature are themselves teaching tools and the ideas of Rosenblatt (1978) who argued that reading is a performative art, and that each reader will bring a new meaning and interpretation to the text. It can mean that reading in the classroom is seen as a chore and that active modes of reading, through student presentations; group dramatic and choric readings; opportunities for students to write back to the author

or add new ideas in their responses are less valued. The main goal becomes making notes on literary features dictated by the teacher to prepare the essay. And, alas, many English lessons can end with a paragraph or two of Point Evidence Explanation (PEE). When English teachers try to resist teaching like this they may be encouraged or directed to use power points that take them in this direction in some schools and academy chains to 'cover' the demands of the new curriculum.

A deficit view of working-class knowledge and culture

A deficit model of working-class knowledge and culture is inherent in the elitist attitudes of the Gove 'cultural restorationist' curriculum. The elitist view attacks child centred teaching approaches that utilise the children's cultural assets and knowledge and labels these forms of teaching as the enemies of promise. Gove has made headline grabbing speeches that critique progressive educational ideas in simplistic ways to assert ideas that preserve elitism in schools. One such example is the vulgar caricature that progressive educators do not really teach:

'Progressive educational theory stressed the importance of children following their own instincts rather than being taught' (Gove,2013,3, *my italics*)

The opposite is of course true for anyone who has been directly involved in teaching over the last decades (Coultas, 2007). To set up talk for learning when engaging with texts, to encourage children to produce their own creative writing and poetry requires much more skilful and sophisticated teaching techniques and classroom organisation that the more dry and traditional approaches of transmission mode teaching which rely on note taking and the teacher's understanding of the text. The teacher's voice will never be absent in an effective English lesson, but that voice is so much more powerful in dialogue with the students than if the students are treated as *tabula rasa* whereon the teacher dictates their thoughts

The elitist view of English and 'powerful knowledge' demonstrates a profound misunderstanding of what useful knowledge is; of pedagogy; and of how children learn. Of course, pupils will need to access abstract ideas in their subjects but the crucial question for effective teaching is how to we use language and the social situation in the classroom to link the new abstract ideas to the experiences and existing understanding of the pupils. For as Barnes (1976) suggested:

'Our pupils will learn most by reading, writing and talking about the experiences they meet and *through this in time will come to terms with subject knowledge*' (126, *my italics*)

These sophisticated and thoughtful forms of pedagogy not only allow pupils to learn more effectively through small group and whole class dialogue (Barnes, 2008) but they also allow pupils to contest and challenge knowledge and both celebrate and critique literature from the past and the present rather than treating 'knowledge' as a fixed and unchanging entity.

Regaining agency and encouraging a wider variety of reading practices

The voices of English teachers and students and wider society must be heard in the debate about literature in the classroom which could become more rich, diverse, canonical and non-canonical, print based and media based. Fewer numbers of students are opting for A level English. We cannot continue to simply look back as a way of moving forward and the English curriculum should be reviewed in consultation with the profession.

Reading practices should be encouraged that allow for personal response and engagement with literature and pupils should be encouraged to talk, write, create drama and films in response to texts and bring their own choices for reading into the classroom.

Some form of Schools Council should be re-established   to allow for teachers' voices and a broad range of educational experts, teacher educators, subject associations who should be consulted on the curriculum, examinations, and assessment and have some oversight of school inspections.

Structures need to change

Structures need to change to challenge reductive and instrumental approaches to teaching. Academies should be abolished as they waste public money, they are unaccountable, and they do not promote best practice in education. Local councils should be encouraged to restore teachers centres as they reclaim control of education to allow for more independent collaboration between teachers.

Schools must become more democratic and less hierarchical as executive heads, with excessive salaries, are removed and structures are created to allow schools to become consultative, embedded in local communities once more with improved forms of staff, parental and community engagement.

Dr Valerie Coultas

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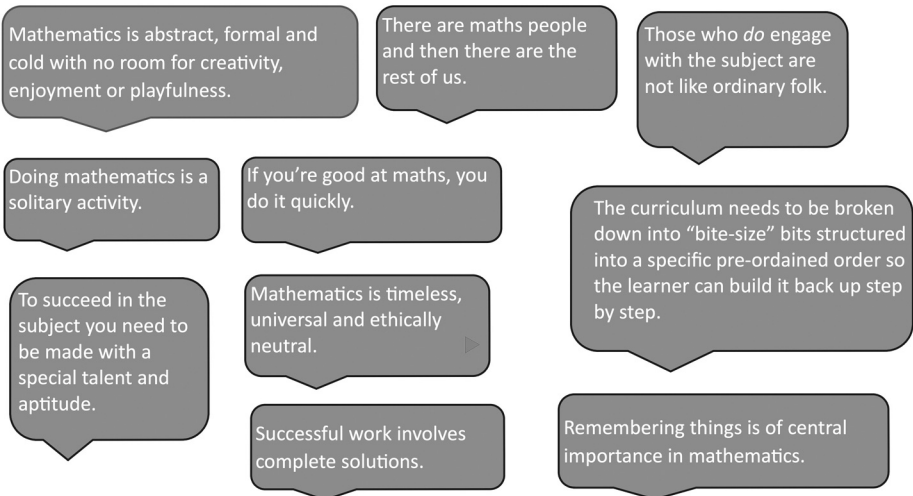
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The mathematics curriculum:
an alternative approach

This article is based on a talk given at **Education Reimagined: Alternatives to the Knowledge Rich Curriculum** on January 13, 2021.

I begin by drawing attention to a number of taken-for-granted, 'common sense' notions related to mathematics and to teaching and learning the subject.

Mathematics is abstract, formal and cold with no room for creativity, enjoyment or playfulness.

There are maths people and then there are the rest of us.

Those who *do* engage with the subject are not like ordinary folk.

Doing mathematics is a solitary activity.

If you're good at maths, you do it quickly.

The curriculum needs to be broken down into "bite-size" bits structured into a specific pre-ordained order so the learner can build it back up step by step.

To succeed in the subject you need to be made with a special talent and aptitude.

Mathematics is timeless, universal and ethically neutral.

Successful work involves complete solutions.

Remembering things is of central importance in mathematics.

These assumptions are reflected at a fundamental level in our current mathematics curriculum. But I suggest every single one of these assumptions is false and that they have a detrimental effect on the teaching and learning of mathematics. Almost all learners currently experience mathematics as something "done to them" rather than "done by them"; they do not share in the ownership of meaning, let alone meaning making[1]. And for many the subject is irrelevant and meaningless. For many, most(?), the mathematics classroom is an oppressive and dehumanising place.

So, what instead?
I offer a list of seven characteristics – they can be thought of as principles or values – which I argue will contribute to a mathematics curriculum for social justice and for attainment for all. I suggest that the mathematics curriculum needs to be:

- process-rich
- based on interesting, challenging and thought-provoking problems or other stimuli
- explored not covered
- developed in a learning community

- enactive
- spacious and to exist in expansive time
- where ethical and political concerns are raised.

I consider each of these in turn.

First, the curriculum needs to be process-rich. Children in classrooms need to engage in the processes of doing mathematics and of thinking mathematically. These processes would include but not be limited to the ones included in the adjacent poster. It can be a good idea to have a poster like this in the classroom to help explain to the learners what mathematicians actually do and to validate the processes when the learners enact them.

If these become "rich expectations generated over time"[2], they work as more than a route into mathematics; they come to constitute the mathematics itself[3].

Second, the curriculum needs to be based on interesting, challenging and thought-provoking problems or issues or contexts or other phenomena. The outcomes from working on these may be unpredictable and there should be a willingness to allow the curiosity of the learners to be the main driver of where their exploring takes them. (I note in passing that this, of course, requires more planning by the teacher not less.)

In primary schools, many of these problems are likely to arise in the context of some cross-curricular enquiry. In secondary schools, for more of them the stimulus is likely to be something more obviously mathematical but it is also possible here to work across the curriculum either occasionally with other departments or in a more thorough-going way through reorganisation of the structure of the curriculum[4]. It is a fundamental part of genuine enquiry that issues may remain unresolved and problems may be unfinished or returned to after some considerable time.

Doing mathematics involves
- getting stuck … and keeping going
- having imaginative ideas
- asking yourself questions
- changing your minds
- making mistakes and using them to learn new things
- conjecturing
- being organised and systematic
- having a guess and then checking it out
- understanding and engaging with proof
- visualising
- describing, explaining and discussing your work
- using intuition
- devising examples
- looking for patterns and connections
- being willing to challenge yourself and others

Third, the content of what is learned needs to be thought about differently. The dominant metaphor in recent years has been 'coverage'. But coverage is "the wrong way to talk about how learning happens, and it fails to grasp the long (and sometimes arduous) process of studying, assimilating, and meaning-making"[5] that is required by students to develop a genuine understanding of mathematics.

This way of working requires that what has been learnt be noted and recorded after the event rather than before, with any 'gaps'[6] being addressed by in the planning of future starting points. But actually, mostly, I suggest, the content doesn't matter too much – if you can think mathematically, acquiring new mathematical knowledge is

generally pretty straightforward and you can do it when and if the need arises. Ray Gibbons, a passionate mathematics educator who devoted her life to trying to improve children's experience of learning the subject held a view rather like this. In a group conversation which took place as part of an historical exploration of a mathematics curriculum development project based in the Inner London Education Authority (https://smilemaths.wordpress.com/), she said:

"I don't really care, I don't think, what anybody knows at the end. What I care about is that they have learnt that the more you learn about things, the more exciting the world is, so they'll want to go on learning more."

The conversation was recorded when Ray was already in her nineties and reflected a lifetime's experience of teaching and of thinking about teaching and learning mathematics.

Fourth, the learning needs to be based on the development of all-attainment learning communities. In general, we co-construct mathematical knowledge with each other. In a learning community, each holds responsibility for the learning of all and understanding is understood as only being achieved when it is owned by all. This entails a shift of attention away from a focus on individual attainment. It offers a challenge to the experience of learning mathematics as isolating and competitive with students "unwilling to engage in this hierarchical game"[7]. It also has the effect of delegitimising the reproduction of existing inequalities through setting and other grouping practices and disabling some of the mechanisms which are used to sort, classify and label students.

Fundamental to building an effective learning community is a belief in and commitment to attainment for all. It requires a rejection of the 'common sense' notion that ability is a given, fixed. We may, perhaps, know what learners have already achieved, but we do not know what they might achieve in the future. Future achievement in a learning community is unpredicted (and essentially unpredictable) because it depends on what we do in the present[8].

Mathematics classrooms should be places of relational equity. This is a form of equity that is less concerned with equality of opportunity or of outcomes (though research suggests it significantly enhances both) and more concerned with how learners relate to, and act towards, one another. Students in such classrooms will learn to 'respect each other's differences [and] to listen to others who have a different opinion, perspective or experience'[9].

Fifth, the curriculum needs to respect the practical. This can be the applied but doesn't need to be.

Learning involves the hand, the heart and the head[10]. The practical, the hands-on, the concrete[11] are usually a source of pleasure and confidence, producing a positive emotional response which in turn provides both motivation and courage to seek abstraction, justification and proof. The head, the heart and the hand are best seen as interconnected and as always available ways of experiencing. Understanding begins with the enactive[12] – the concrete and material engagement with a concept in

which physical objects are observed or manipulated or the body itself[13] is used to make and experience phenomena – and is deepened and enriched by returning to it.

Sixth, the curriculum needs to be spacious and to exist in expansive time, not clock time. Clock time, the ticking of the mechanical clock, regulates and measures what we do and chops time up into ordered fragments. "Time becomes commodified: it is something fixed, something which can be 'saved' or 'wasted', something that can be 'invested', something that can be 'used up' – and something which is always already running out"[14].

Expansive time is generated by extended timescales, an acceptance of unfinishedness, a commitment to meaning-fullness and a broadening of spaces physical, experiential, and metaphorical. Spaciousness exists in spacious relationships with mathematics, between learners, between teacher and students and amongst teacher, students, and mathematics itself. It provides room to move one's mathematical elbows and to engage in dialogue.

Seventh, and by no means least, we need a mathematics curriculum that raises ethical and political concerns, that brings into view what is usually "put below the horizon"[15], that understands mathematics to be an historical and cultural artefact.

On the one hand, we need to explicitly acknowledge that mathematics does significant harm in the world. Many applications of mathematics contribute significantly to social harm. One example amongst thousands is that of the weapons owned by the wealthy and deployed through advanced computers against the poor, now creating almost certainly the greatest disparity ever between combatants[16]. Another is the algorithms used to predict who is likely to offend. In addition, more generally, mathematics can bring dehumanised thinking to social and ethical problems fostering ethics-free governance[17].

On the other, it can be used to lay bare injustices and structural inequalities and can contribute to an anti-racist, anti-classist, anti-sexist and anti-colonial curriculum.

Our students need to develop the democratic competences required to hold those in power to account. Given the ubiquitous presence of mathematics in political debate, as well as in technology and the instruments of government, it is clear that this must involve some level of mathematical understanding – to be able to interpret the mathematical information used in political debates, to have some sense of where this mathematical information comes from and how it is produced and the agendas by which it has been shaped, to question, challenge and interrogate it and to participate in formulating political solutions.

This is not to make mathematics political – it is already political because of its role in organising our society and our lives. Mathematics is used to take decisions that affect us, to have a direct though often invisible effect on our daily lives. Indeed, mathematics helps to hide the human role in making the decisions that shape the global consumer society and the environmental impact of these decisions. Our students not only need to be able to do mathematics, but also to be able to think critically with mathematics.

Some final comments

Teaching informed by these principles and values promotes learning and encourages the development of authoritative, confident learners. It also creates possibilities for addressing social justice in mathematics classrooms. This is because it privileges a sense of trust in oneself as an author of knowledge, as a member of a community with whom one is in solidarity and as someone who can challenge, critique and decide.

We need to work openly with learners and their families about what we are doing and why. We cannot assume that the meaning of our practices is transparent – there is evidence that not all learners easily find access to a curriculum like this and that the differences can be as a result of social positionings and therefore 'raced', classed and gendered. The Visible Mathematics Project[18] addresses these issues directly and explains strategies that can be used to open up the meaning and purposes of our pedagogies to our learners.

We need to overturn the metaphor of the curriculum and learning as things to be 'delivered', as commodities, the successful delivery of which can be easily measured. By extending the metaphor, Tony Brown asks us to consider the collateral damage concealed: "What is delivered, as might arrive in a supermarket delivery van, and what damage is done by the plastic wrapping that we barely noticed until our seas filled with plastic and we feared that it was a potential vector for Covid-19?"[19]. I suggest, as a start, the collateral includes unhappy children whose curiosity is denied and unhappy teachers whose creativity suffers the same fate. Perhaps instead of focusing on 'falling behind', we could notice where the kids are already ahead.

We need to allow both learners and teachers to be the major influence on what happens in schools. This idea, along with the others for which I have argued in this article, has happened before[20] and can happen again. To learn about and re-consider what has happened before is not empty nostalgia. Indeed, I argue that being cut off from our past makes it harder to envision a different future whereas blowing away the cobwebs helps strengthen our sense that things do not have to be as they currently are[21].

The experience of the pandemic has made teachers and learners challenge the status quo is fresh and liberating ways and to see more clearly than before the inequalities and injustices of current educational policies. But, in the current political context in schools – a very narrow and over prescribed curriculum with content simply to be remembered accompanied by a ruthless performativity agenda[22] – it is obvious that mathematics classrooms where teachers find themselves able to enact these values and principles are going to be phenomenally difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, we need to argue for them or something like them within the Labour Party, in our unions, in our schools and in other spaces to which we have access. And, on Monday morning, we need to find those small gaps, those hidden interstices which allow for tiny enactments, day by day, of this alternative curriculum, one which is "bigger, broader and braver"[23].

Hilary Povey

Notes

1   Solomon, Yvette (2007). Not belonging? What makes a functional learner identity in undergraduate mathematics? *Studies in Higher Education*, 32(1), 79–96.

2   Lave, Jean (1988). *Cognition in practice: Mind, mathematics and culture in everyday life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

3   Boaler, J. (2002). The development of disciplinary relaitonships: Knowledge, practice, and identity in mathematics classrooms. *Proceedings of the 26th Conference of the International Group for the Psychology of Mathematics Education*, Norwich. 2, 113–120.

4   For examples of what can be achieved, see p22f in Tunks, Kiri (2020) The world has changed – let's change the world. In Louise Regan and Ian Duckett (Eds.) *Reimagining Education*. Socialist Educational Association with Manifesto Press.

5   Taylor, Tim (2017). *A Beginner's Guide to Mantle of the Expert: A transformative approach to Education*. Singular Publishing. Exploration – A metaphor for curriculum study | Mantle of the Expert

6   'Gaps' and the associated 'catch-up' are both problematic concepts as currently framed because they belong in a discourse that conceives of education as focused on the individual and of the curriculum as a race to be run (and won). If we think of understanding as something that a group or a community does and of the curriculum as, say, a garden to be explored, these concepts no longer have a function.

7   Nardi, Elena, & Steward, Susan (2003). Is mathematics T.I.R.E.D? A profile of quiet disaffection in the secondary mathematics classroom. *British Education Research Journal*, 29(3), 345–367.

8   I am grateful to Patrick Yarker for this insight.

9   Boaler, Jo (2008). Promoting relational equity' and high mathematics achievement through an innovative mixed-ability approach. *British Educational Research Journal*, 34(2), 167-194.

10   Pestalozzi, Johann (1801/1894). *How Gertrude teaches her children*. London: Swann Sonnenschein.

11   See Mathematics in the Making (MiMa) for some ideas IMA_ebook_EN__VFinal_compact.pdf

12   Bruner, Jerome (1966). *Toward a Theory of Instruction*. Harvard University Press.

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Build back different: an assessment model fit for a bigger, broader and braver curriculum

As we saw last summer, between the ham-fisted incompetence of the Conservative government and the hapless bungling of the Ofqual leadership team, getting assessment right is crucial. As a school governor I have heard a lot about the "recovery curriculum" recently and as a trade unionist I've read a good deal about the "emergency curriculum" — but what I'm really interested in as a socialist educator is a curriculum that paves an alternative road out of this pandemic that builds for a different and better future. A meaningful assessment for learning can form the basis of a learning curriculum. A form of assessment that supports learning is the key to building a new curriculum that serves our young people. We want model of assessment that serves the curriculum and is no longer separated from it.

Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State for Education, has said he was placing his trust in 'teachers not algorithms' in cancelling exams. While this rhetoric is welcome what is really required is assurance that this sudden desire to trust teachers and hand over the process to you is not a smokescreen which leads to the Government pointing the finger of blame at the profession come results day. A robust and fair assessment process is a pre-requisite for a joined up curriculum where learning and assessment are hand in hand. Assessment for learning supports practitioners and helps them focus on:

- the learner and learning and builds on formative learning assessment;
- used by teachers on an ongoing basis to help their learners achieve to the
- best of their abilities and is a very important part of the learning process

Yet, after months of dithering and conflicting messages, the government's latest noises on trust in teacher grading look likely to put them in the firing line[1].When the secretary of state announced exams would be cancelled this year, he said he wanted to place his trust in teachers. In September 2020, The Chartered College of Teaching argued for a year of teacher assessment supported by trained "lead assessors". The proposal offered a fighting chance to ensure the grading process would be reliably informed by teachers, working in close harness with exam boards to create centre-based outcomes. The offer was ignored, but it would have been a start.

Now, having insisted throughout the autumn that exams would not be affected by the pandemic, politicians faced with exam cancellation can see the spectre of last summer's debacle appearing again. Their solution? Soundbites of "trust teachers, not algorithms" and a sudden keenness to hand the process over to the profession. But is this 'trust' anything more than a smokescreen?

Teachers want to be 'trusted', and the government rhetoric sounds persuasive. The difficulty comes when trying to bridge the gap between the reality of how well students are doing now and Ofqual's suggestion that teachers should not "decide the grade a student might have achieved had the pandemic not occurred". This is hugely problematic.

While at first glance the consultation appears to be handing trust to teachers, what emerges is a preference for test materials over teacher assessment. And while the consultation proposes that final assessments take place as late as possible to mitigate learning loss and ensure as much curriculum coverage as possible, the final assessment, grade allocation and appeals processes are work-heavy and time-poor.

Economics, history, pedagogy and assessment

Government-sponsored generic skills initiatives, from common skills to core skills to key skills, the dabbling in essential skills and, most recently functional skills, relate to a narrow vocational curriculum and the assessment models that have accompanied them, but there have been occasions (in the mid-90s and again with the Tomlinson Report, 2004) when a broader and more meaningful wider curriculum has attempted to cross the academic/vocational divide and a genuine learning curriculum has seen the light of day.

The economic imperative has raised broader educational and social questions. It is not just vocational training that people should receive. They have a right to be educated more broadly. Once again that might be seen purely in economic terms. How else can people experience fulfilment as human beings? Questions like this are as vital as ever, perhaps more so. Successive governments have failed to address the skills gap. Similarly, the genuine assessment for learning models that have not just been state-sponsored assessment objectives sought to foster a more progressive curriculum, which matched with both the appropriate skills and attitudes and the appropriate learning objectives in order to enable pupils to develop a well-considered personal and critical response.

Assessment for a bigger curriculum

Armed with tools, a teacher can enhance the learning experience in ways that have a positive impact on teaching and learning styles and develop the curriculum in its broadest sense.

Ever since I can remember there have been problems about the assessment of generic skills in vocational education, be it liberal education; general studies; communication skills; general and communication studies; social and life skills; people and communication and, more recently, functional skills. So why assess them? Why not just develop them when assessment for learning isn't about grading or certifying and is essentially feedback for learners?

If there is nothing new about the problematic nature of assessing these transferable skills — supposedly a prerequisite for a competitive British industrial and service workforce — why the commotion on the pages of the education press and beyond? Perhaps it is because now, these "core" skills are, for the first time, making an impact on schools and traditional academia as well as vocational further education.

There were certainly a number of false starts and missed opportunities under Labour, but a decade of coalition and Tory governments has so narrowed our curriculum that educators now bandy the terms "recovery" and "emergency" curriculum when what we need to be doing is building a different and more meaningful skills-based curriculum with

transferable skills like communication, teamwork, problem-solving and learning development as its spine, community and care as well as employability in its stomach and humanity and entitlement as its heart and pulse.

A bolder model for assessment

This bigger, broader and braver curriculum will need an equally bold and dynamic model of assessment to match it.

There are indications that the government is attempting to use the crisis to impose so called 'traditional teaching methods'. Teachers should still be encouraged to use a variety of pedagogical approaches, safely, including collaborative ways of learning, to meet the needs of their pupils.

It also follows that examinations will need to change. Clearly there is no case for holding baseline assessments this year and none for re-instating any external primary testing in 2021. "Assessment", says Terry Wrigley "should be a close companion to teaching. Its key purpose is to see whether the intentions of curriculum are bearing fruit in our students' learning and development"[2]. Instead, government should take the opportunity to develop an entirely different approach to assessment. This, Wrigley argues[3] will improve achievement for all by reducing teaching to the test and introducing more learning related to real situations. The use of portfolios with a sample chosen by the learner, with guidance is a further progressive development in terms of assessment, as is learners having some input as to which methods of assessment are employed.

For the next two years at least, it will be impossible to simply return to GCSE and A level examinations in their old form – even if that were desirable. Pupils' experiences will have been too varied and time lost too significant for that to be possible. But schools will need to know well before pupils return to school just what will be expected of them and their pupils in summer 2021 and 2022 at the least. Seriously out of the box thinking will be needed to ensure that these cohorts are not disadvantaged. Allowing schools to opt out of parts of specifications as is being proposed in English GCSE should be fully explored rather than a return to old form GCSE and A-level . Employers and higher education may well have to adjust their expectations as well.

A fresh approach to assessment

In terms of the other arguments in favour of exams they are not strong and I am not proposing a system of no examination or assessment as there is of course still a role for exams just ones created, administered, assessed and then peer reviewed by serving teachers. There were plenty of things wrong with the UK's assessment regime before he pandemic and these have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Many of the issues would be addressed by a unified approach to learning and assessment. A number of questions need to be addressed, such as what is wrong with the current assessment system? Why did Covid cause a breakdown that exposed the inherent problems more fully? What kind of alternatives exist in the wider world context?

There also needs to be political proposals for an interim system which would be valid

for and move in the direction of a future formative assessment or assessment learning.

The current "standardised" GCSEs and A Levels work they are hardly fair or effective systems. The evidence of the stress caused by them is legion, British students are the most over tested in Europe and rates of poor mental health and even suicide are rising steadily linked to exam overload at the end of two years of "crammed" study. The whole experience of too many students in too many schools is blighted by an exam factory mentality where all efforts throughout schooling are geared towards passing a test rather than any more humane or enriching purpose. It is not just the stress, but the sheer waste of time rehearsing for what 'might come up'. Teacher assessment based on a range of evidence, with a test in one or two subjects to moderate the results, would be much more effective. It is a cruel irony given how the ease of understanding an exam score is often cited as a benefit of the system that very few outside education fully understand the "standardisation" process that goes into our standardised exams. From my experience of trying to explain this to both parents and students when they ask the common question of what grade I predict come exam time the sheer unfairness and also inexpert nature of the process comes through. Most people assume simple quantities pass marks for exams exist and if a student surpasses a certain number of marks they get a corresponding grade. They don't. The point at which grades are allocated is worked out through a bizarre statistical process predicated on the logic that certain numbers of children will achieve certain grades and then working out what actual exam marks equate to grades so as to enable the specified number of children to achieve them. Or not as the case is for many children who fall on the wrong side of the grading tracks. The only commonly understood element of this is that grade boundaries shift in relation to how well a cohort performs, if there is strong performance across the board up the grad boundaries go and vice versa. There is much more that can be said of this system but for our purpose here it is clearly not simple and more importantly it is clearly no more "scientific" than the judgment of a skilled educator.

Building back different: a portfolio approach to assessment

There is more to assessment than seeing if the requirements for achieving a qualification have been met. Formative assessment is the assessment used by teachers on an ongoing basis to help their learners achieve to the best of their abilities and is a very important part of the learning process.

In contrast, summative assessment takes place on completion of a topic or unit and often contributes to the grading and assessment of a qualification. Assessment for learning supports practitioners and helps them focus on the learner and learning in individual classroom sessions. It also shows how one of the Assessment for Learning strategy's principal themes, quality feedback, can be used to help learners progress. Many teachers have expressed concern in recent years that the introduction of burdensome assessment requirements detracts from effective classroom practice and prevents them meeting learners' needs. The purpose of this publication is to help teachers develop Assessment for learning strategies to:

● improve classroom practice

● contribute to the personalised learning agenda, where learners are empowered to take an active part in their own learning

● develop the confidence of learners to undertake peer and self-assessment.

Portfolios would require more, not -as critics of formative assessment and assessment for learning often argue – less, as critics often argue rigour than exams. A portfolio assessment system that contributed two-thirds of the marks towards a student's overall grade would be another positive step towards assessment for learning. Teachers would need to ensure that they were familiar with all the requirements for portfolio work. This includes the administration that teachers need to do to carry out the work, as well as the evidence that students' need to produce. Key administrative points for teachers and lecturers are:

● matches the unit specification requirements so that students who complete the assignment have produced the evidence required;

● provides opportunities for students to demonstrate the knowledge, understanding and skills required to achieve across the full range of marks available;

● requires students to undertake a range of activities reflecting the teaching and learning styles they have experienced during the course;

● helping students to achieve on portfolio work[4].

There is, of course, the danger that a portfolio approach to assessment being overly bureaucratic and rigid. Another possibility is to include presentations to a real audience.

Teachers and lecturers can adopt a number of strategies to help students achieve to their full potential on the portfolio work. These include:

● planning and carrying out assessment

● using induction sessions and activities to make students familiar with the type of work they will have to produce and how it will be assessed;

● giving students' practice at producing the types of evidence needed for their portfolio before they carry out the work that will be marked for assessment;

● discussing the unit specification requirements when students start each piece of portfolio work, so that they understand exactly what they have to produce;

● explaining the types of skills and evidence students need to show to achieve the higher marks and illustrating this with examples;

● making sure activities have interim deadlines to enable teachers and lecturers to check progress;

● setting activities for the portfolio evidence (by giving project briefs, guidance or assignments) that make the tasks interesting and varied so that students have to carry out a range of activities, not just desk-based work;

● giving written and oral feedback on the way students tackle their work, to ensure that they focus on what is needed, not on peripheral activities.

Ian Duckett

Notes

1   Dame Alison Peacock, 'A sudden desire to trust teachers hints at a poisoned chalice' *Schools Week*, 22 January 2021
2   Terry Wrigley, *Beyond the exam factory: alternatives to high-stakes testing, More Than a Score*, 2017
3   Terry Wrigley, *The Politics of Curriculum in Schools,* The Centre for Labour and Social Studies (Class), 2014
4   Cheryl Jones, *Assessment for Learning,* Learning and Skills Development Agency, 2005

From face-to-face to fully online deliveries: teaching and learning for all?

Introduction

This chapter aims to delineate the movement of conventional face-to-face (F-t-F) to fully online teaching and learning from three perspectives. The first relates to the global pandemic, the second, the Further Education (FE) sector, and the third, asks the question how this major shift in pedagogy (teaching and learning) affects those who are disadvantaged.

I want to argue that teaching and learning from conventional programmes to fully online ones are different. Teaching and learning from online programmes have different pedagogy, which I will call 'Activity Based Pedagogy' (ABP). If this is the case, then our approach to teaching, learning and curriculum development requires different formulation.

The Covid-19 pandemic has meant that we are more reliant on digital technologies as a result of new ways of working, learning and living, such as using our homes as working, learning and living spaces. These new ways offer teachers and learners a chance to reassess our teaching and learning.

The FE sector offers a rich tapestry of pedagogic settings from FE colleges, voluntary and community sector organisations, commercial organisations, independent training providers, adult and community learning providers, industry, specialist colleges and other public-sector organisations (Education and Training Foundation, 2014). Of the programmes on offer, over 70 per cent are work or occupation-related (Loo, 2019).

One of the characteristics of this sector is inclusivity, which provides opportunities for people from compulsory sectors to further their learning. In this regard, widening participation (WP) of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds is prominent in the pursuit of social equity and justice in this sector (Loo, 2019).

The chapter relies on empirical data from two projects. The first one refers to a study of 21 teachers of occupational programmes. It aimed to study teaching knowledge and its application to pedagogic contexts (Loo, 2018). The findings from the seven FE-related teachers are used. The second study consisted of seven fully online learners from a doctoral programme and aimed to understand the learners' perspectives of online research. Both projects used questionnaires and interviews. The relevant findings are used in this chapter. Also, I will refer to my teaching experiences of conventional and fully online programmes, and with the latter, over nine years.

The structure of this chapter, after this introduction, includes some salient characteristics of conventional and fully online deliveries, the relevance of a fully online programme from the perspectives of programme, learning and teaching, and some thoughts about the new online pedagogy for disadvantaged learners.

Is traditional teaching and learning the same as fully online one?

Let me illustrate the two contrasting styles of conventional and fully online offers. Any programme can be divided into two parts: knowledge acquisition ('what') and application ('how') (Bernstein, 1996).

An example of a face-to-face/traditional programme is the BTEC Level 3 in travel and tourism. It has modules like Aviation Geography and Terminology. This module offers students with the knowledge, understanding and skills about airline routes, airport and flight information, climate, and health (Loo, 2018). A possible three-hour session might cover aspects of "the basic aviation language used throughout the industry by referring to three-letter codes, airline codes, phonetic alphabet and frequently used terminology...Learners will have an opportunity to learn about health issues related to air travel, health, climate and entry and exit requirements of global destinations" (Loo, 2018, p. 87). Its application could then follow this knowledge acquisition part.

Knowledge acquisition in a fully online offer may be asynchronous, and the learners can access the relevant literature on the principles concerning the three-letter codes, airline codes, etc. as with the conventional programme. The 'acquisition' sources might be in various forms such as texts, videos, etc. as in the traditional approach. But this knowledge acquisition may occur over a more extended period of a week, and not within a three-hour session with the conventional offer. The knowledge application part might take place in the next week. Explicit instructions are given to the learners beforehand, such as research into the aviation language. The application part might include synchronous online discussion via platforms like Collaborate or Zoom to present the learners' (individual or collaborative) findings.

The above examples illustrated the essential differences between the two teaching modes. The traditional face-to-face method might use a student-centred social constructivist learning theory where the emphasis is on the learner and using her/his know-how to build on the content and then apply the new knowledge to reinforce their understanding. Another learning theory, such as behaviourism would take a different teaching approach. The focus is on the assessment of the content [for an overview of the significant learning theories, please access: https://www.academia.edu/1745876/Theories_of_Learning_-_a_comprehensive_image_of_the_major_theories_and_their_possible_connections]. The sequencing of knowledge acquisition and application is still the same on the fully online teaching approach.

There are four areas for consideration in comparing the online programme with the traditional offer. These are findings from the project of online research. One is the time for reflection to enable a more insightful response to activity as accorded in the online version. Two is the facility to have an asynchronous approach to critique readings, concepts, and tasks. Asynchronous may mean teaching and learning may not occur at the same time. So, learners can pace their learning to juggle their studying, working and private lives. Pedagogic interactions such as discussions and reflections could be posted in a Discussion Forum in an online offer. Three is a relatively cheap way to communicate with participants (deliverers and learners) who may be located in different countries with different time zones. Four is the added functionality through various media using digital technologies and enabled individual's flexibility and pacing of their learning (such as employing relevant

learning strategies in individualized periods). In synchronous teaching, simultaneous interactions could occur via Collaborate or similar digital platforms.

The participants felt that they needed to be motivated and directed in their contexts of work. The participants' backgrounds, in this online study, vary in their work settings and geographical locations. The comment by participant M encapsulated the above points: "Online learning is for mature, disciplined and independent learners who can juggle academic, work and life experiences." This simple statement has resonances for stakeholders such as learners, deliverers, programme managers, institutional management, and policymakers.

From the above illustrations, one might notice the pacing of the two delivery modes is different: three-hours and two weeks. The sequencing might be the same as both delivery modes use the acquisition and application of new knowledge. However, the emphasis might be different—the traditional approach centres on the acquisition, whereas the online, application. The learning process in the online mode is on applying the know-how and that the acquiring aspect is almost tangential to the activity. Of course, the learner needs to acquire and understand the content before using it to the learner's specific activity. Thus, the application is not generic but tailored to the structure of the chosen topic, locations, needs of the learners, etc. The online mode focuses on the activity, i.e. application/implementation of new knowledge. One may call this Activity Based Pedagogy (ABP).

In contrast, the traditional style is on the learners' learning of the new content and scaffolding via her/his past know-how (social constructivism). The above illustrations showed that we should view online teaching and learning differently to face-to-face mode. The ABP pedagogy offers new ways of constructing education for delivery staff and learning for learners. So far, I have looked at two delivery modes from two ends of the pedagogic spectrum. However, for teaching institutions moving to a halfway house of 'mixed-mode or blended' delivery mode (Figure 1) is another matter, perhaps one that is dependent on the educational contexts. It is not the appropriate space for this chapter to discuss this hybrid programme. But what is relevant is to flag up some implications for ABP pedagogy in the next section.

Figure 1 Programme, delivery mode and pedagogy

Programme	Campus	Hybrid	Online
Delivery mode	Face to face	A mixed-mode delivery which might be classified as 'more of the same' digital technologies and move towards fully online provision	Fully online approach tht is suppoorted by digital technologies
Pedagogy	Student-centred social constructivism	A pedagogic sprectrum of 'more of the same using digital technologies and Move towards fully online	Activity Based Pedagogy (ABP)

What can a fully online programme offer?

The previous section highlighted some characteristics for fully online delivery and that this educational activity should not be viewed as merely digitalizing conventional delivery: 'hybrid'. Also, the remark by participant M is insightful with specific reference to disadvantaged learners in FE. I will discuss the findings under three themes of programme, learning and teaching.

Programme   Curriculum development and structure of the fully online programme are pivotal to learning and teaching. The specifications/contents are crucial in helping the deliverers translate them into sessional activities. From the two types of conventional and online offers, the contents may not be too affected. What is relevant is to bear in mind the disadvantaged learners' needs. For example, there may require additional learning support before and during the programme. So, in planning the sessional activities, these requirements need to be factored in.

   The delivery of the activities from the specifications requires thought in setting up relevant materials for knowledge acquisition. These may include texts, videos, educational gaming software, etc. Digital platforms, as technological support may consist of interactive systems such as Collaborate, Skype, MTeams, Zoom, and Discussion Forums. These could be used to support pedagogic interactions, either synchronously or asynchronously. Digital' face-to-face' opportunities are helpful, as humans require interactivity. Learners may find the fully online offers' quiet', 'remote' and 'unsupported'. These support systems would, hopefully, in time, enable learners to be more independent learners. 'Quiet' means that a learner is learning by her/himself and occurs al in the mind with human interaction. Learners may feel cut-off from others and this individualized learning may feel remote from other learners on the same programme. To support their learning, collaborative and synchronous activities, and tutorial support would create learning frameworks and learning communities to provide structures for these learners (Huang, 2002).

Learning   Learners (with specific learning requirements) need to 'acclimatise' (e.g. a higher level of linguistic skills) to this online mode. They also require a period of adjustment from the traditional approach, support and a realignment of educational perceptions and attitudes. An example is an increasing reliance on text-based reading and learning from sources. Also, there may be more text-oriented application such as report writing, reflective logs, presentation, etc. Those learners with writing issues require support to get them up to speed for this online learning. Literacy/Writing centres in FE institutions could support these learners. Accessing, collating and identifying relevant and credible literature sources may require support, to begin with. Time management ability needs to be taught and managed at the beginning to enable them to be independent learners as participant M remarked that online learning was for 'mature, disciplined and independent learners'. FE institutions also need to offer technical support as learners are in varied locations. Thus, initial and ongoing support systems need to be in place for these disadvantaged learners. Having access to a

computer would be useful (Cellan-Jones (2020), and England could learn from so-called 'less developed' countries like Estonia in this global pandemic times (Weale, 2020). Of course, less privileged learners also have wider socio-cultural deprivations, and FE institutions cannot be the only support structure available to them. To illustrate the extent of poverty, after a decade of austerity in this country, Unicef is feeding our hungry young people for the first time in its 70-year history (Storer, 2020). This illustration highlights the depth of deprivation some sections of the society have to negotiate in their daily lives regarding their housing, jobs, benefit claims and necessities of life. Indeed, survival is the order of the day, and learning is a privilege.

Teaching Online delivery involves different educational activities and with different emphasis. In a sense, they require a more in-depth understanding of the topic and the ability to monitor, guide and resolve real-world situations that are generated by the learners (often with learning needs) over the extended duration. This teaching acclimatization by deliverers needs a more nuanced and more in-depth understanding of the discipline/subject, and the ability to guide and relate first principles to specific learning contexts via activities. Similarly, these cognitive functionalities require professional development and different pedagogic mindsets. Ultimately, this may involve more input time with implications for resource allocation (not to mention the setting up of the online mode and its testing procedures, etc.) and continuous professional development.

Using the earlier example of learners of the BTEC Level 3 in travel and tourism, the programme needs to reflect the needs of the disadvantaged learners such as a more comprehensive or more intensive approach to support them in engaging with the subject. The programme offers a steeper learning curve than more privilege learners, as the latter cohort would have more extensive travel experiences. So, they would have direct exposure to the names of locations, airports, airlines, etc., where the three-letter codes of airports and airlines are based. The disadvantaged cohort not having the perceived 'social and cultural capitals' would need additional support in their learning and should be reflected in the curriculum. This configuration affects teaching regarding the breadth and duration of coverage for each part of the curriculum. Support structures need to be in place before and during the programme. These may take the forms of broader knowledge acquisition of materials, a detailed listing of content, and direct experiences of the industry to level the learning field to those privileged peers.

For the above strategies to work, they require the support (financially and contractually) of management and policymakers.

Some thoughts about the Activity Based Pedagogy of online delivery
In this chapter, I have argued that online programmes require a different pedagogic approach because the emphasis is on applying newly acquired knowledge. This ABP pedagogic concept is different from conventional pedagogy because of more time for reflection, facility for asynchronous delivery, relatively cheap way of communicating with international learners, and greater functionality using technologies.

For disadvantaged learners, they require additional support from programme development, learning and teaching dimensions. These support systems will facilitate the students to become more mature, disciplined, and independent learners.

Dr Sai Loo

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Appendix
SEA Curriculum Statement

Curriculum Principles
SEA Curriculum and Assessment Working Group 2020/21

As socialists we acknowledge that the current English curriculum as laid down in National curriculum documentation is designed to reinforce existing power structures in society and at the same time equip learners for their future economic role within it.

The English National Curriculum is unusual in that its aims are not seen in terms of the attributes a learner will develop as a result of experiencing it. Indeed, it's doubtful whether it even prepares the majority of pupils for their role in the economy. Instead, it catalogues the knowledge pupils must learn i.e. what, in the view of its designers, is the 'best that has been thought and said'.

Most other jurisdictions, including the other three in the UK, see curriculum aims in terms of the qualities, knowledge and skills learners will acquire to operate effectively as citizens and gain worthwhile employment. These aspects usually include soft skills such as creativity and problem solving as well as awareness of rights and responsibilities, and respect for individual differences. This approach is better and has widespread support including from employers and the centre right.

To support these curriculum aims, we need a meaningful assessment for learning. A form of assessment that supports learning is the key to building a new curriculum that serves our young people. We want a model of assessment that serves the whole curriculum and is no longer separated from the learning process.

We would want to go further. Our aims for the curriculum are:

● *We want to see young adults who have the skills, knowledge and personal qualities to:*

● Ensure their personal wellbeing – this would include physical and mental health, social and emotional well-being including friendships and relationships, personal autonomy and creativity and the practical aspects of life including managing money, entering employment and living independently;

● Make a positive contribution to society – this would include contributing in their roles as a citizen and a member of civic society and through a contribution to the economic well-being of the country;

● Appreciate and respect the contributions of a range of cultures to human experience, understand the perspective of those who have experienced oppression and colonisation and know that the particular knowledge and cultural experiences they bring to education will be respected;

● Are willing to contribute to solutions to global problems such as tackling racism and decolonisation, climate change and poverty;

● Are aware that the economy and society are open to change and that there are

alternative ways of organising them;

● Are able to choose areas of study to focus on in more depth depending on their interests in the upper secondary phase;

● Achieve their full potential in both their personal life and in their contribution to society.

In order to do these things, young adults need:

● A high level of key skills including literacy, numeracy and the ability to engage with the digital world, they understand, the intention behind and veracity of, information posted on line;

● Important areas of knowledge – including a grounding in science and scientific method, an understanding of how human society is organised, has evolved and interacts with the physical environment and the creative and artistic achievements of people now and in the past; When they learn in subjects they acquire skills as well as knowledge e.g. they learn to act as historians as well as learn history or they express themselves as artists as well as learning about art;

● Critical thinking skills and competence to communicate and express their ideas effectively through a variety of media;

● An understanding of the key characteristics of British and global society including the values of democracy and social justice, respecting diversity, the world of work and the challenges of sustainability;

● Practical and technical capability in a wide range of contexts and the opportunity to develop their own creativity;

● The ability to analyse and solve problems, to empathise with and work collaboratively with others and to understand and meet appropriate expectations;

● To know about the opportunities, open to them both in education and employment and to understand how they can access them;

● The motivation and ability to go on learning throughout life and to meet the challenges posed by an age of rapid change and longer life expectancy.

SEA Curriculum and Assessment Working Group

John Bolt
Valerie Coultas
Ian Duckett
Mel Griffiths
Ken Jones
Eddie Playfair
James Whiting

Biographies

Patrick Ainley was Professor of Training and Education at the University of Greenwich School of Education and Training (as once was), previously teaching in schools, FE and HE.

Dr Martin Allen has worked in secondary, post-16 and higher education and been active in the National Union of Teachers. He has published widely on the relationship between education, skills and employment.

Paul Atkin is a retired primary school teacher. He is PEO of Brent North Labour Party, convenes the NEU Climate Change Network and edits the *Greener Jobs Alliance Newsletter.*

Dr Valerie Coultas is the author of *Constructive Talk in Challenging Classrooms* (2007). She taught in six London comprehensive schools, and was a Head of English in two schools, before becoming a teacher educator at Kingston University. She is the joint Chair of the National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE) Multicultural Diversity Committee.

Ian Duckett was a teacher and head of an alternative education provision in London. He is currently a teacher and school improvement partner in Norwich, a member of National Executive Committee of Socialist Educational Association and an executive committee member of Norfolk NEU. Ian co-edited the SEA's previous publication, *Reimagining Education* (2020).

Afzal Khan was elected as Labour MP for Manchester Gorton in 2017, and currently serves as Shadow Deputy Leader of the House of Commons. Afzal was born in Pakistan and moved to the UK in 1971 when he was adopted out of poverty as a child. Afzal understands the vital role education plays in setting a course for children's futures, and he is committed to being a strong voice in Parliament for the young people he represents.

Gawain Little is a primary school teacher in Norfolk and member of the NEU National Executive.

Dr Sai Loo is an academic at UCL Institute of Education, University College London, and an author and editor of research monographs. Having published seven monographs with Routledge, his eighth one will be with Springer. His most recent publications are *Teachers and Teaching in Vocational and Professional Education* (2018) and *Professional Development of Teacher Educators in Further Education: Pathways, Knowledge, Identities and Vocationalism* (2020).

Alyson Malach is a committed Further Education educator/manager and long-standing lifelong learning leaders, and an established EDI guru. Alyson's background in teaching and management was gained in Manchester City Council Lifelong Learning education, Further Education and Sixth Form Colleges, including the field of Special Educational Needs. Alyson was a research and development officer for NIACE in the field of race and equality and she has developed her portfolio of work to include teacher

education, work with disadvantaged groups, community cohesion and anti-racist stratifies for change. She is the author of several publications and articles on education and equality. She considers her most significant publication to be *Colour Blind,* which was published by NIACE. Alyson is currently Director of Equality and Diversity UK (www.equalityanddiversity.co.uk)

Warwick Mansell is a freelance education journalist and founder of the investigative website educationuncovered.co.uk

Hilary Povey worked for the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) for a number of years as a secondary school teacher, curriculum designer, advisory teacher and Director of the Smile project before joining Sheffield Hallam University where she is now Professor Emerita of Mathematics Education. Her research centres on social justice issues in mathematics education.

Louise Regan was national president of the NUT/NEU. She is currently national officer for membership and equality. She is also joint editor of the SEA bulletin *Education Politics.* She is a primary teacher.

James Whiting was a secondary drama teacher in London and a senior leader in two schools, specialising in the curriculum for the 14 to 19 phase, also working for Hounslow local authority. He is General Secretary of the SEA.

Terry Wrigley is a Visiting Research Fellow, Manchester Metropolitan University and editor of the journal, *Improving Schools*. He is the author of numerous articles and books on education.

What is the Socialist Educational Association?

The Socialist Educational Association (SEA) is the only educational organisation affiliated to the Labour Party. We believe that education should be based on equality, democracy and cooperation – not competition. We work with the Labour Party to develop policy to further these ideals but our work is not confined to the Labour Party

Labour now promises to:

● End the academies programme, abolish Ofsted and high stakes testing

● Bring all schools and central services back to democratic properly funded local authorities.

● End deregulation, privatisation and under-funding of our public services.

How does the SEA organise?

● We discuss alternatives to the Tory narrow test-driven curriculum that is currently stifling our schools and colleges.

● We show how another system is possible. We develop alternative policies for teaching, learning and assessment.

● We campaign with unions, parents and other groups to resist the damage that the Tories cause.

● We oppose privatisation and casualisation of staff in school, college or university

How do I find out more?

Go to www.socialisteducationalassociation.org to:-

● Find out about news and events

● Read editions of our journal *Education Politics*

How do I join?

Membership is open to all with an interest in Lifelong Learning.

Fill in the membership form at the back of this pamphlet or join via our website.

The SEA has active branches across England, as well as SEA Cymru, our Welsh branch, which organise their own programme of events.

SOCIALIST EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION - MEMBERSHIP FORM

Affiliated to the Labour Party   www.socialisteducation.org.uk

I WANT TO JOIN / REJOIN THE SEA AND PAY THE FOLLOWING SUBSCRIPTION —

Single: Waged £25 ☐ or Unwaged £12 ☐   **Couple**: Waged £35 ☐ or Unwaged £18 ☐

DECLARATION: (please tick one):   I am already a member of the Labour Party ☐

Or I am <u>not</u> a member of another political party (and therefore eligible to join the SEA) ☐

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> **Please complete and sign this form and send it to:**
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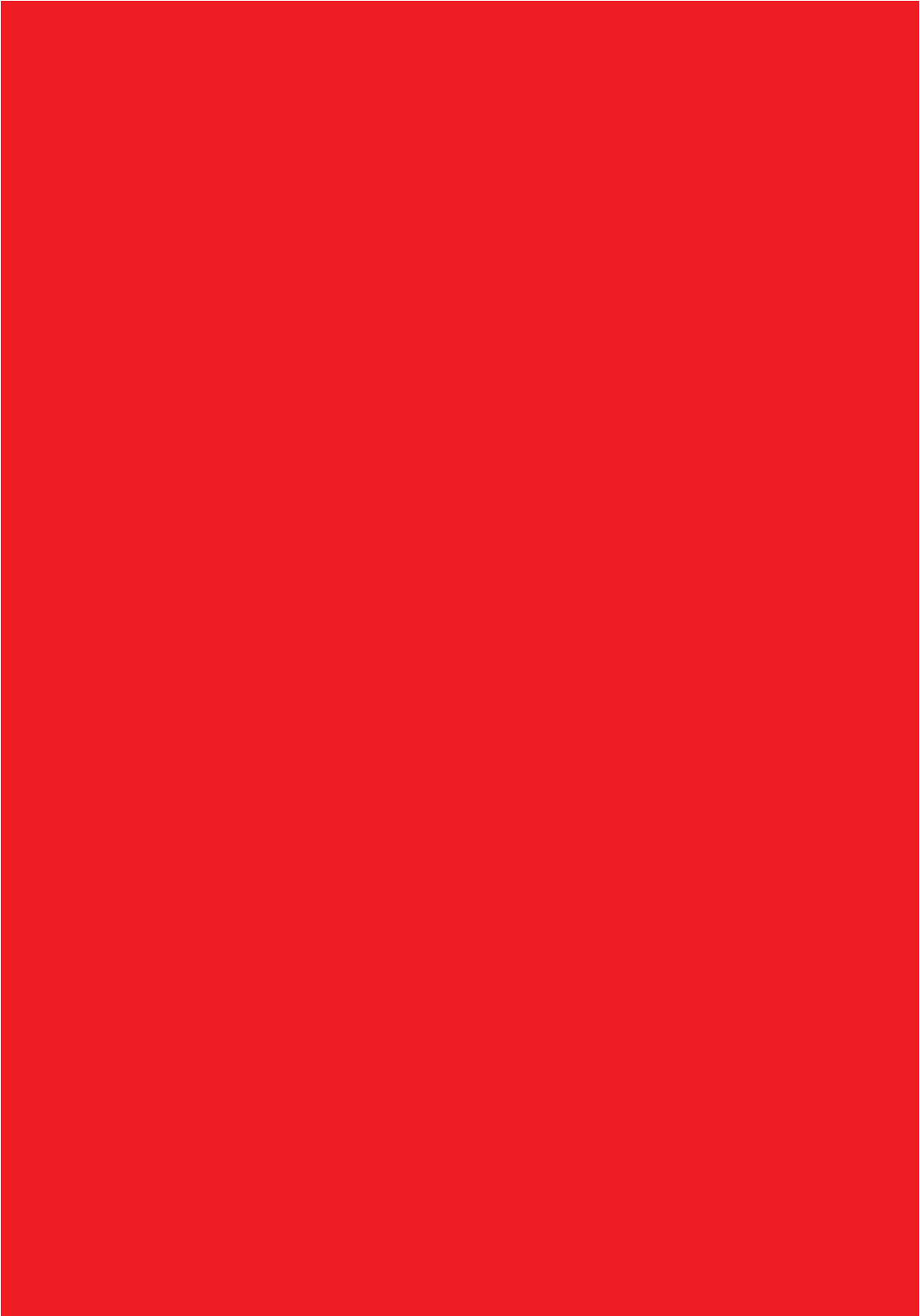c/o Unity Trust Bank PLC, Nine Brindleyplace, Birmingham B1 2HB

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manifesto

SOCIALIST EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION · SEA

Reimagining Education
Curriculum and Assessment

This second book in the SEA's series *Reimagining Education* focusses on the curriculum and assessment. The validity of the current system of testing against a narrow curriculum is challenged within education and shown as unfit for a modern world by the Covid-19 pandemic. No child should be assessed as a failure and the SEA exists to frame a modern education policy that serves to nurture every child's full potential.

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