

# With a Little Help From My Friends



Reflections from longer careers

Edited by Chris Chivers

Dedication.

To all those who have made and still make my life as good as it is.

“What a wonderful world”. Louis Armstrong

### **“Book” description**

A collection of personal insights that illuminate many different aspects of the complex nature of education, especially as it has unfolded through individual careers over the past forty years.

Each narrative brings to life the realities, the challenges and the pleasures of teaching and management.

Some reflections unpick the changes that have impacted on the education system during that time, both the positive and the less useful initiatives. Others take a long view and consider what they have learned as a result of a career in teaching.

There should be something for teachers at whatever stage in their career. Some will read and reminisce about their career, some will think of their own school days.

No-one has talked of “the good old days”. There will have been both good and bad days within a long career. The point is that each of the contributors worked through the bad, as the good always triumphs.

This can be as simple as a child’s smile.

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Nb. Title picture commentaries are taken from an earlier blog project, 1000 years of experience.

## **Introduction**

This started as a project to put together a book that sought to draw lessons from extended careers. Having experienced them moment of pride, then of panic, as, having decided to ask colleagues to help, the complexity of the project took hold.

As my role was a combination of contribute and edit contributions from a range of others, this created another layer of issues, of whom to contact and how to phrase the request, knowing that every single one of the potential contributors would be busy, with work, family and other writing commitments.

The title of the book being based on the reflections of older members of the teaching profession, this narrowed down the potential group somewhat, but there was always the possibility of error, as anonymous Twitter pictures and personal biographies can belie the fact that a younger person might be acting a little older. I went for Twitter links, as this would give a greater geographical coverage. I was also concerned to make sure that there was a possible 50:50 male, female split, and Primary-Secondary views. It seems very easy to cause concern these days within education circles. I may not have completely succeeded in this area.

In drawing up a potential contents list, I was concerned to offer every contributor as much scope as possible, while still keeping to some kind of narrative. The aim was to allow for a spectrum of views, not just an editor's choice of contributors who would follow a party line. In fact the form of the book changed from the original format, as contributors were exceptionally generous with their time and thoughts.

In seeking to cover educational experience over the past forty years, I am aware that we will only scratch the surface within this book and it is wholly based on personal experience. It does not seek to justify an approach through academic means.

Others would have a different perspective to offer and I can see the potential for geographical, inner-city or country, or phase specific, Primary, Secondary follow up books.

So with grateful thanks to each and every one of the contributors, I offer an insight into the thought processes that have taken each contributor through substantial careers, together totalling around five hundred years. Every contributor has been named and their Twitter "handle" given. Chapters unnamed are my own.

I hope that the voice of each contributor has been allowed to come through as they intended and that their reflections will allow the reader to consider their own situation, however long they have been teaching. To have been a teacher is, and always will be, a privilege. To be a part of shaping minds that will outlive our own lives ensures continuity, but also enables each of us to live on in memory.

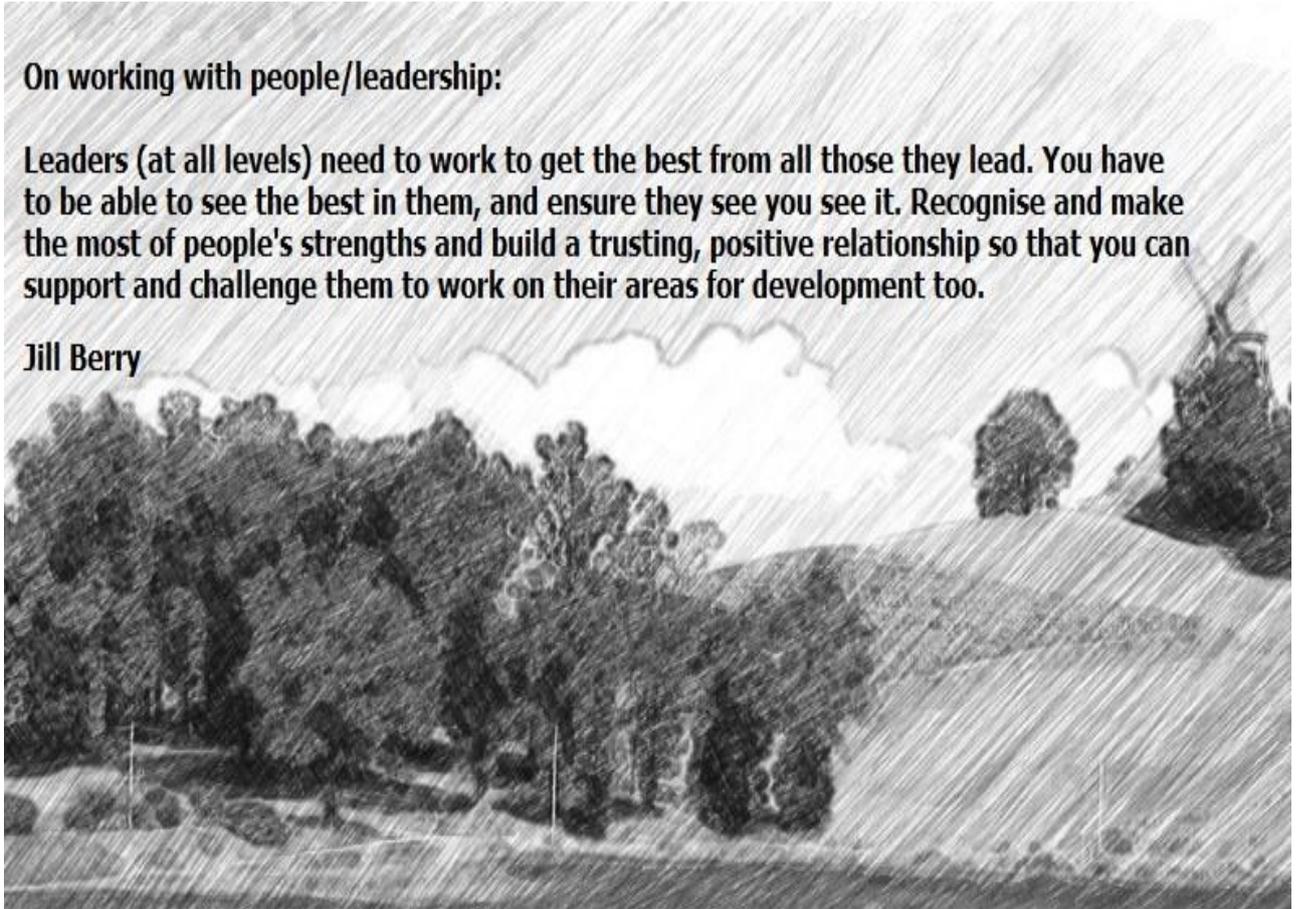
**If you like what you have read, please consider a donation to the @schoolbus62, care of Kate McAllister, or @edlumino, care of Natalie Scott to support education for refugee children.**

**Chris Chivers Twitter ChrisChivers2 Blog [chrischiversthinks.weebly.com](http://chrischiversthinks.weebly.com)**

**On working with people/leadership:**

**Leaders (at all levels) need to work to get the best from all those they lead. You have to be able to see the best in them, and ensure they see you see it. Recognise and make the most of people's strengths and build a trusting, positive relationship so that you can support and challenge them to work on their areas for development too.**

**Jill Berry**



## **The Extraordinary Days of Ordinary Teachers.**

**Ray Wicockson @raywilcockson**

In this time of great transformation certain quiet constants abide. That historic expressed will of a nation to provide by right a guaranteed period of general education for all generated, among myriad concomitants, a perpetual obligation to furnish all classrooms with the quietest constant that is here my theme: the ordinary teacher.

### **The Ordinary Teacher.**

***"The world is full of obvious things which nobody by any chance observes".***

(Sherlock Holmes, Chapter 3, *"The Hound of the Baskervilles"*)

The daily work of ordinary teachers exhibits unique features not encountered in comparative occupations. They render the commonplace extraordinary and as near magical as you can get this side of the supernatural. Acknowledged, these attributes self-evidently display the hallmark of a consummate profession. The problem as ever with the familiar is

that they so easily go unremarked along with plainly momentous implications. I should know: I managed a whole career with little pause for such reflections.

Ironically, this was because, throughout, I remained, in my definition, an ordinary teacher, for which you qualify if, day and night, excepting your private, home life, whatever the timetable commitment or level of seniority, your mind defaults by natural priority to considerations of students in groups and as individuals whom you currently encounter at school. You live, every day, immersed in what many other voices in education discuss from the shore.

Characteristically, you experience a staff meeting or CPD session (especially at the close of day) as a disorientation, a jarring from one world to another. When you speak, it may well be with an untoward diffidence in marked contrast with your classroom voice. I have noted this on social media too. And no wonder: It is (as I now realise) par for your chosen path, for you are but recently returned from the distant encampments and lodges that dot the nursery slopes of life.

Upon the great highway of primary and secondary school teaching from time to time, as appropriate, ordinary teachers may lecture a class, train for examination or give one-to-one tuition, discharge management duties and take cognizance of educational research, philosophy or government policy, but this essay is not about the work of lecturers, trainers, private tutors, school leaders or researchers and politicians. It will, I hope, become clear, however, that ordinary teachers breathe and flourish only with trust and a modest measure of imagination on the part of all, including parents, involved in general education.

Central to this exercise of imagination is an appreciation that, contrary to appearances, ordinary teachers live and move and have their being as if in a parallel dimension, in a world that turns upon its own axis through stranger seasons. Such is its gravity as I write, years away, it yet exerts (studentless) term after term, a distant, haunting pull. As do the words of a parent, circa 1980.

### **'I don't know how you teachers do what you do!'**

We were chatting informally, stretching our legs at the close of a long parents' evening and this father's spontaneous remark came as from nowhere, comical in its exasperation. He'd clearly been mulling over the matter for some time but to no avail. Though essentially rhetorical, he elaborated enough to show "how" also meant "why". At root, he could not get his head round the notion of an adult spending day after day in the company of dragooned bands of children, let alone what you did and how in a job that was for him unimaginable but to me, by 1980, second nature. I see his point better now I am retired because, on the surface, the traditional arrangements for universal general education do seem unpromising, more likely to confound than accomplish.

Why, after all, would you contrive that a child spend each primary year with 29 peers and one adult tasked with teaching the whole curricular spectrum and much more besides? Why then in secondary schools play pass the parcel at every period change with students and specialist staff, deliberately multiplying and revamping interactions?

None of the professions usually adduced as parallels with teaching experience such intense, prolonged, complex and populous contact with adults, let alone children. Yes, teachers 'diagnose' in the manner of doctors, but the latter do not treat 30 patients at once. Performing before a class is indeed akin to acting but no actor need be concerned with the backstories of individuals that make up an audience.

Teaching is unique in its basic requirement that professional response be made to children as individuals and as sizeable groups simultaneously. One has only to listen to the staffroom and read teachers' tweets: "My Year 8's were lovely today!" comes just as naturally as "Kenny G is a right pain!" Such comments reflect the nature of classroom life: a conscious construct, in miniature, of the individual in society. Or rather "village": I like my society one village at a time.

### **Villagers All.**

Teachers have more in common with their students than anyone else. Both are presented, daily, with the same personal, social and curricular challenges and any given group of 30 children and one adult are the only people to experience in full what transpires between them during their time together. These shared experiences are extraordinarily sporadic, diverse, yet cumulative. Holidays, weekends and nights intervene; primary classes grass--hop from knowledge field to field; the secondary kaleidoscope's reshaken wholesale hourly. Yet every time a school bell rings a village gets its wings.

Ordinary teachers spend much of their waking lives in the most unusual of villages created and sustained in consort with children. They have no physical form; these are villages of the mind and heart. Classrooms may look much the same from school to school but they are as station platforms for the journey. We do not go to a theatre to stand in the foyer. Behind the whiteboard, beyond the digital reach of any iPad, something momentous is happening the glacially slow exploration and interpretation of the book that is the world into which new beings are born with the natural right to add a page of their own. It is the privilege of ordinary teachers to get to nudge the glacier a little faster downstream to the sea.

Such is the nature of this great altruistic enterprise, and I am no theorist but the simple traditional structure of primary and secondary education makes eminent sense for there are laid down archaeological layers ( I am reminded of Keats's phrase "the superannation of sunk realms" ) of discovery and engagement with the world. Childhood play braved in

forays from the family fireside is foundational in exercising the imaginative faculty to mint connections. Those connections are confirmed and elaborated on by the annual succession of primary teachers who represent the first mature adults outside the family circle with whom a child has more than passing acquaintance. They (and a child's cohort) are sufficient in these early days to engender increasingly confident curiosity and reflection, self-expression, adaptability and social integration. A holistic approach is essential so that the (proper) introduction of formal academic knowledge is experienced in perspective, as a treasure trove of an archive that can only enrich the awakening soul.

That the acquisition of academic knowledge is not synonymous with general education is a reality (still, I hope) acknowledged most clearly in primary schools, whose teachers are neither superior nor inferior to secondary specialists. These educators differ only in the landscapes they journey through. The delta and the mountain stream are one. And so, what I mean to say is that when, rightly, a child encounters the world's knowledge compartmented into subjects, imaginative play and the freedom to explore and eureka interconnections afforded by primary lessons will be so ingrained it will not diminish but pervade response and interpretation for life.

The names of secondary subjects herald the disciplines to be examined in Year 11 and researched or otherwise pursued in adult life. The figure of the specialist teacher embodies this artificial demarcation in knowledge. And it seems apt that the new dispensation be accompanied by a more complex, challenging and numerous range of villages with which to interact. But these are yet safe havens in which we may prepare our little boats as best we can for the open sea.

### **Village Time.**

It is a special irony in teaching that those engaged in such a glacially slow process must grow inordinately adept in handling the exigencies of time. The lesson timetable is basically an appointments book but I know of no other profession that marshals so many people into such tight time slots every working day. Whether you're shifting the focus of a primary day or exiting Year 8 for a double A level session, one thunderingly complex transformation has to take place, every time. Of course, the children go through this too but all villages look to their resident adult as to a pilot light.

That teachers manage such constant changes is a combination of professional nous and shared expectations arising from village history. In computing terms, the very presence of "Mr Wilcockson" coupled with "Wednesday period 3" swiftly becomes enough of a cache to shortcut to the relevant browser and programme. And Bob's your uncle: the village that is Year 9 group 3 continuing its study of "The Sign of Four" leaps back into life. Teachers are magicians at reconstituting, revivifying learning villages.

Students adapt too; so well, in fact, that, paradoxically, they speedily become quite conservative with regard to their village. I was often fascinated when I was in service by subtle but palpable differences in attitude when covering lessons. The most well-behaved and industrious group (even in my own subject) evinced an air (begrudging is too strong) of reserve. In part I'd say this was the natural temptation to ease off ("He's not here so why should we ...?"). But I think also there is in this reaction a kind of primal loyalty *their* village would not reappear this day. I might add that, however detailed and relevant the work set on cover it never corresponds with what would have transpired had all villagers been present.

I won't elaborate here, but my village analogy has clear implications for visitors, observers and inspectors. One lesson is but a paragraph in the narrative of a village. I shall instead focus on what seems to me to be the weighty responsibility borne alone by the village elder when visitors have come and are long gone.

### **Here upon the Sea of Galilee.**

I'm retired. Nevertheless, I am acutely aware of the plethora of issues, demands and challenges besetting those in service. Some of these are 'first base' essentials such as the maintenance of discipline; others (fiercely debated) more philosophical in nature. These preoccupations often seem to me to lack a context that may contribute a resolving perspective. The rudderless village is in existential crisis.

Christian in subject (*see* St Mark's Gospel, chapter 4), Rembrandt draws on a simple, archetypal image. The Ancient Mariner and Nick Carraway exemplify Shakespeare's "*wandering bark*" (*see* Sonnet 116) and in the detail above it's generally accepted Rembrandt himself looks out at the viewer, rendering the universal personal. Upon the sea of life Coleridge's creation is becalmed, Fitzgerald's beating on against the current. Here, an ordinary man (not Christ) grips the rudder. An inactive, serene Jesus embodies the spirit all crews must find within themselves to survive. Be in no doubt the disciples are failing: that Christ saves them in the Gospel is a unique, altruistic lesson. Rembrandt signed the rudder he understands the parable. Selfless seamanship (that wisdom of the seas), all hands to the deck, keeps us afloat steering a resolute course.

I'm still making my own connections, thank God. And the closer I look at Rembrandt's freeze framed face, the more I see my own at 21 for I nearly foundered in that tempestuous probationary year. Untrained, newly married, with a child on the way, I taught a full timetable from Day One and take this belated opportunity to apologise to anyone unfortunate enough to be in my classes. I won't catalogue the usual inadequacies: NQT's know them only too well. Let's just say I didn't, for example, find the right impulse for effective discipline until initial attitudes to children and knowledge went through a sea-change. I had no pastoral sense for the former and an inappropriate view of the latter.

Consequently, naive and supercilious Ray set up his tent in assorted encampments of children expecting them to hang on his every word.

Another Ray, my first Head of Department, more by what he was than what he said, set me aright.

I never thought to word this before (being too caught up living it): teachers are agents of society's altruistic impulse. There can be only one valid purpose: the creation of special places where a suitably qualified representative of the current adult world may initiate for the young (through considered planning and real time improvisation) experiences deemed potentially enlightening.

### **Enlightenment.**

#### **"Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?" T S Eliot**

If you equate enlightenment with the acquisition of academic knowledge, best not be an ordinary teacher. Fresh from university, young Ray thought just like that. Modest HOD Ray was (can you believe it?) relieved a clever grad could take over his A level work. I was just about OK there. And with 6th form GCE retakes (some my age!). Elsewhere, I thought I was teaching English but in reality communicating only that I cared far less about students as individuals or villages than my precious subject. Which is fine if you're an academic.

"P.B" (*see* my sonnet below), with whom I was privileged to teach and who may read this will recall a lovely man who, self-confessedly, was completely at sea in schools. He helped us out temporarily at college, drank with us, involved himself with a good grace in staff/student drama but, left alone with a class, fell irretrievably into private reveries concerning the book he was writing. I heard one delightful anecdote in which he quite forgot the class whilst taking the register, leaned back in the chair, and closed his eyes to cogitate elsewhere.

By contrast, ordinary teachers are almost entirely absorbed in the pupils present and I have noted in my "Markings" blog "The Empty Space" my debt to years of theatrical experience in this connection. In performance, one is barely conscious of self, intensely observant of fellow actors and immersed in the role. What is learned in rehearsal is veiled, what learned from experience integrated where effective. Similarly, a teacher must bear lightly whatever knowledge (including that of education itself) is introduced, often with the sleight of hand of the player. In the wings of your teaching sits a quiet, wise director, whom no one need notice. Out there, on the stage, in any empty space (such as a village green) young troupes of actors interpret the old afresh, sparking off each other, taking imaginative, illuminating risks, giving their airy nothings a local habitation and a name.

As a script to a play, so knowledge is to wisdom and enlightenment. And in the classroom much of that knowledge is naturally what is topic by topic currently known and understood about the world by its adults who (especially if they become teachers) would do well to remember its provisional nature. What is in reality happening is one generation offering the next what it knows as accurately as may be not as immutable, imposed cultural heritage to imitate but precisely so new minds may evaluate afresh, make unimagined connections, make their own discoveries and write unique pages that fulfil individuals and enhance humanity at large.

Way down, hidden as the submerged part of Rembrandt's tiller, we teach wisdom and love with love and (hopefully) wisdom.

### **A Tale of Two Villages.**

For everything there is a season. Thus, there is properly a place for memorization, following instructions, practising methods and training for exams or driving tests. In a host of situations in life we are fools not to take advantage of well structured linear programmes customised for discrete ends. In such trainer/trainee scenarios the manual is king. You don't have to be a villager, just willingly compliant in the light of perceived benefit. And while such exercises feature within any general education, they must not characterise it.

Ordinary teachers are living Bibles for the young. As Jung has it: "Children are educated by what the grownup is and not by his talk". As I put it: "A teacher is a dealer in parables."

Here's one. In which of these villages would you wish to grow up, maybe teach and live out your allotted days?

### **"Your Village".**

The fictional dystopian village of Patrick McGoohan's 1967 series "*The Prisoner*" dramatises what happens to people when self-determination is completely supplanted by external powers, when what is ironically called "Your Village" is not meaningfully theirs at all. Here it is an adult, a man of the world, who wakes one Kafkaesque morning to find himself in a strange new world. How much worse for a child, say I.

The opening episode "*Arrival*" is both enough to illustrate my educational point and for Number 6 (as he finds he is now called) to explore what little the village displays. The episode is free to view on YouTube.

Number 6 encounters a village and villagers shorn, bleached of identity, imprisoned but untroubled as long as they comply with near childish conventions. Their real life counterparts thrive and exhibit individuality while the law of the land maintains a restrained, respectful distance. "Your Village" however is designed, provided and

micromanaged by unseen ones. The closest approximation to a village elder, Number 2, is merely a relay, an enforcer in a place of sparse internal relations and none with an outside world off limits.

The teacher who operates in the manner of Number 2, imposing a delimited range of legitimised knowledge, activities and behaviours prescribed by outsiders or concocted alone, who systematically closes down naturally engendered new connections is party to the creation of a sham and the arrested growth of a generation.

### **Or "Brigadoon".**

You know the one that only appears, magically, from the Scottish mist, once in a century; the one where the villagers joyously do their own thing; the one, once you've been there, you hanker after forever.

### **Sonnet for P. B.**

Old Rowley village was our Brigadoon.  
A century ago  
We played one livelong day from dawn to dusk  
With the innocence of Eden.

Night fell. The spell broke unbelievably.  
The Garden vanished.

We have taken our solitary way with a goodly grace:  
You, Sir, with your Eve  
For which, high thanks to watchful gods presiding!  
I to my Ulyssean wanderings.

On a clear day  
Across this timeless Bay  
I can descry one further range of mountains  
And the high, proud peak of Rowley hoves into view.

(The Bay is Morecambe Bay, where I live. Rowley is our vanished, unperished college).

### **A final word to all ordinary teachers.**

No village founded on wisdom and love really dies. Somewhere out there a former pupil or comrade in arms smiles in recognition across a village green magically remembered.

***"But the effect of her (Dorothea's) being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs."***

(George Eliot "Middlemarch")

**Mine for the bucket - keep the bucket full.**

**On you, as a person.**

- Remember it's just a job - remember who and what the important things in life are.
  - Don't beat yourself up -
  - Stay fair and consistent.
  - Laugh
  - Take time to chat, coffee and lunch.
- Keep the bucket full**

**On children**

- Remember the individuals....
  - Remember every child is someone's child
  - Praise, praise, praise
  - Celebrate
  - Have high expectations and hold them accountable.
  - Be fair, honest and be there.
- Keep the bucket full**

**On management**

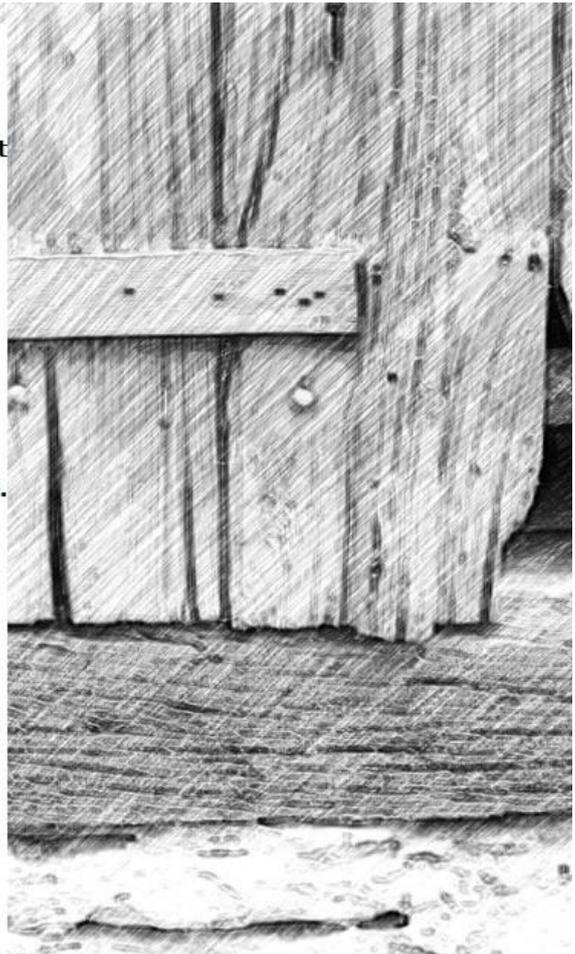
- Be there - be visible
- Listen to understand
- Appreciate and thank
- Have high expectations and keep yourself and others accountable
- Strive to be the best - and push others to be their best

**Communicate**

**Break / question the barriers...**

**Keep the bucket full**

**Tania**



## **Comprehensive, consistent and complete; developing and sharing a vision, seeking agreement and retaining focus.**

From the time I stepped into teacher training college, back in 1971, the overriding focus has been on children and seeking to understand them as developing individuals. When I went to college, I knew things, from a broad educational experience coupled with life experience of twice travelling to Australia, by sea, enabling a broad perspective on the world. By reading and, at that time, using the library extensively, I was able to add to the sum of my knowledge, while acknowledging that I was in an initial teaching phase. I qualified, with high grades in subject and teaching practice.

It has always been about the children. I was fortunate within the first few years of my career to work with a wide age range, starting in secondary, but then, in Primary, having both junior and infant classes. With a science background, I followed my initial teacher education with a Post Graduate Diploma in Environmental Sciences, to provide the background to promotion. A few years later, an opportunity arose to undertake an Advanced Diploma in Language and Reading Development, which proved invaluable in later management roles. In between, there were many shorter, local courses, covering the full range of the curriculum, usually at one of the local Teacher Centres. There was an active TGIF club, meeting after school on a Friday, to download before heading home.

In many ways, I was seeking to make myself the best teacher that I could be, combining essential subject knowledge with child development. As a primary practitioner, the curriculum was always broad, with teachers taking all the subjects. There might have been some cooperation between teachers, swapping one strength for another, but this was limited.

Classes in the early years of my career were large; it took several years to have a class of less than 35 children, with no additional classroom assistance, apart from the occasional mum who offered to come in and hear readers.

In those days, we didn't overtly think of any form of pedagogical divide, as seems to be the case today. There had been, during my training a series of booklets called the Black Papers, issued by pamphleteers trumpeting against a growing progressive trend, but this had limited impact. Much teaching was of a traditional nature, especially if information or knowledge needed to be shared.

However, with classes of 35+, in order to enable quality time for extended experience, such as practical science, geography, art or writing, working in groups enabled an integrated day to operate. This may begin to sound progressive to some, but a significant aspect of planning activities was a single word, pitch, which was defined as match, stretch and challenge. These elements today are likely to be called differentiation, but, without the underlying challenge, this can all too easily become activity based.

Much effort was deployed to creating personalised or group based challenges in tasking, with much built in independence. Personalised responses, oral as well as written supported development.

Reading was a very individual experience, with reading books organised according to the Cliff Moon based colour coded system, combining a number of schemes. It was really important for teachers to know the books available so that individuals could be guided to certain books or schemes that might increase motivation. Time was spent in the school library or with the reading schemes to read and find out the available resources; essential background teacher knowledge.

Home-school reading diaries formed a useful reading record, as well as encouraging a dialogue based on learning. Every child had their own cassette tape, and, once a week, they had to read into the tape recorder, while wearing headphones, so that they could hear themselves reading aloud. This was reinforced by listening back to the tape afterwards. It offered many the chance to undertake personal miscue analysis. Deployed properly, informal miscue analysis, by an aware teacher, can begin the process of unpicking issues before they become significant.

Maths was invariably based on a purchased scheme. It was always a surprise to me that a few colleagues never referred to the teacher guides of the schemes, but jumped straight into the activity books. This, in many cases, left gaps in children's knowledge that had to be filled. The activity books often meant that children were, very early, leaving concrete apparatus and concentrating on pure numbers. Later, working in a school whose maths scheme was based on the work of Zoltan Deines, it was clear that children needed to retain concrete materials, especially for place value activities, to create mental schema which they could then manipulate mentally.

It worries me today to hear or read discussions that might deter teachers from using appropriate apparatus for as long as a child needs the support, yet successful countries do just that. Although the idea of visualisation is as old as John Dewey, at least 100 years, and has been a central aspect of my 40+ year career, it can, because it is almost too obvious, be overlooked.

## **Vision**

Every school has to stand for something, around which everything, including the curriculum and teacher expertise, can develop, as fully as possible for each and every learner to have a quality experience. This is usually articulated as the school Learning and Teaching Policy, which will be the distillation of the reflections of the team around a central vision that might be articulated by the head-teacher, Governors, parents or, in the best situations, a combination of all of them.

It is interesting to speculate what a statement of school vision might look like. It should be broad in outlook, but specific enough for it to be enacted by each teacher in their classroom, with each responsible for high quality learning opportunities throughout the year. It should enable the selection, purchase and deployment of resources, personnel as well as hardware to enable this to happen efficiently. It should also not, in itself, become a burden under which teachers labour, as mechanicals. They are not delivery drones.

In hiring high quality thinkers, it is incumbent on the school to enable them to do this, as a central feature of their role. They are the experts in the classroom, especially with regard to their knowledge of their children. They need the space to think, to plan, to resource, to adapt to the evident needs of the learners. They need to be able to retain the essential humanity that brought them into teaching.

Teaching, particularly at Primary level, is about relationships; confidence, challenging, discussing, watching, engaging, questioning, coaching, supporting, correcting. It is about best use of space, resources and the available time. It is a blend of project management and quality assurance, with the teacher at the centre as decision maker, on behalf of each and every child.

For an outline of a possible Teaching and Learning Policy, see the appendix.

### **A college of learners**

The term "buy-in" is important, if a school is to operate effectively and efficiently. Any organisation passes through stages of development, with any substantial staff change providing an opportunity for review and reflection.

When I became a headteacher, in 1990, there was a need to take stock of the available resources, both in personnel terms and the school environment. There was a need to engineer a broad dialogue, to enable every member of staff to share their thoughts. This was fraught with difficulty, as some were not used to having a say, so felt that informal discussions were setting policy, rather than just exploratory. Some staff chose to move on and one retired, which allowed the first stages of creating my "own" team, from the resident nucleus and importing complementary skills to ensure that breadth of ideas and experience contributed to school development.

It took a good couple of years to fully experience the fruits of this early work. It needed time to think, to talk, to agree and then to embed ideas. Gradually a general framework emerged within which everyone was working, so that, at this point, individuals could take significant charge of development in a subject area, knowing that their thinking and their efforts would find favour with colleagues. The third and fourth years were significant as developments were refined through practice and regularity of review, which was sometimes led by the subject leader working with a Local Authority advisor or inspector. That way, what was being offered was current, and offered appropriate learning opportunities.

As individuals moved to other schools for promotions, this created opportunity, but also occasionally a tension: opportunity for additional ideas to further develop the school offering; tension where a new member of staff sought too early to "make their mark", and tried to make changes without first understanding fully what the school was offering. It was essential throughout to make sure that there was always plenty of time made available for discussion, in small and larger groups, with time to research, to take advantage of courses and with cascade opportunities after reflection.

Thinking about children, their current and future needs, is the central element of teaching and learning. If time to think is at a premium, then it can come to pass that the curriculum becomes activity based, without reference to learner needs.

Time to talk and think together is always valuable.



#### What I reckon

- differentiate through language and outcome not worksheets
- be kind to staff and students
- person first admin second
- be good enough
- all students are worthy of your time not just the clever ones
- find the glitter – did you know John who can't read and write very well could somersault on his BMX?
- parents have hunches about their child and they are usually right – they are worth listening to and will have great advice about how best their child learns
- quality first teaching is knowing your students and adapting to suit them – this is not differentiation/SEN/Teaching Assistant's role – just good teaching
- Less is more – an essay with bullet points and one superb paragraph maybe preferable to a terrible essay
- Alternative assessments can allow some a chance to shine
- The hardest to love are often those that need loving the most
- Start each lesson afresh – try not to say 'you always do this', or 'let's see if you can do better than yesterday'
- Catch them being good – it's easy to ignore challenging children when they are being good out of sheer relief but this is exactly when a hand on the shoulder, a quick nod of recognition or a smile can be most effective – they get to experience what the 'good' kids get

**Jules Daulby**

## **Coordination, coexistence and courtesy; it's a team game, developing a teaching community.**

The notion of a college of teachers in every staffroom appeals to me and would be my personal starting point. As the dictionary definition says, it is in the form of collective (shared) responsibility, among a group of colleagues.

It was a singular pleasure after Ofsted visits, to have the positive reinforcement that my school was run on collegiate grounds. It was something that I believed in, wholeheartedly, in that my guiding premise was that I needed to ensure that the adults working with children were as well trained and supported to do their jobs as they could be. I was no longer in a position to do this myself, over the longer term, so I was reliant on others, so the space to work and the available resources had to be the best that we could afford.

**"All teachers are already leaders. It's in the nature of teaching."** Hargreaves 100 quotes, shared on Twitter.

Support for each other was a central belief. Subject leaders were allowed to lead and develop colleagues, through release time; I could provide that in different ways, before PPA time was a reality.

One simple way was to link with the local ITT provider and to take students on a regular basis. This increased the staffing of the school at little or no cost, and, with finalist teaching students, once they were settled in and effectively taking over, enable the class teacher to withdraw for short periods, to undertake projects or to release other staff to do so. As we always took a pair of finalists, this allowed collaborative team development.

**"We must use collegiality not to level people down but to bring together their strength and creativity."** Hargreaves 100 quotes, shared on Twitter.

Enabling colleagues to take a significant lead in developing others enhanced their personal professionalism, but also deepened the interpersonal relationships, so that mutual understandings were strong. Being aware to avoid group think, I was not averse to putting into the thinking pot something a little "off the wall"; I did often play "Devil's Advocate", if discussion seemed to be getting too cosy. The phrase "tongue in cheek" often prefaced a challenge. This also encouraged others to explore from a range of angles, so avoiding the pitfall of linearity through group think.

Staff meetings were often reporting back on research findings, new ideas etc, always with a prepared paper ahead of the meeting, so that discussion was based on reflection, rather than reaction. This led to security in decisions and a definite "storyline" for the school. The support staff were invited to all development activities, so were part of the continuing discussion.

Collegiality, to my mind, also embeds aspects of well-being, in that everyone looks out for everyone else. That removes the burden from managers, although they are just then seen as part of the team. Teaching, if done properly, is a team game. One star player cannot create the basis for success, but a cohesive team can achieve a great deal by working together, led by a clear-thinking manager.

## **Principles of collegiality.**

- Everyone's a member.
- Everyone has an equal voice, within collective discussion.
- Everyone shares in reflection.
- Everyone is party to decisions.
- Everyone is responsible for carrying out collective decisions.
- Anyone can bring questions back to the "college" for discussion and clarification.
- Collegiality does not preclude an individual from trying out new ideas on behalf of the collective.
- Professional trust is a significant, developing part of the process, not a static state.
- The quality & morale of teachers is absolutely central to the well-being of students and their learning.
- In healthy individuals, emotions don't distort rationality, they enhance it.

To me, it seems self-evident that an organisation such as a school through which cohorts of children pass over a time scale, needs to be run on collective grounds. Each individual decision that is taken within the corporate body has to be seen as serving the needs of that body. An individual seeking to "do their own thing" can cause disruption or dislocation within the body, undermining the authoritative nature of the whole.

**"We will not achieve high performance in education if we replace teachers with machines or turn teachers into machines."** Hargreaves 100 quotes, via Twitter.

However, it is also evident that decisions cannot be mechanistic within a human and humane system, dealing with the specific needs of individuals, so the system has to establish flexibilities within the system that allow for "human error", both for learners and for teachers, each learning from their errors.

**"Teaching is a never-ending story. The work is never over; the job is never done."**  
Hargreaves 100 quotes, via Twitter

## **From Experience. Bruce Waelend @HTBruce**

30 years in education this year as a class teacher, KS2 leader, deputy head (x3 once in New Zealand), headteacher of an outstanding primary school as well as acting head of one on its journey out of special measures., school inspector, education consultant, associate lecturer in primary education and some other things I haven't thought about.

## **About education**

- It represents the only hope that many children have for a bright future. It's a ray of hope and a ladder to higher ground.

- More than this, it is a way of helping people to look at the life, themselves and others in a new and more positive light and to make them want to make a positive difference to their corner of the world.

### **About leadership**

- Vision and values are everything. If you don't have those, then you'll be at the whim of every wind of government policy, fashion and unsound practice.

-My personal vision - To inspire children to make the world a happier place.

- The most important aspect of any school is the quality of its leadership - the ability to inspire others to provide children with an education of real and lasting quality.

- Anything is possible, as long as leaders don't mind who gets the credit.

- Great leadership allows others, including children, to be able to achieve things that they never thought possible.

- Kindness and appreciation are two much undervalued values.

### **About children**

- One childhood - one chance!

- We have a moral imperative to ensure that we do everything possible to provide children with everything they need to flourish in life.

- If it's not good for children, it's not good for anyone.

- If we try and teach children without inspiring them with a desire to learn, we will have a very hard task indeed.

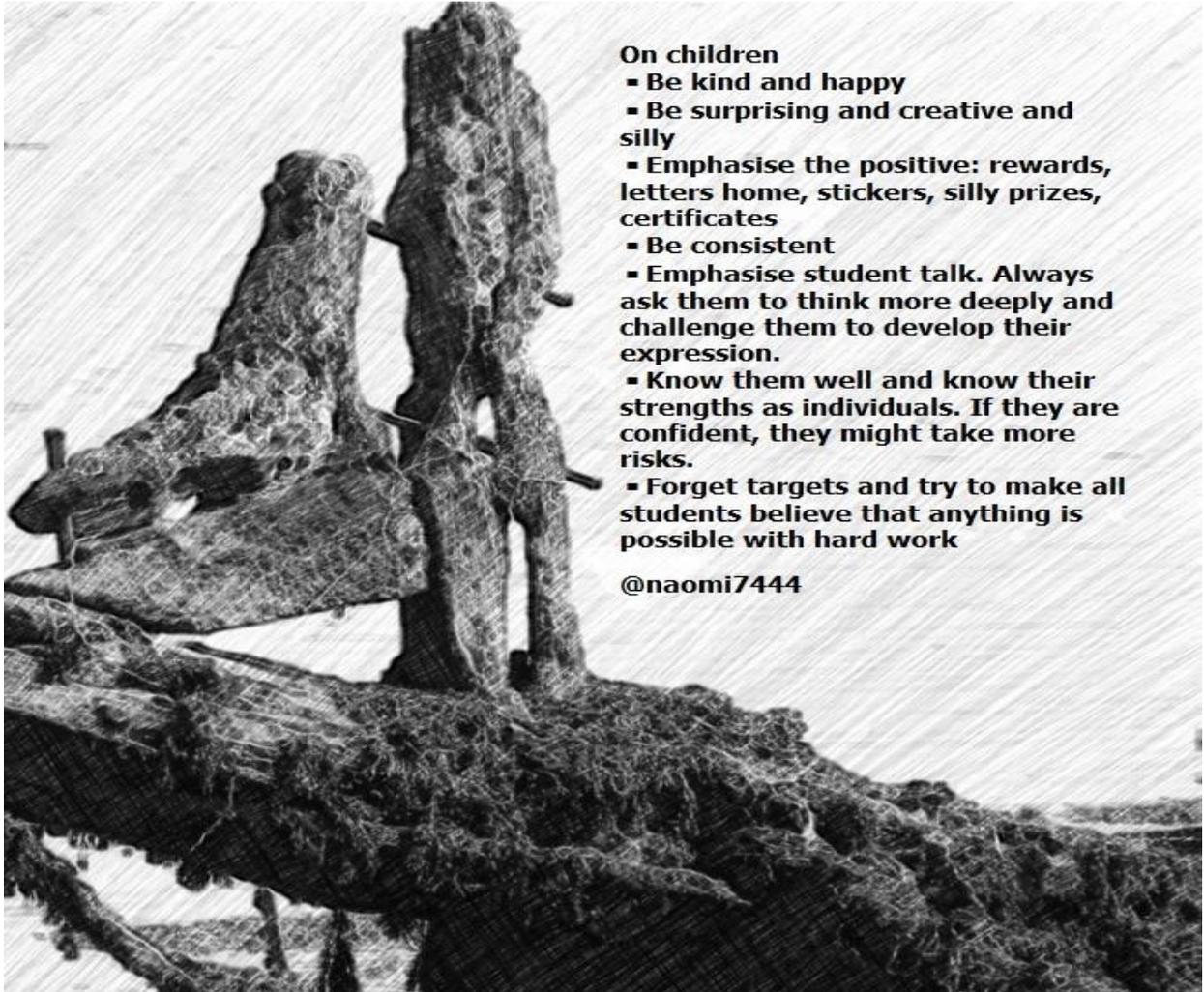
- Books and stories can captivate children's interest like nothing else and allow them to visit places, meet people and encounter adventures that would never be possible without them.

- Children are endowed with untold gifts and abilities and it's our job to help them to discover, value and nurture these.

- Children aren't just young adults. They will be one day, but not yet. Childhood is the province of the young and we had better help children to treasure it.

- As Henry Ford said, "If you think children can or they can't you're probably right".

Have high expectations.



#### **On children**

- **Be kind and happy**
- **Be surprising and creative and silly**
- **Emphasise the positive: rewards, letters home, stickers, silly prizes, certificates**
- **Be consistent**
- **Emphasise student talk. Always ask them to think more deeply and challenge them to develop their expression.**
- **Know them well and know their strengths as individuals. If they are confident, they might take more risks.**
- **Forget targets and try to make all students believe that anything is possible with hard work**

**@naomi7444**

## **Coherence and cohesion; making it work and making it stick.**

Schools are organic, they grow and change over time...

Schools vary considerably and, if your career spans a number of organisations, there will be many influences on you personally and professionally. My career was across a range of schools, with varying philosophies and under very different styles of management. Some were empowering, some were disabling; the former because teachers were encouraged to think, the latter because the school was the opposite; the head's view was that you had to think exactly like her.

Becoming a head in 1990, I took over a one form entry village Primary which had shrunk because of local private schools as well as being close to a county boundary where the neighbouring authority took children at the end of year 6 into Secondary, while we still had a Middle School system. This school had always been thought of among the education establishment as a "good" school. There was regular sharing of practice with colleagues and in LEA training. The reality when I arrived was different, with a number of long-standing issues to be resolved very quickly.

As a result, I had almost a 50% staff turnover within two years, at which point I could feel the beginning of building properly, based around a core of dynamic staff prepared to

develop as a team, ensuring that any problems were addressed quickly and all moved forward together.

The act of creation is a very special energy, in that you can think openly, discuss widely, bring in the available external expertise and synthesise processes that everyone can buy into and make work. If you are "in on the ground floor", you have a purpose in making sure that it does. It's "your baby" and, like all babies, you are extremely proud to show it off. The school grew. Four years later we had our first Ofsted, which was excellent in all aspects; everything held together very tightly.

Then we had staff turnover. Deputy to headship, senior teacher to deputy headship, NQT to second post and, as a result of 35% turnover there was a need to induct new people into the systems. Induction is a very interesting process, in that there is the potential in seeking to induct efficiently to take short cuts in describing aspects of practice where it had become everyday practice. The normality for us could be retold, but needed the underpinning, developmental thinking to interpret fully. This may have been a weakness. It needed mentoring to be embedded. New teachers at all levels had to play "catch-up", while still doing the day job.

Inevitably there was a wish from new staff to make a mark and subtle tweaks were introduced. In the correct forum they could be discussed and where they constituted an improvement, they were incorporated. Over the next few years, the school changed slightly, but was still judged very well at Ofsted as results were consistently high, across all areas. Further change followed, as lives altered, and aspirations meant further promotion.

I realised at this stage that I was staying for two reasons. I was providing a level of continuity that was needed and my first wife, having been diagnosed with cancer, had relapsed and family needed continuity too. Having rebuilt once, it was possible a second time, especially as it coincided with alterations to the National Curriculum, which provided a base for auditing school provision. Change was evolutionary, rather than complete change, growing from earlier strength, supported by opportunities for in-school research.

My last year as a head was tough. If you want to read the full story, I have been candid; suffice to say that it included the death of one teacher from cancer and the death of my first wife, with a side order of other long-term staff physical illness, which resulted in my teaching full time for the autumn term. After the death of my wife, in the July, I realised that I had become a weak link, with very "slopy shoulders" and decided to step away from the school so that it could continue to develop and move forward. A hard, but necessary decision. I could have gone back, but that would have meant the school carrying me, when the larger aspect of headship is to support others to do their job well.

Schools are organisms, beyond the individuals who make up the body. They grow and change with loss and new additions, eventually to become different organisms over time. They learn to adapt to situations, to evolve and grow new members from within. They are rarely, if ever, once and for all organisations. Someone once advised me "In schools, expect the unexpected". That still stands. If schools are only seen in mechanistic terms, over time they will fail. Human beings have frailties and few certainties. As an "organism", a school has to be able to adapt to circumstances as they impact on a day to day basis.

Humanity should be the watchword for each and every school.

# Reflections on inclusion and SEND 1988- Present

**Jackie Ward @jordyjax Deputy Headteacher in a Pupil Referral Unit**

In a teaching career which has spanned nearly three decades, the wise words of a friend and former colleague stand out in my mind –

“...there is nothing new in education, the wheel always comes full circle”

This was said to me at the start of my career and has held true, in my opinion, over the intervening years up to the present day.

So what did inclusion and SEND look like in the late 1980s? My first teaching post was in a school of predominantly Muslim infant children in a northern town which experienced widespread immigration from Asia to fill the still-plentiful jobs in the textiles industry housed in mills and warehouses. I was employed under the section 11 Home Office-funded programme which put an extra teacher for half a day in every class to support the EAL learners who formed the major part of the school. There had been a recent move away from Language Centres and specialist teachers and the Swann Report of 1985 stated:

“The fundamental change that is necessary is the recognition that the problem facing the education system is not how to educate children of ethnic minorities, but how to educate all children”

Does this not chime a familiar chord with the EAL and SEND advice of today?

As an NQT with no experience of EAL learners I felt rather out of my depth initially and can relate to Julia Sykes, an Australian teacher who, when faced with three little girls who couldn't speak a word of English, remarked:

“So you fumble around in cupboards, spend hours at home trying to organise some sort of course and continually berate those in power who made the insane assumption that a major in English Literature somehow qualifies one to teach English..”

I loved my year at the school and discovered that talking, reading, baking, art, music in a language rich environment brought the children on in leaps and bounds in terms of communication and confidence. However there was a darker side, the ghettoisation of many of the surrounding areas, especially with regard to the women in the community, meant that education was only really valued for boys. I remember a particularly bright little girl called Farzana who could have been anything she wanted, destined for a future of arranged marriage and drudgery or so I was told; I still think of her today and wonder what happened in her life

There was also the dark side of racism within the school; our sole little white boy was withdrawn by mum because he was taunted and his food was spat in. This shocked me because I believed, in my naivety, that racist behaviour was white on black. I also discovered that a caste system operated in the school and a hierarchy of different religions including Hindus. These were infants remember! The shadow of parental values and prejudice was ever present!

One impression that stayed with me strongly was that segregation of communities was wrong. Many of our staff referred to the school as being “the school on the hill”; removed from “real life” and the local, more genuinely, multicultural schools nearby. Money was

thrown at it. Children in Need money regularly found its way there despite there being no real poverty other than a poverty of ideas and beliefs in how to be inclusive. Ethnic native language speakers were employed but to me just reinforced the isolation and seclusion of a non- English speaker. That isolation looms large again in a world of IS and Prevent strategies, which may well reinforce that 'separateness' of yesteryear.

Years later, when I worked in my little village school, we had two children from the Philippines join us without a word of English. The little boy Year 1 was happy and boisterous and soon joined in with his classmates. The little girl Y2, very sensitive, cried and sobbed and so we employed an occasional EAL specialist to boost her confidence. Both children thrived in our immersive environment and, being bright children, both achieved Level 5s across the board in their KS2 SATS. That is the best way to approach the teaching of English in my opinion! It's not about ability though, it's about social inclusion. We were a lovely team! I also think this is the cornerstone of much successful practice in our multicultural schools of today.

My second job was in a primary school on a mixed housing estate. It was here that my love of children with behavioural difficulties was born. In those days there were no TAS and I was on my own, as a second year teacher, in a class of over 31 children. (I find it ironic that there are present-day discussions which question the role and usefulness of support staff. I would have given my eye-teeth for one, especially when OFSTED came to call!) There was a mix of 'middle class' children and 'council estate' children and I loved them all! It was here that I found out how to be a social worker, a counsellor, a PR consultant and anything else that came my way. We are now talking early 1990s and the National Curriculum with its twelve files was upon us! I was young and enthusiastic, Lord help me, and relished the challenge of all those conflicting personalities and abilities within a tightly framed strait-jacket of conformity. I smile wryly when I see heated discussions on Twitter about the over-regulation and over-testing of children today; just try grappling with a myriad of files hundreds of pages long, which set out in minute detail what primary pupils were expected to know! Excruciating! And then there were the new SATS tests; as a KS1 teacher, I had to deliver mandatory tests in English, Maths and Science- floating and sinking was fun- never mind the floods of today, every Y2 classroom in the land was awash! And that was just the teachers' tears!

For me the wheels came off in the new OFSTED framework; inspectors came in with clipboards and frowns and unfortunately my difficult children responded in the best way they knew, by being silly and frightened and, sadly, I crumbled and was ill for many weeks. However I returned and was bowled over by the love and sympathy of the parents who said the cohort had been difficult from nursery. I wish my colleagues had been so kind, despite my mother's recent death. Talk of the sign of things to come, OFSTED-wise! What I learnt from all this is that, without the support of your head and SLT, you have no chance. An unfavourable OFSTED had them searching for scapegoats. However the experience was not totally negative. I made some lifelong friends and learned how to get the right provision for children with SEND.

Whilst I was at my village school, I really got my teeth into SEND and my duties included 1/1 support programmes with children, liaising with parents, class teachers, HT, governors. I discovered that the key to successful outcomes was having the ability to write the right report. Little has changed today! One little boy diagnosed with Asperger's got full-time support and thrived in our mainstream setting thanks to my paperwork. I had the

unenviable task of telling his parents that he had difficulties. I was incensed that they had been made to feel it was their fault and directed towards parenting courses when there was a genuine problem with their child which needed a correct diagnosis. Today, nothing much has changed and parents are still being made to feel at fault if their children experience difficulties. Parenting courses are still being flagged up, no matter what the issue!

A secondment at an inner city primary school reinforced my affinity for behaviourally-challenged pupils and it was here I really honed my skills. This school was genuinely inclusive and I taught groups who were every bit as challenging as at my PRU. I felt so at home here (2006) and one mother appointed me as her difficult son's guardian angel. I felt there were real possibilities for managing behaviour successfully but also saw how some staff struggled to engage with issues in their class situations. This, I feel, has motivated me in my present role; class teachers need all the help they can get!

In 2009 I came on secondment to my present position at the PRU and eventually secured employment as the deputy.

The present day has brought many challenges with it in terms of managing challenging behaviours, diagnosing SEND in pupils including autism, and keeping a balance of respite placements and permanent exclusions. Unfortunately, permanent exclusions are winning at the moment.

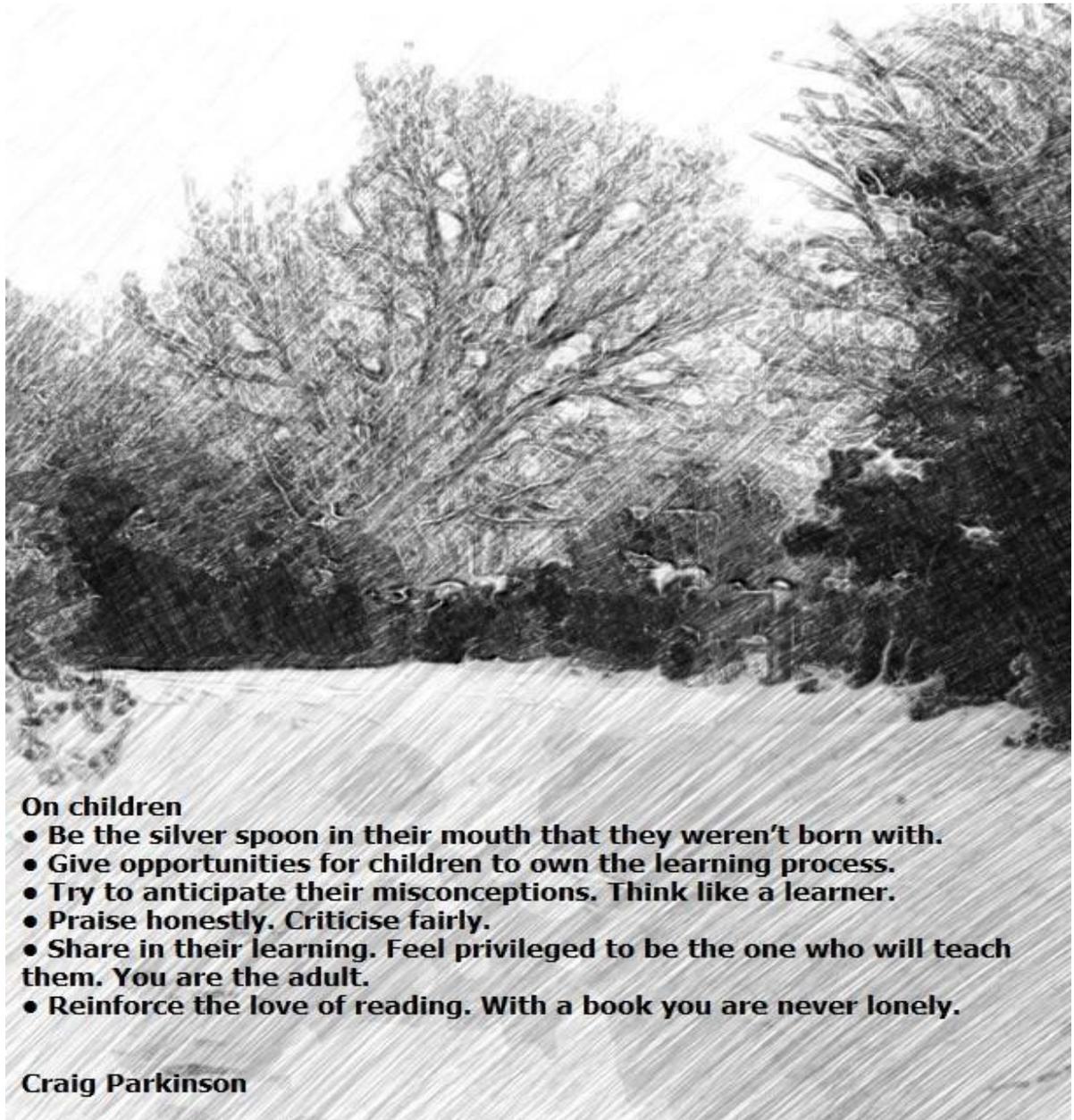
OFSTED has loomed as large as it did all those years ago at my second school. Requiring Improvement, based on our skewed data has seemed grossly unfair, as unfair as the clipboards and frowns were back in the day.

I also think it as hard now, if not harder, to get Education, Health and Care Plans (statements) and appropriate specialist provision for present day children; indeed, as my friend so presciently said, there is nothing new under the sun.

#### References:

Swann Report 1985

Lessons learned: A history of migrant education in Victorian government schools 1960-2006



**On children**

- **Be the silver spoon in their mouth that they weren't born with.**
- **Give opportunities for children to own the learning process.**
- **Try to anticipate their misconceptions. Think like a learner.**
- **Praise honestly. Criticise fairly.**
- **Share in their learning. Feel privileged to be the one who will teach them. You are the adult.**
- **Reinforce the love of reading. With a book you are never lonely.**

**Craig Parkinson**

**Communication, contribution and collaboration. Talking and working together with a single purpose, in-house and with external support.**

After I stopped as a Head teacher and a period of recuperation, I developed a portfolio of freelance opportunities that meant that I had access to hundreds of different schools, undertaking different supportive and developmental roles. Being allowed such access has always been a significant privilege and many reflective learning opportunities.

Seeking to unpick what makes a school tick, in order to be able to offer suggestion for further development demonstrated, without exception, the openness and honesty with

which schools are run. I have often been asked if what I had seen was underpinned by values or education principles and the simple answer is yes.

Schools talk of ethos, principles and values, but, in practice, they meld into an amorphous mass, with, in best practice, the over-riding effect that "Every person matters", evident through relationships, accessibility and communication, in a wide range of appropriate forms and across all "stakeholder groups". Schools that make it easy for parents to make and keep in contact reduce "stewing time", where a parent waits for a return call, or for a busy member of staff to phone. Parents always cite ease of communication as a significant factor in their positive regard for the school.

Teachers and everyone else in schools are exceptionally busy, not only as a result of their day to day activities in classrooms and beyond, but also considering the impact of regular and very detailed system-wide change. It is not surprising if, in the absence of internal systems that enable easy access, a hard-pressed teacher overlooks the need to ring "x's" mum urgently, and in so doing cause harm to their relationship with the school. Some schools have systems where a designated person does the call, or is available to chat, then to record and pass on the details.

In essence, it is a case of "Done with and through", rather than "Done to" and, by doing so, strengthening the sense of community and belonging, with mutuality creating an energy that enhances the school experience.

The self-developing culture is an interesting phenomenon, as it results, in some cases, from necessity. Where a Local Authority is unable to offer expertise in an area, individual schools, federations and clusters are getting together to come up with solutions. Solution-finding creates group strength and a growth in personal and collegiate confidence.

If a rich curriculum is created and available to every child, not just the most able, it creates significant opportunities for learners to explore together, to share oral language and to bring back to the classroom the same experience to explore further with appropriate guidance and support. Home activities, designed to enhance discussions at home, can enable children to develop their spoken language, with children of different heritages able to do so, at home, in either language, bring back to their learning the fruits of discussion. Good schools encourage dialogue in all forms.

Many London schools visited took advantage of the cultural wealth of the capital city, ensuring easy to reach venues were used extensively and harnessing the availability of additional adults through links with local enterprises. Some staff came in to read with children, during lunchtimes, while one used city business people to mentor older students into clear thinking about the world of work.

In each and every school, communication systems were exemplary, commented upon by parents, community members, Governors and external staff experts. Engaging with the local communities was a priority, with strong links in both directions. The communities saw the schools as a heart, a meeting place for many different groups. Articulation of often complex systems was as clear as possible, with interpretation available as necessary. The schools went "above and beyond" in the words of parents, what they had been expecting. Parent support for the schools and for learning was a strong feature and, interestingly, every member of the school community saw themselves as the "eyes and ears" of the schools. They valued what they had and wanted it to be unviolated.

Most importantly, every school knew each child really well. They all had a strong learning culture, and, in the words of one head, they explored individual need "forensically". In that way, decisions were based on the best available information, so had impact, with "follow through", as actions were tracked through to the next decision point. Everyone was clear in their roles, carried out tasks diligently and were held to account on a regular basis. Accountability systems were strong at all levels.

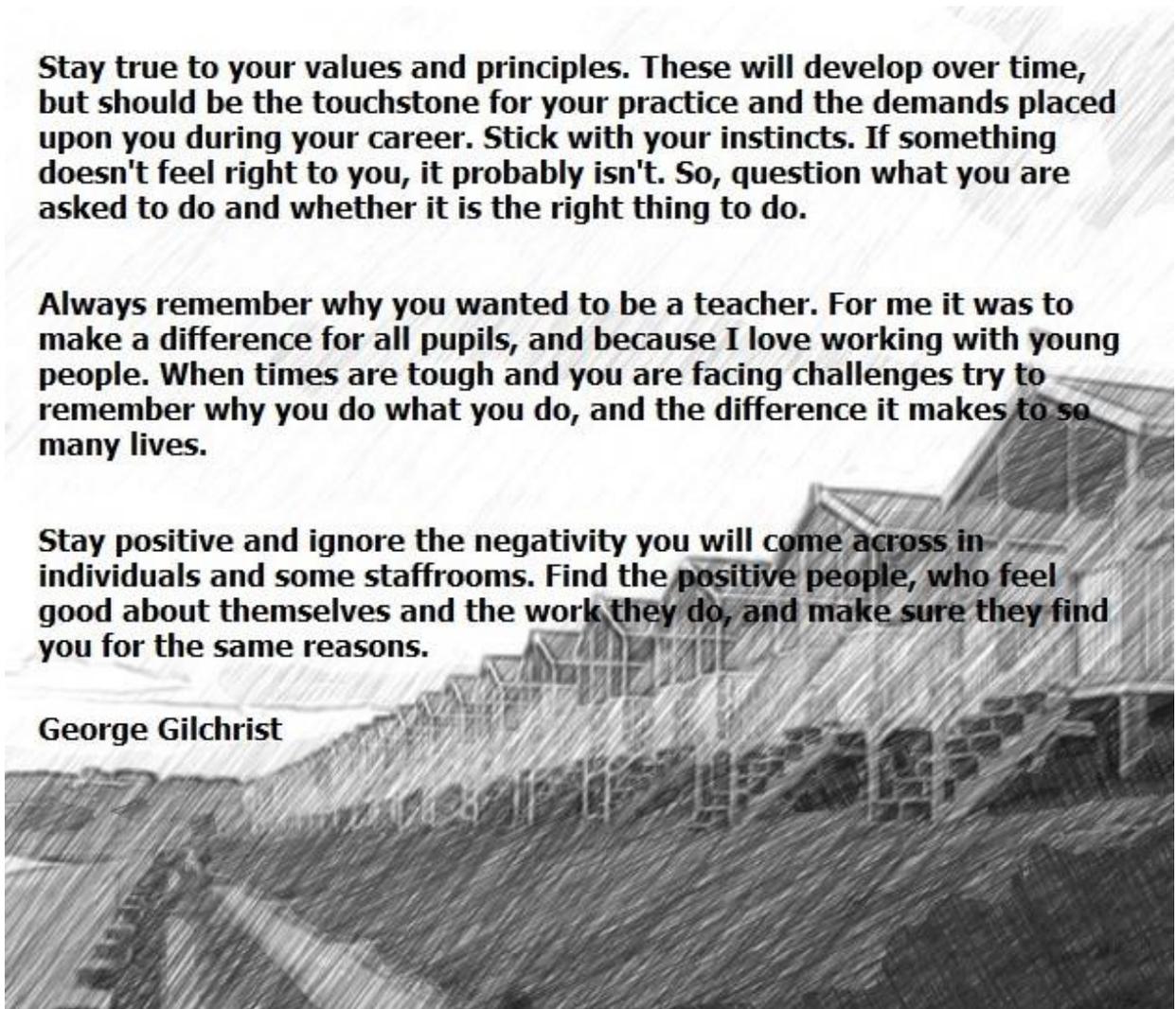
It could all be summarised in the words of a song; "Do what you do do well".

**Stay true to your values and principles. These will develop over time, but should be the touchstone for your practice and the demands placed upon you during your career. Stick with your instincts. If something doesn't feel right to you, it probably isn't. So, question what you are asked to do and whether it is the right thing to do.**

**Always remember why you wanted to be a teacher. For me it was to make a difference for all pupils, and because I love working with young people. When times are tough and you are facing challenges try to remember why you do what you do, and the difference it makes to so many lives.**

**Stay positive and ignore the negativity you will come across in individuals and some staffrooms. Find the positive people, who feel good about themselves and the work they do, and make sure they find you for the same reasons.**

**George Gilchrist**



## **A Scottish perspective; George Gilchrist @GilchristGeorge**

### **Vision**

A school without a vision must be a pretty soulless place. It will also be a place without a clear purpose and at the beck and call of any and all agendas. We need a vision to know where we are going and to help us identify how we might get there, as well as to protect us from the agendas of others.

As a school leader, I think it is important that you have a personal vision for where you want to take the school you lead, and also a wider one for education in general. You need to share this vision with colleagues and members of the school community so they too can consider what their own vision might be. Out of this collaboration and sharing should emerge a vision for each school that reflects its uniqueness in terms of its development journey, its context, and of which all have ownership.

I think that it is crucial that this collective vision is underpinned by values that are understood by all, and which are transparent in everything you do. Of course, a vision without action remains just a dream. There are many schools that have vision statements but which are still pretty soulless, because they stopped at that point, or their vision was developed so a box could be ticked.

It is the actions you take as a school leader and as a school community that bring your vision alive and make it real. It is through the collective and collaborative actions of all that the vision can be lived and be worked towards. It is the people who make the vision real and it is your actions, and the culture and ethos of the school that demonstrate you are being true to that vision and the values that underpin it.

### **A Team Game**

Delivery of the collective vision cannot rest on the shoulders of one person. It requires the collective actions of all who form and frame the school community. Relationships are key. It is the coexistence of the individuals that make up the school community, and the strength of the relationships between them, that determines the success of any school.

To develop a 'learning community' requires all to be working to a common purpose, in a way that accommodates the individuality of all, and which builds upon the strengths each can bring. It is down to the school leadership team to coordinate the efforts of all, and to provide the 'road-map' for the direction of travel. But, all should recognise they have a role to play and a contribution to make.

Team-work is critical if we are to 'keep the main thing the main thing', as I once heard Sir John Harvey Jones say. In my opinion the main thing should be learning and the understandings and pedagogical practices that allow this to flourish and develop for the benefit of all. To achieve this we need the coordinated and collective efforts of all, so that we develop a common understanding and language around learning, and where we are on our development journey.

## **Making It Stick**

One of the biggest issues we have faced for some time in education is the proliferation, and adoption, of various fads and trends. Often these are based on no evidence as to their useful or efficacy, but which still manage to build up a head of steam so that schools feel as though they are failing if they don't include them or use them. Two recent examples that spring to mind are the push for the recognition and adoption of various learning styles, and Brain Gym. Both of these were based on little or no substantive evidence that demonstrated how they worked, but were adopted by most schools across the country.

I think the fact that so many find such fads and trends compelling is because so many people are still searching for 'silver bullets', the panaceas that are going to solve all the issues in schools and learning. Let me reiterate, these do not exist! We do know from research across the world, and across time, what does work. That is, a focus on learning and teaching, collaboration, improving leadership at all levels, developing system leadership, developing adaptive expertise and developing enquiry dispositions in all our teachers, the importance of context, and so on.

What has to happen is that, as Fullan and others have said, we need to focus on these aspects in a 'relentless' way in order to bring about embedded and sustainable change for the better. Change in thinking and practice, in my view, cannot be imposed by others. It has to come from the individual and their developing insights in order to make it stick.

## **The power of collaboration**

I have always liked the Ken Blanchard quote, 'None of us is as bright as all of us.' To me this points to the power of collective action and collaboration. If we have agreed a common purpose, then have to work collaboratively and co-operatively to deliver the best outcomes for our learners. Michael Fullan has implored teachers and schools for years to break down the silos of individual classrooms and practice. Helen Timperley has noted that 'it is no longer acceptable to do your individual best' and joins Fullan in demanding that teachers and schools work collectively and collaboratively to improve.

Others, like Chris Chapman, Clive Dimmock and Alma Harris have also identified the power of collaboration within schools, across schools and beyond schools in order to have the biggest impacts. We have to work collaboratively to deliver in what we recognise more and more is a complex change agenda within and across schools. Modern technology enables us to collaborate beyond our immediate confines. It was not that long ago that collaboration was restricted to those you were in physical contact with.

Now, we can collaborate with educators across the Globe, as long as we keep recognising the importance of context. Collaboration does not mean 'one size fits all.' Rather it should be about sharing principles and insights in order to provide mutual support. We should not be precious about who we work with, but all in the system need to be committed to supporting schools to develop.

It is no longer acceptable to have your focus solely on the learners in your class, school or town. We all have system responsibilities for all learners in our system and should recognise that it is through collaboration we can have wider impacts, and support each other.

## **Keeping it real and humane**

There is a great danger that when we focus so much on measurable outcomes, systems and structures within our schools and our educational systems, we can lose sight of the individuals within those schools and systems. I have been concerned for some time that we are in real danger of losing sight of the real people we work with and teach when our thoughts become clogged with metrics and accountability agendas.

So, how do we keep our focus on the people and their holistic and individual needs within such agendas? For me, it is all about values. We have to be clear about our individual and collective values. We need to identify these and make them clear to all. We then, most importantly, need to bring them to life through our actions. Everything we do needs to be measured against those values.

In my own schools, our values are the first point of call for our self-evaluation processes. If our values include honesty, openness, inclusion, fairness and integrity, is that what it feels like to be a member of our school community, or as a visitor? Do our actions, and our planned actions, reflect our agreed and shared values? If they don't, what are we going to do about it? How do we maintain positive relationships in the face of behavioural issues and challenges? Is how we deal with all learners, and staff, open and fair and based on collective agreements with all?

These can be difficult questions to consider and act on, but they are crucial as they shape the culture and ethos in classrooms and schools. It has always been my contention that everything we try to do in schools and systems stands or falls on culture and ethos. Get it right, and there are no limits to what we can achieve. Get it wrong, and it will destroy everything you are trying to achieve.

## **Understanding development journeys and contexts as unique**

When considering school or individual development the 'one size fits all' model can never work. Each school and each individual within them is unique. Their context is different, as is their place on their particular journey of development. When enough people realise this we begin to see the folly of some strategies, including 'sharing good practice, that seem to assume that you can lift what is working in one context, drop it into another one, and expect the same results. Such practices have been shown to fail time and time again.

So what does work? Firstly, we need robust self-evaluation processes built into everything that we do. This way we will know ourselves and where we really are, and you have to know where you are before you can begin any journey. Then we need to collaborate and learn from others, not by slavishly copying what they have done, but by understanding the principles and insights that sit behind, and underpin, what they have done to achieve success. This needs to be a 'warts and all' understanding, so that we learn from the challenges and failures they experienced, just as much from the successes.

When we have those understandings, we then need to consider how they will fit, or not, our own particular position and context. They will need adjustment and shaping to match our own particular situation. Only then, can we use the experiences of others to help shape our own developmental journeys. This is a harder and more complex approach than just lifting something and dropping it into your own situation, but in my experience anything really worth doing, and which aims to have sustainable impact, is rarely anything else.

## **How we maintain focus when faced with further innovation and change**

Michael Fullan talks about something he calls 'initiativitis' which he describes as the constant change from one thing after another and which causes schools to be continually busy, but with little regard to sustainable impact of all the 'things' they do. Does this sound familiar?

So how do we maintain our focus in the face of more and more 'things' being mooted that we should be doing? Firstly, go back to your values and use these to help you weed out the wheat from the chaff, to decide what you will do and what you won't do. Next, you need to be evidence and research informed. This is not the same as being 'evidence and reform driven' which some advocate.

To be driven by research, evidence and data is dangerous because it swiftly leads to shaping what you do to provide and improve the evidence or the data, 'teaching to the test.' Instead, we need to be informed so that we are not doing things on whims, or because they are the latest fad or trend.

We implement change and developments because there is plenty of evidence to show they will have positive impacts for learners, always being aware of the importance of context and knowing where you are on your development journey. Having a plan, a school improvement plan or development plan, is crucial. This, more than anything, is going to protect you from the demands of others and allow you to deal with change in a managed and controlled way.

It should not be set in stone, but should be an adaptable and responsive document that gives everyone a structure to what you are trying to achieve. It should be your plan and, once agreed by all, you should use it to move things forward and to protect everyone from other agendas. We need a relentless approach to development and one year's plan should lead seamlessly into the next and should connect everything you do to your core business, your 'main thing' as Sir John Harvey Jones calls it. Taking such steps will allow you to keep that main thing the main thing.

## **Dealing with the challenges**

Leading a school, and teaching, are not easy, but they remain very rewarding. We all make a difference in peoples' lives on a daily basis. Those of us who have been involved in such work for any length of time will have faced many challenges and many difficult situations. We will have dealt with some of them well and we will have dealt with others not so well. But, we will have learned from all of them and out of them we will have developed a range of strategies to help us deal effectively with new challenges we face.

One of the things I learned very early in my leadership journey was to deal with issues as soon as they arise, to stop molehills becoming mountains. The next was to keep calm and to try and not to take things personally. Easier said than done by the way! I again refer to your values, as these certainly help you identify what is acceptable and what is not. They help you draw your 'line in the sand' beyond which you are not prepared to go or accept.

When such a point is reached, it may be time for one of those 'difficult conversations' we can all dread. What I have discovered about such conversations is that they are hardly ever as 'difficult' as we imagine them to be. If you are up front and open with everyone in all your dealings, then such situations become easier. Collaboration, and having access to good quality mentoring and coaching can also be so helpful when facing challenges and difficulties.

Having colleagues you can trust and just talk to, after all they will have faced many of the same issues, can be a lifeline, especially early in your career as a school leader. You should accept the challenges you will face secure in the knowledge that you will deal with each in an appropriate way, based on your values, informed by research and experience, and with the needs of all your learners at its heart.

### **Positives and negatives**

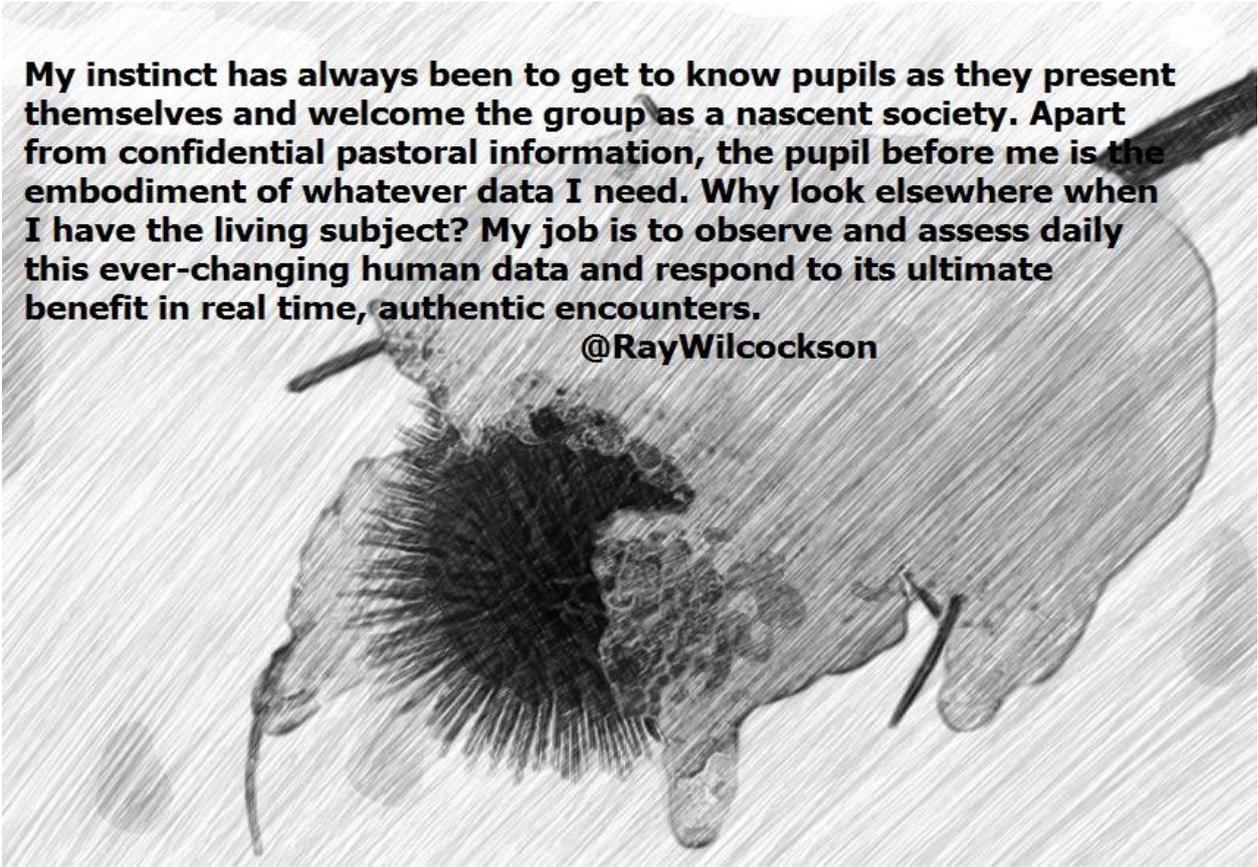
As with any profession, throughout your career you will experience positive and negative experiences. I have been a school leader for over twenty years and I still see the positives outnumbering the negatives every single day. We work with fabulous people and for a common cause, which is to provide each and every one of our learners the best educational experience we can so that they can achieve their potential.

Any day, when I am weighed down by the demands of my job, I can simply leave my office and enter any classroom to reconnect with what my role is all about, and experience so much that is positive about that role.

The biggest cause of negatives are usually generated outside of schools by politicians and the media and I can usually ignore most of this, though this might be one reason why I also blog as this is an opportunity to get one or two things off my chest! I still believe I have the best job in the world and there have not been many days when I have not looked forward to going in to work. I can get frustrated at times, but usually these frustrations quickly dissipate when I work with pupils and colleagues, and reconnect with my core purpose.

You have to find a way of dealing with the negative aspects of our role, but realising that all roles have them and not many have the daily highs we can experience can certainly help with this. An interesting exercise might be to list all the positives about your role, then try the negatives.

Whenever I have done this, the positive list has always far outstripped the negative. Attitude is crucial. Should you try that exercise and the negatives outweigh the positives, perhaps it's time to consider a career change.



**My instinct has always been to get to know pupils as they present themselves and welcome the group as a nascent society. Apart from confidential pastoral information, the pupil before me is the embodiment of whatever data I need. Why look elsewhere when I have the living subject? My job is to observe and assess daily this ever-changing human data and respond to its ultimate benefit in real time, authentic encounters.**

**@RayWilcockson**

## **Compatibility in a compassionate community. Unity of purpose within a humane system, at the same time dealing with behavioural challenges.**

Crime and punishment or choices and consequences? There are not always easy answers.

An ABCDE of behaviour issues.

- A = antecedents; what happened before the behaviour?
- B = behaviour; describe the behaviour in detail.
- C = consequences of the behaviour.
- D = discussions and decisions.
- E = Expectations of future behaviours

Nobody really likes rules and regulations, if they are honest, and most people at some stage have broken some kind of rule, sometimes inadvertently. Probably every adult has also indulged in what is now being called low-level disruption; you only have to talk to an adult audience to be able to see, as speaker, a wide variety of what schools call low-level behaviour issues, such as talking to neighbours, using a smart phone and taking a drink, sometimes noisily clanking cups and saucers together.

Most drivers have crept above speed limits at some stage. Laws rely on a high degree of self-regulation to be maintained, by the vast majority of the population. Laws support the need to be able to manage behaviour when self-control, within the accepted rules and laws, breaks down.

We live in a world that is governed by laws, created by Governments, enacted by a wide range of people, including the police, with different levels of courts to deal with those whose misdemeanours are significant. All of the above are governed by statute, aka laws, that say what they should do. We have these laws so that civil society can run efficiently and effectively and allow all to participate to the best of their ability.

Essentially, as adults, we have a pretty good idea of what this means. There are rules and laws which govern driving and, if you speed and get caught, you can expect some form of sanction. Non-payment of a wide range of taxes can incur fines and punishments. Inflicting bodily harm on another person is likely to result in time in prison. However, in all these cases, it can be argued that the rules/laws may have been broken by people who know the rules, but choose to break them because they do not expect to be caught. Drink/drivers will be aware of their behaviour and the consequences, but they still go ahead. It is possible that they do not care, about the impact of their behaviour or the consequences, so are prepared to take the risk.

So is "breaking the law" a combination of behaviours, with an individual prepared to take the risk, not caring and not expecting to be caught, among others?

Sport is governed by rules and regulations, which ensure that competitions are fair to all participants, with umpires and referees whose job is to interpret the rules, to make snap judgements to ensure the free flow of the game/ activity.

In schools, there are rules which seek to ensure that the civil society that is the school is able to run and allow the participants to take advantage of the education on offer. The rules are made by the managing adults, to guide the actions of the other adults, to ensure that everyone is safe and able to go about their daily experiences. School rules need to be straight forward, easy to articulate and understand and be capable of interpretation into the many different aspects of school life where rules are needed.

Like all rules, they rely on all members agreeing and seeking to abide by them. This can be through home-school agreements, with the school setting out how behaviour issues are handled and parents and children signing to agree with them. It is the beginning of a behaviour contract. If the rules are interpreted through assemblies, classroom expectations, notices, the regular articulation ensures that they have the capacity to become embedded into the psyche of each child.

Positive reinforcement of good/acceptable behaviours can be supportive in ensuring that the rules are allowed to "live" in the school culture. Many schools run schemes that benefit those whose behaviour is good, if only by being noticed. If there are no evident benefits to behaving, then it is not a surprise that some will seek to take advantage.

The adult role, in a school, can be nebulous as an arbiter of the rules. It does rely on the adult fully understanding the expectations and rules and their particular place. Some adults in school assume a status, just by virtue of adulthood, which learners do not recognise, with the implication that all their judgements are reasonable. Where adults are the arbiters of the

rules, often, as individuals acting as police, judge and deliverers of punishment, with certain individuals, this can become a point of personal conflict.

It is very easy to create rules and to write them in such a way that they can be easily broken. Lists of school rules which state "You will not..." are plentiful and easy to add to. For some they become a challenge in themselves. But, everyone needs to know where they stand, otherwise rules can be made up as people go along. Insecurity adds to tension in the social group. Rule-making is always likely to be "top-down"; there are not many alternatives, although an interpretation of democracy might have originally suggested other ways.

There is a discussion to be had about how overt any sanction should be. Today, we do not have public flogging and hanging and most punishment of perpetrators is done away from direct public gaze, in courts and possibly in prisons.

Children are learning about their world, how to relate to others, how to become responsible people, They are learning about the "rules" that govern social interaction, such as turn taking, in games and speaking, sharing with others, taking an equal amount, when naturally they want to be first and have all of something.

For sixteen years, I ran my school with three principles

- Be responsible for yourself
- Be responsible for the way you treat others.
- Be responsible for the things around you.

The implication of these was that children could do things as long as they did not hurt another or cause damage to items. It was possible to have conversations about inappropriate behaviours and to seek ways of restoring the balance. Some might now seek to call this Restorative Justice but it worked for me in my setting.

Now, there is a difference in scale in schools and not all schools can work along those lines. Visiting schools of all sizes, I see many good examples of organisations which enable the schools to manage the behaviour and for the CYP (Child or Young Person) to be re-assimilated into the school. In some cases there are several layers, including the equivalent of an internal Pupil Referral Unit, in an attempt to maintain the CYP in that school setting, knowing that exclusion can further deepen personal issues. In these settings, specialist staff are used to ensure that CYP receive counselling, coaching, mentoring as well as meeting their basic teaching needs.

People matter in behaviour situations. An interesting side to behaviour management can occur when BM is passed to someone else to be actioned; I sometimes called this "upward delegation". Where this occurs the original adult, by passing the baton, can become devalued in the eyes of the CYP; the person with status is the person who deals out punishment. Passing the buck does not help overall. School society is everyone's job, as everyone is a part of that society. Relationships matter hugely.

Behaviour in school should be a regular item of discussion, through whole school assembly focus, stories shared under PSHE topics, class talks or circle times and face to face with individuals as needed.

- Expectations need to be very clearly stated and overt in daily school life. Any rules should be easily memorable, to both CYP and adults.

- Adults should model calm behaviours, even in challenging circumstances.
- Choices and consequences should be a part of discussion; phrased as "your choices, my choices".
- If punishment is appropriate, the fairness should be apparent to all.
- Follow through and follow up should be every staff member's mantra.

It can appear at times that we expect behaviours from CYP that we do not expect of ourselves. Behaviour management is, in my opinion, a subtle interplay of many factors, some of which are in the control of the adults, but through a high reliance of compliance from the vast majority of the school population. Individual CYP come to school carrying a lot of baggage derived from life outside the setting and can appear to be kicking against the school rules.

If they break the rules: -

- Some will need only a look to conform.
- Some may need short term guidance.
- Some may need coaching and mentoring.
- Some will need to be made whole, to rediscover their humanity.
- Some may need time away from the situation, then face the consequences before reintegration.

As in a court of law, the person who makes the ultimate decision is making a, hopefully considered and balanced judgement. There are many occasions when judgement is called into question. Everyone is fallible. Human decisions can be flawed. Sometimes we have to accept that too and be able to move on.

As Vic Goddard, Head teacher of Passmores School says; "(Maintain) a positive regard for young people".

**Make the most of your staff who are your greatest resource**

- Teaching is a craft that must be learned and developed and nurtured. It will not just happen.
- Take a serious look at the CPD provided for your staff. Is it past its sell-by date? Ask you staff how it could be better and look to Twitter for advice on how to make it more meaningful.
- Employ teachers and support staff who are flexible (attitude), who have a sense of humour and are solution focused and who are willing to learn and change.
- Really support them by making sure there is time for them to plan, teach and mark.
- Make sure they work in teams and support each other.
- Remember life throws curve balls and staff as well as children may have to cope with terrible problems, which may affect their performance. We need to support them through that.

**Kenny Frederick**



**Kenny Frederick @kennyfrederick**

## **Reflections**

After 39 years in the teaching profession, 17 as headteacher of a large secondary school, and a year as a 'consultant', I offer my thoughts and share some of the things I have learned over the years.

I have always said that I did not want my school to succeed at the expense of the school down the road. I wanted us all to succeed. After all they are all our children. However, Headteachers do not always play fair and some will do all in their power to succeed at the expense of other schools. Some will behave very badly indeed... Such is life but it makes me sad as we should be setting a good example.

In my view Leadership without moral purpose is not worth a jot! Heads need to be clear about their values and principles and hang on to them. Remember them when the going gets tough (and it will!). Big egos have no place in schools.... A bit of humility goes a long way!

### **Advice for headteachers:**

Always admit your mistakes and always give credit where its due

Never pretend you know all the answers but recognize there will be somebody in your school or community who does know the answer. Ask them!

Don't try to be the headteacher you think people expect. Be yourself -warts and all!

Schools are about people and people are your greatest resource, invest in them, value & support them. Motivate them and appreciate all that they do.

Distribute and share leadership across the school and don't forget support staff who have so

much to offer.

Demystify headship – it's not rocket science, and encourage others to aim for that role. Inclusion is about children, staff and parents and can be achieved in many ways but it's never easy.

Collaboration does not just happen. It needs to start with the head teacher and it needs to be structured and planned but must never be forced.

Collaboration will only happen when there is trust and openness and understanding that each school/teacher/person has something to contribute.

Developing the whole child and preparing them for life is what education is all about – not just about passing exams

Developing children as lifelong learners will prepare them for the future we know so little about.

A school without emotional intelligence and a caring supportive ethos is not a school...

Share your vision and adapt it by listening to others (this is where Michael Gove failed...!)

### **Making the most of your staff who are your greatest resource.**

Teaching is a craft that must be learned and developed and nurtured. It will not just happen. Take a serious look at the CPD provided for your staff. Is it past its sell-by date? Ask your staff how it could be better and look to Twitter for advice on how to make it more meaningful.

Everybody in school needs to belong to a union and heads should not see the union as the enemy but work with them. They really can help.

Only employ teachers and support staff who are flexible (attitude), who have a sense of humour and are solution focused and who are willing to learn and change.

Really support them by making sure there is time for them to plan, teach and mark.

Make sure they work in teams and support each other.

Remember life throws curve balls and staff as well as children may have to cope with terrible problems, which may affect their performance. We need to support them through that.

### **Making the most of your pupils**

Listen to the pupils and hear their voices especially around teaching & learning.

Ask them about their experience and their learning

Make sure teachers ask them for feedback and act on it

Remember pupils like adults have a range of needs. Our job is to meet those needs so they can thrive and flourish.

As a school concentrate more on looking at how children learn rather than concentrating on judging what teachers are doing.

### **What I would do differently next time as a head**

I only taught for one year as head and only then because we had a teacher shortage. I really thought it was not the job of a head who was being paid a lot of money to lead the school. However, I think this was a mistake, as I would have had a much greater understanding of what teachers were doing if I had been in the classroom myself.

I would take a completely different approach to CPD and make sure it was differentiated and delivered mostly by staff in the school rather than by experts. Teachers need to take charge

of their own development so it is important to involve them in developing their own training and development programme. Teachers learn best from each other and more opportunities to observe each other and to feedback openly and honestly.

I would try not be so obsessed by Ofsted and exam results!

## **Finally**

Secondary schools need to stop thinking they know everything – they don't and can learn a great deal from primary schools

Poverty is a real issue not something made up by whinging teachers...

The expectations of teachers, schools and children are huge and are not healthy

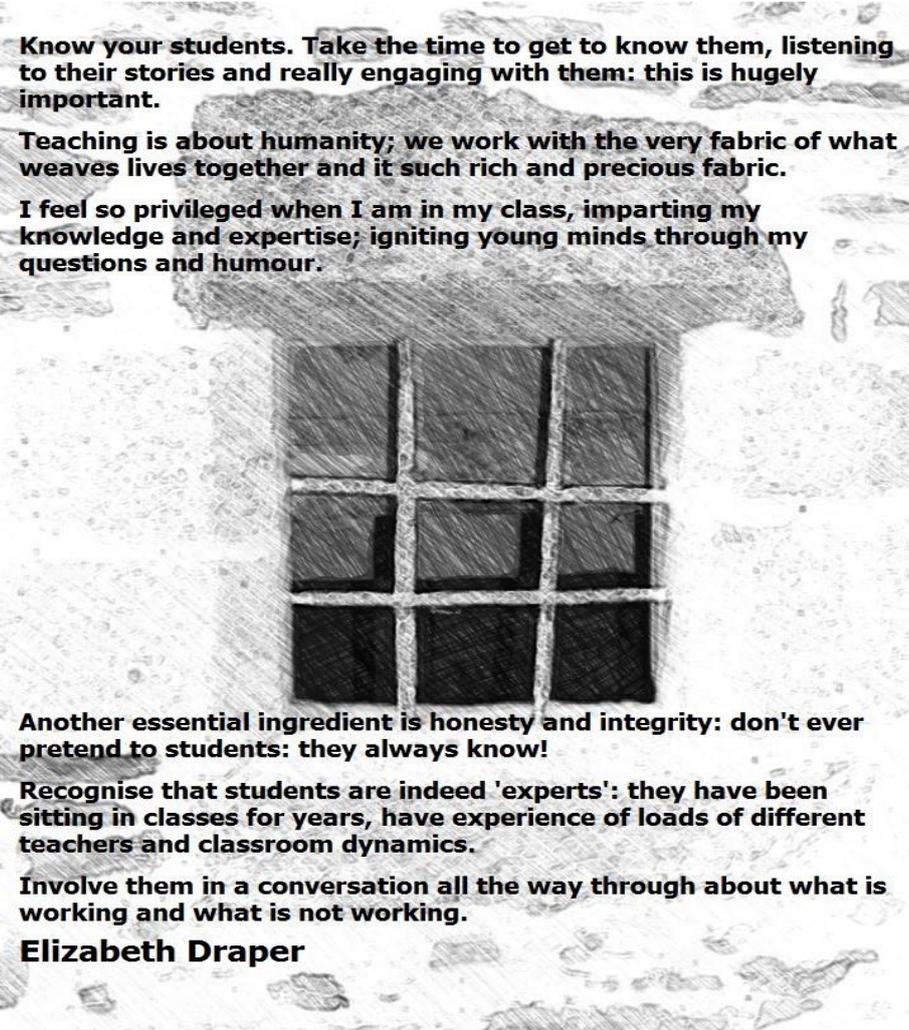
Government policy comes and goes and heads have to help teachers circumnavigate the more extreme big ideas to come in with each government.

Schools always make sense of even the most obscure government policy and make it work despite the problems. Government then take the credit and rubbish teachers! That's the truth but it should not deter us from doing our jobs.

Resilience comes from within and it's about having eternal optimism and a belief that things will get better. Heads need to model this and help others develop their resilience but must never think less of those who appear to be less resilient than others. It takes time and support to develop.

I have been very lucky to have had such a brilliant career as a teacher and headteacher and now I am able to visit schools across the schools as a consultant. I am still learning and am in awe at the work schools are doing. In fact I am so enthused that I am just about to embark on a PhD with Brunel University that looks at a new form of CPD called Instructional (Teacher) Rounds.

Once a learner, always a learner!



**Know your students. Take the time to get to know them, listening to their stories and really engaging with them: this is hugely important.**

**Teaching is about humanity; we work with the very fabric of what weaves lives together and it such rich and precious fabric.**

**I feel so privileged when I am in my class, imparting my knowledge and expertise; igniting young minds through my questions and humour.**

**Another essential ingredient is honesty and integrity: don't ever pretend to students: they always know!**

**Recognise that students are indeed 'experts': they have been sitting in classes for years, have experience of loads of different teachers and classroom dynamics.**

**Involve them in a conversation all the way through about what is working and what is not working.**

**Elizabeth Draper**

## **Maintaining composure under resistance. Keeping calm when things get difficult. Mary Roche @marygtroche**

I have been involved in education for nearly six decades – as a pupil, a teacher, a postgraduate and a lecturer. I am still learning but I can make a few claims to knowledge too.

I know now that education is never neutral – that our values permeate everything we do and say in kindergartens, classrooms, lecture halls and education ministers' offices. I also know now that relationships matter in education and that they are influenced by those same value bases. I know too that critical thinking and dialogue – along with reflection and keeping calm - are needed to clarify our assumptions and positions and stances when different sets of values compete for dominance.

I grew up in an era when children were seen and not heard. It was an era where 'spare the rod and spoil the child' was a motto adhered to by parents and teachers alike. It was a time when only the wealthy (or the poor who could win scholarships) could afford secondary education, and only the very privileged went on to university. Norms and values were largely shared by society, church and state, and reinforced by the education system.

I was the oldest of a large family of children lucky enough to grow up in a home where our parents read to us, talked to us, played with us and encouraged us to be “good in school” – an exhortation that implied compliant behaviour as well as academic prowess. I was a precocious speaker and reader and I succeeded academically without much effort. My primary school teachers were nuns who had devoted their lives to the education of the poor. They were caring, knowledgeable and strict; they encouraged us to read and write well; they expected us to learn off poetry; they taught us to sing in harmony, to knit and sew and cook; they drilled us in our times tables, and provided us with lists to be memorised - battles, rebellions, rivers, mountains and towns and, of course, catechism. They were of their time. Classroom life was silence punctuated by teacher questions and pupil recitation. Dialogue did not feature.

## **Training**

My teacher training took place in a very strict convent setting in Dublin. We slept in enormous dormitories and observed an almost monastic way of life with compulsory attendance at meals and Mass and lectures, even on Saturdays. We females were trained to be compliant assistant teachers of classes from Junior Infants (4 year-olds) to 6<sup>th</sup> Class (12 year olds). Meanwhile, across the city in the male college, young men had discretion around meal and lecture attendance, and were prepared for teaching 8 to 12 year olds. Teaching infants was deemed to be women’s work. It would seem that men were being educated for a different, less docile, role.

When I began teaching in the early 1970s Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner had begun to have an impact; child-centred ‘enquiry’ was a phrase bandied about, but few knew what to do about it. When I began teaching I was faced with such a huge class (over fifty 4 and 5 year old girls) and child-centred theories seemed impossible to implement. I resorted to my apprenticeship of observation (Lortie 1975) and a pedagogy of control and monologue. I wasn’t happy about the situation but I did not have a language with which to critique it.

To acquire such a language (although I did not realise that was my aim) I read widely about education: Ashton-Warner’s (1963) *Teacher*; Holt’s (1964) *How Children Fail*; Marshall’s (1963) *An Experiment in Education*, and Postman and Weingartner’s (1969) *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*. I encountered Lipman’s *Philosophy for Children (P4C)* and its Irish counterpart, Philomena Donnelly’s (1994) ‘Thinking Time’. I was overjoyed at arriving at what I thought was the solution to all my pedagogical problems. I implemented Donnelly’s approach and tweaked it to suit my context. I achieved what I considered to be huge success, having researched it for my MA. I was a zealous advocate: I wanted every teacher to try it for themselves. I was certain they would love it too.

I felt completely confident about the approach when I took up a new teaching post in 2001 and began my PhD.

## **Encountering dilemmas – my principal**

Teachers’ professional identities are not always secure. Day *et al.* (2006) argue that ‘professionalism is bound up in the discursive dynamics of professionals attempting to address or redress the dilemmas of the job within particular cultures’ (p.614). I found it to be the case in my early practice.

The first of these ‘dilemmas of the job’ presented itself quickly. I wrote in my journal that

*My principal wants the professional development [in relation to Critical Thinking and Book Talk] put on a more formal footing. I believe he thinks I*

*am too casual in wanting to share accounts of practice informally with colleagues. He wants me to start providing in-house in-service to 'get them up and running: kick start the process so that everyone will begin doing it.' (20-03-02)*

I was hesitant about adopting prescriptive practices, despite the fact that I wanted everybody 'doing' Critical Thinking and Book Talk. My unease was to do with immersing colleagues too quickly in a practice which had taken me many years to understand, and about which I was still learning. I had spent the previous twenty years in a school where there was little or no collegiality and this experience had made me wary. I also felt uneasy about being forced to 'do critical thinking'.

*I suggested to my principal that if teachers feel coerced into a practice into which they have not fully bought or do not fully understand, then the whole idea might backfire. I also felt that the notion of being compelled to do critical thinking was paradoxical. (26-03-04)*

The diary entries show that in those first two years I was concerned with wanting to develop an affirming and relational model of professional development in my new institution that, unlike my previous school, would encourage educational discourse that was future oriented, open and critical. I was apprehensive about appearing to 'push' my model of practice at colleagues.

*..the emotional climate of the school and classroom will affect attitudes to and practices of **teaching** and learning... this dimension of identity has been given relatively little attention in much of the research (Day et al. 2006 p.612)*

I had to remind myself of my commitment to respecting the rights of others to think for themselves, including those who disagree with me. Initially, I perceived my dilemma in terms of a binary dualism: either I was right or my principal was, and, that by default, one of us had to be wrong. I failed to see it as a contest of two rights: my principal's right as leader of the staff group to direct our school in accordance with his values (and the expectation that I, as one of 'his' staff members would comply), and my right to work in a way that was appropriate for me and commensurable with my values. In feeling miserable about the apparent clash of epistemologies in our respective stances, I ignored the positive aspect – we were both trying to achieve the same vision, but by different methodologies, as these were grounded in dissimilar ontological and epistemological standpoints. Over time and together we reached a compromise whereby teachers who felt unwilling to do the programme would swap classes and expertise with those who could. For example my own pupils benefitted hugely from having excellent music and sports coaching while I took two other classes for Critical Thinking and Book Talk.

### **Encountering resistance to my ideas from other teachers**

I encountered further resistance to my ideas when I presented a week-long professional development summer in-service course in my local education centre. I explained to the 25 teachers from a variety of schools, how classroom dialogue could support the whole curriculum, but only if teachers were willing to be critical thinkers themselves and ground their practice in a relational and humanising pedagogy.

On the first day of the course I articulated my educational values and explained how I had come to the point where I now believed that learning to think for oneself was probably the most important aspect of education. I presented an overview of the idea of philosophising with children and showed some video excerpts of children engaged in lively discussion. I then asked the teachers present to respond to what they had heard and seen: I was taken aback when one teacher said, very angrily:

*That is the greatest load of rubbish I have ever heard or seen. The idea of letting children talk like that ... that's very dangerous! (01-07-04)*

No one else present agreed: in fact, this teacher's response acted as a catalyst in provoking discussion. When all the teachers who wished to, had responded, I thanked the first speaker for her contribution and expressed a hope that perhaps by the end of the week, she would come to appreciate the approach. She remained unconvinced and at the end of the course she said:

*Children come to school to learn; they are told what to do. That's the teacher's job: that's what we're paid for – to teach, to give information to the children, to help them learn. (Excerpt from conversation with AC 05-07-04)*

In this response the teacher is echoing what many conservative educationalists feel in relation to giving students too much of a voice. For example, Fullan (1991 p.170) points out the rarity of children being asked for their opinions within education contexts and asks: *What would happen if we treated the student as someone whose opinion mattered?*

Noddings' (2006) argued that critical topics are not presented in educational contexts largely because of ignorance – 'the notion never arises' (p. 3). Now, like Noddings, I saw that fear too plays a dominant role:

*Fear may be an even greater impediment. What harm might we do to our students if we encourage them to think critically and reflectively? It is not only fictional characters like ... Dickens's Gradgrind who fear that real harm might be done to individuals or to the social fabric by promoting critical thinking. ... the social order itself might suffer if citizens were to exercise critical thinking. (Noddings 2006 p.3)*

The teacher who protested against the idea of teaching children to think for themselves spoke from her own ontological stance. Her educational values did not allow her to support the notion of a free-thinking and dialogical learning environment. Her epistemological values seemed fixed in a propositional form of logic that views knowledge as a commodity to be deposited into students. Her idea of the value of didacticism appears to be grounded in conventional logics of control and oppression (Marcuse 1964). Marcuse argues that propositional thinking forms the basis for a social technology of control and that the idea of citizens thinking for themselves would represent a huge threat to such forms of thinking. He speaks about the ways in which an 'advanced industrial society' creates sophisticated, scientific forms of management and organisation.

The teacher in question appears to be displaying a fear of loss of control. Perhaps ignorance and fear are two sides of the same coin that militates against critical thinking.

### **Another upset – this time from pupils**

RSE is one of the core resources for the Social and Personal Health Education curriculum. One of the lessons for 3rd class contains information about the growth of the foetus in the uterus and how babies are born. It necessitates the use of the correct anatomical names for parts of the body and so, in an attempt to give the topic the gravitas it deserved, I decided to take my students into the unused Room 15 where we usually had our weekly Critical Thinking and Book Talk session. The children automatically sat in a circle and I began by reading the preliminary part of the lesson, a poem about new life. I then tried to 'deliver' the rest of the lesson, but was confounded when the children constantly interrupted and discussed babies and pre-natal care and spontaneously shared their experiences of the births of new siblings or cousins.

My research journal notes for the day show how I became flustered and asked the children to 'please stop interrupting so that I could talk':

*Suddenly C, looking perplexed, asked, But Teacher, I don't get it, like ... why did you bring us in here if you don't want us to talk?*

*I answered that I had to teach the lesson and that I had to stick closely to the way it was presented in the teacher's book.*

*C replied: Yeah, but why are we in here so? Why didn't we stay in the class?*

*Heads nodded in assent and CF said: Teacher, like, this is ... like, our room for talking; and you're ... you're always saying you're just one of us like, one of the listeners - in here, Teacher. (30-03-06)*

I realised then that I had expected to be able to teach didactically without any challenges simply because 'I had decided'. Suddenly for the very first time I saw that years of experience of classroom dialogue in a circle format meant that the introduction of a didactic practice into that format now needed some preliminary explanation. I had simply assumed an authoritarian role and the children as excluded 'Others' who must listen to me and absorb information without thinking for themselves.

I saw that thinking critically is a feature of a holistic education practice, not an add-on 'bonus' that I bestow at certain times. I saw that going into a different room 'for thinking' reinforced the reification of critical thinking as a 'thing' we do in Room 15, but not in our classroom, unless I 'allowed' 'it'.

Back in the classroom later I discussed the episode with the children and told them how I'd been taken aback by their involvement. I asked them what they thought would have happened if I had 'taught' the lesson in our own classroom.

*G: Well, we would like, probably have let you talk more, like for longer I suppose.*

*C added, Yeah, but after like, a while, we'd still probably expect that we could interrupt with questions and tell you stuff too. (30-03-05)*

I then saw that while I had achieved some small measure of progress in creating a dialogical and democratic classroom, there was still a long way to go. I realised too, following the episode described above, that my children were not simply 'going through the motions' of

discussion: as far as they were concerned they were taking part in real dialogue. This is different to what Elkind and Sweet (1997) referred to as the way in which many students see classroom dialogue as 'filling in the blanks' – a process where, in 'discussion', children try to guess what the teacher wants and supply 'right' answers. They cite their own experience as students and state:

*Our teacher would start to lead a classroom 'discussion', but we had a sinking suspicion that it was just a sham. All she wanted from the class was for us to fill in the blanks of her pre-programmed curriculum. She would fish around from student to student until she got the answer she was looking for. So we kids had to make a choice between sincerely expressing our own thoughts on the subject, at considerable risk to our grade, or simply giving the teacher what she wanted to hear. The 'smarter' kids chose to play it safe. Their reward was the teacher's effusive praise for supplying the 'right' answer. (Elkind and Sweet 1997 p.1)*

Burbules (1993) also speaks about the irony of asking questions to which one already knows the answer, which, he says, only happens in educational contexts (p.98). Holt (1964) similarly showed that children use many strategies in order to provide 'right' answers, or to merely 'survive' in class by pleasing teachers. When I started out to encourage children to be better critical and creative thinkers, I wanted to provide my children with a more authentic experience, to engage them in what I understood by genuine dialogue (see below). I wanted to encourage them to be thinkers rather than teacher pleasers or providers of 'right' answers. I wanted them especially to begin to realise that often there are no right answers, and that social problems can often arise because of contesting rights. But I also wanted to be a 'good' teacher, to comply with norms of what I felt 'good' teaching meant. I was caught between these duelling identities for a long time with my critical researcher voice, informed by a dialectical form of logic, trying to be heard over the louder voice prompted by years of propositional forms of logic. I believe that the episodes above, show that I have come some way towards realising my goal and hushing that didactic propositional voice. I now know too that encountering resistance is good. It forces us to reflect critically on our educational values.

### On management (working with people)

- Humanity should be a byword for everyone. Create a climate of respect. Model it.
- You work with and through your team. You are responsible for their welfare. Value them.
- Make sure the work environment supports their efforts, with appropriate space, resources and time.
- Goodwill works two ways; a "give and take" approach buys extra effort.
- Communicate, communicate, communicate; don't assume.
- Strategy is only as good as the explanation and the understanding. You can have all the plans in the world, but, if no-one understands them, they will fail.
- Take time to say thank you.

Chris Chivers



## **Competence, competition and comparison. Everyone getting better, by understanding and addressing their own development journey.**

The idea of CPD (continuing professional development) can be a contentious one, in that every teacher needs to be continually developing, seeking to be better, while the restrictions of the school budget can mean that this is piecemeal, if it is seen only in the context of time at courses, off site, led by an expert in a field. This approach can be costly, with course costs, supply cover and some disruption to the classes being left behind.

A long time ago, when I qualified, all courses were run at our local teacher's centre, as twilight offerings, usually led by a local teacher over a six week timescale, to a theme, which

enabled reflection in between, trial in class and reportage and professional discussion, which was particularly valuable where for some this had meant success, while others found disaster. Context and background preparation was shown to be a significant factor.

If you were lucky, you got to go on a "Gurney Dixon". This meant an overnight stay at the authority residential centre, for a two day course. These were special and often ran at weekends, so that working weeks became endless, even if you were one of the chosen ones. However, it also meant, on at least three occasions, sleeping in a single room where the caretaker had stored the toilet rolls and the shared bathroom facilities often left much to be desired. The quality professional discussion was often developed over a drink at a local hostelry, sharing classroom notes, away from the bustle of school life.

**Lesson 1 CPD;** talk with your colleagues; they have expertise and insights to share.

Working in an open plan school for four years, enabled much informal CPD, as a head round the curtain, a chat on the way to and from the staffroom, sitting on a table before or after school, chatting over activities, displays, specialist subjects, enabled a drip feed of ideas to be developed. Copying was allowed. Equally, where issues in a year group might be causing some concern, to be able to pop next door, to the year above or below, allowed discussion of what could be tried to remedy or accelerate the children with appropriate tasking.

**Lesson 2 CPD;** link with an ITE institution, take students and see having them as mentoring training and personal development across a wide perspective.

Having a student teacher, on an extended practice, ensures that the teacher, acting as mentor, has to unpick all aspects of their professional practice to engage fully with the student needs. It can also be the case that watching a student teacher prompts reflection on the part of the mentor. It certainly enables reflection on the class needs, as the mentor can spend time observing their learning approaches and work closely with specific individuals. This working closely can provide the basis for a more analytical approach than is often available, so deepens the teacher understanding and refines the T&L approach taken.

A good relationship with an ITE institution can result in a constant stream of good quality students, who provide additional personnel, and, once established as the class teacher, can enable cross-school release, for colleagues to observe each other, with mentors acting as cover, for short periods of time.

**Lesson 3 CPD;** take advantage of local offerings, twilight or (occasional) Saturdays. Build up a personal network of colleagues.

Newly organised, Teachmeets can be a way to take part in free CPD opportunities. They are twilights, usually have some refreshments and are a good way to meet colleagues from other schools. It's a chance to get away early, with a purpose. Ideas are shared, which can be taken away, stored and use when needed.

In addition, there is now a range of Saturday gatherings, some free, others at a cost, that support teacher sharing at a deeper level, with colleagues sharing their specialist areas. Examples are Teaching and Learning Takeover, ResearchEd, Northern Rocks and Primary Rocks.

**Lesson 4 CPD;** Blog, keep a weblog of your ideas, share them online, through social media like Twitter. Online conversations are fast becoming an outlet for professional discussion,

sharing extended ideas with blogs, enabling feedback comments, which in turn enable further reflection.

If you don't feel like making your thoughts public, keeping a reflective diary enables you to go back over ideas or to make useful summaries.

**Lesson 5 CPD;** personal development takes time.

It is not something that happens on one day. Teaching is a reflective profession. Ideas are the bread and butter of teaching and learning. Working in collaboration, with internal colleagues or from another school, clarifies thinking and refines personal practice.

**Lesson 6 CPD;** do some extended study at Post Grad level.

Many institutions now support in-school research/investigation as the means to gaining credits, so that in-house development can also be linked with personal CPD. That can be the quid pro quo; you run the improvement, write it up, for school and uni and gain credit, both for school improvement and as a qualification. Both are very useful for the CV and promotion.

**Lesson 7 CPD;** it's about you. Take charge and organise, join in discussions and share in or lead idea development. Be proactive; CPD is you developing yourself, not (just) something that someone does to you. It is embedded in the teacher standards; no 8, professionalism.

## **Reflecting; Lisa Pettifer @Lisa7Pettifer**

This is my 25th year of teaching. Here's what I've learned.

### **On you**

Never lose it. Emotional outbursts are memorable, so a two minute rant might take you two years to live down!

Rarely put off until tomorrow what can be done today - you can save time in the long run, just don't try to do EVERYTHING today!

Sometimes do things differently. Don't get stuck in a rut and repeat previous habits just because you haven't stopped to reflect and evaluate for a while. Try to see the benefit in someone else's way of doing something.

Often think about family and friends who might be missing out on your time and energy because of the amounts of both that get sucked into work. Draw the line.

Always listen to your body, your partner, your children and your inner voice.

### **On children**

Never be mean to a child. You are the grown up and whatever behaviour you exhibit, a child somewhere will emulate you.

Rarely raise your voice to a child. If you have to, do it with control and demonstrate very soon afterwards that calm is restored. Use a slow, low tone to get across serious messages.

Sometimes call for reinforcements. Enlist a parent, TA, colleague or a peer of the children to help out in a tricky situation.

Often remember that the children we meet are not the 'finished product' yet. Even as teenagers, they can say and do daft things. Don't hold it against them and they will grow through it.

Always listen...to all sides of an argument, to all their questions, their dreary weekend news. You never know, one day you might be the only person listening.

### **On management**

Never do nothing. Always act, whether in thought or word or deed. Never live with regret. If you owe an apology, sort it sooner rather than later. And mean it. If someone owes you one, understand why it might be hard for them. And move on.

Rarely leave things unresolved. In exceptional circumstances, defer to a later discussion, but not without checking your current understanding and finding points of agreement for next steps.

Sometimes we have to admit that we'll have to ask for help on that one. Be open about what you can and can't do. Recognise and acknowledge those who have given support. Often delegate to others in their areas of expertise and then show your appreciation for their input. Leaders need to grow more leaders and give more junior colleagues chance to shine.

Always listen...as much to what is not being said as to what is. If you ask "so, that's OK?" in a meeting and no one responds, they're not telling you that it's OK!

## **Continuity. Keeping things together through initiative and change**

One certainty throughout my teaching career is that change has been a constant. For the first half, this was initiated by in-house or local area thinking, as people came back from courses and sought to implement the latest ideas.

From 1987-1997, the National Curriculum implementation and development held sway, but teachers were left relatively well alone to pursue their own approaches, so marrying the best of what had been with the best of what the National Curriculum asked for.

The 1997 change of Government heralded not the much promoted discussion with teachers, but the arrival of multiple boxes of National Strategy material and a daily diet of political exhortation through all media that the Literacy and Numeracy Hours had arrived, as if they had not existed previously.

It can be hard for teachers to hold to their personal beliefs, understanding and approaches when all around are changing theirs, yet, in order to function effectively, a teacher needs self-confidence.

As a headteacher, the mail was invariably full of brochures and flyers for fabulous products which we couldn't afford to miss. Often there were several versions of the same kind of material, many of which already were in existence within the school, so there had to be a compelling reason to buy into yet another "bright idea". There were schemes of work; book and card based resources as well as technological aids for every subject.

The product has to be sold and sometimes the sales team arrives with some kind of offer "only available to you, today". Hard sell, in my experience, leads to shelves full of unused resources, because an earlier subject manager thought the product was the bees' knees.

There is currently a larger group of consultants at different levels, including active teachers, whose ideas have been developed and honed within their classroom experience to the point where others want to hear from them how it is done. These outstanding people certainly have a great deal to share and are very confident polished performers. It is a pleasure to be in the company of passionate, reflective people willing to share their thinking. It is essential that they rationalise why they think as they do, so that participants can reflect on what they have heard compared their current situation. Ideas are always food for thought, but always need to be adapted to local circumstance, in terms of the local resources and expertise.

But what happens when the person, the consultant, also becomes the product? The mantra can be sold as, "Follow me and all will be well...." This has led to many a blind alley, especially where copying has taken the original to a very different place.

The problem with a fad or a fixation, especially in education, is the adherents or disciples become evangelical in their zeal to ensure that their school should also be devout followers. I have to admit, where a whole staff works collaboratively on developing an approach to learning, this can become very successful, because they are determined to make it work. The creative process is contagious and personally developing.

There is no better CPD for teachers than creating a scheme of work, a series or a single lesson, that really works well. The class buzz, the direction, the feedback from and to learners and between colleagues can become electric and other teachers want to know how it is done, so the more confident take career steps in developing CPD for others and so the snowball rolls. Of course, it can all come unstuck when the original expert moves on to another role.

In a busy world, it is understandable that finding a useful resource, including a proven method that might suit a particular piece of learning is a good thing. One interesting innovation over the relatively recent past, in selling, has been the use of words such as accelerate or big in the product title. Does this really make them better? Then of course, there are the training courses to be able to use the product, or to meet with the person, with subsequent cascading of information. It takes time before a clear evaluation can be made, in order to decide whether or not to pursue and the cascading will inevitably be an interpretation of the original, adapted to local resources and personnel skills.

Schools and staff can become fixated on a product, the ethos of which can become the principles on which a whole subject is developed. This can assume national proportions, as was seen with the introduction of the Literacy Strategy. The politics became "The Literacy Hour", while local interpretations allowed individual advisers to promote personal practice at the expense of current school practice which may be better, but changes under pressure.

The difficulty is that what works for one cannot be instantly successful for another. The push for systematic synthetic phonics as the main approach to reading has been a political imperative, based on a centralised view that it is the best evidenced approach. The "Literacy Hour" was similarly plugged politically and that became a millstone and a drag on learning

for many, without the anticipated improvement in literacy. It can be a case of a bright idea not fitting the holistic system, occasionally like using compatible ink cartridges in a printer. They then gunk up.

How much time are teachers spending trawling the internet? Is that in itself a kind of fixation? Is this directly to the benefit of learning in the classroom, if the resource is used without adaptation?

Equally there are many excellent teachers doing wonderful things. But just sharing the worksheet with a colleague may not produce the intended outcome, unless the receiver has a very clear idea of the process of development, the internal screenplay for the lesson, the off the cuff improvisation and adaptations that can occur when you "know your stuff".

**I'd argue that all time for reflection on pedagogy is valuable, so that decisions are based on informed choices. Perhaps time purchased for thinking time would be better than time looking for another new resource?**

Teachers are responsible to some degree for their own CPD, either through reading, conversations with experienced colleagues as mentors/models, in-house and external experiences including Inset, which should provide food for thought.

Teachers have a small amount of dedicated PPA time. Is this time out of class always put to uses which can take teachers further in their thinking than filling in prescribed planning forms, which in themselves might be the product of someone else's mind? Reflecting on practice, with colleagues, is an essential part of self-development, made more interesting if there is a challenge to come up with slightly oblique or unusual ways of sharing ideas with learners. It's well worth considering binning the worksheets and thinking about the developmental framework and scaffolding questions, rather than prescribing the script.

Inset is valuable time out of classrooms without the burden of responding to issues. Prescriptive inset that is delivered so that it, in turn, can be replicated, can be demotivating. Inset should model the Teaching and Learning approaches that the school is seeking to deploy; "Know-how with Show-how". This supports the visualisation by teachers of what is being said, especially if pedagogical change is outside their experience. They need to be able to "see it", just as much as the children.

**So:-**

**Think for yourself and your setting first.**

**The school should establish a clear ethos, philosophy and pedagogy.**

**Communicate.**

**Staff can then reflect on innovation and what it can add to the whole, especially on what has to be adjusted or lost.**

**Copying may be a form of flattery at an initial stage, but adaptation may lead to further innovation and cross seeding of ideas back to the originator.**

Schools will always have something to learn from each other and collaboration is a key driver of innovation, with ideas dispersed, trialled in different settings, then outcomes compared.

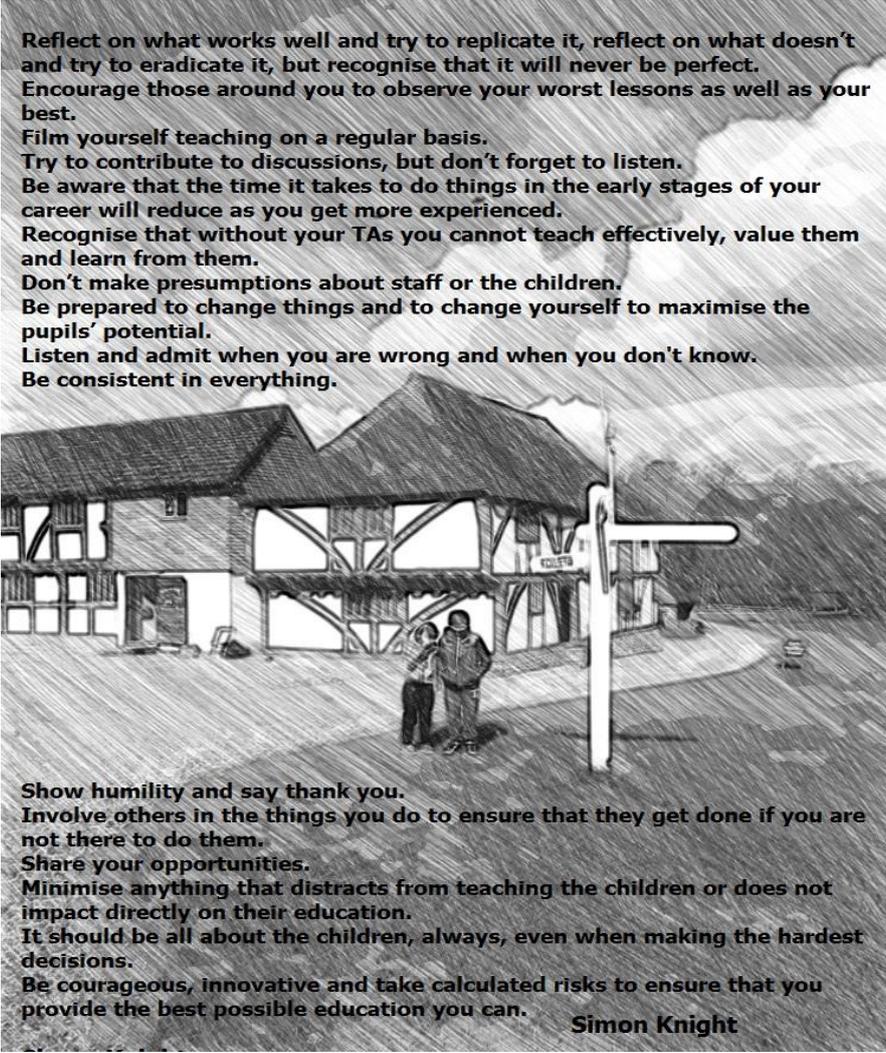
## **'No Man is an Island'**

No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as any manner of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

### MEDITATION XVII

Devotions upon Emergent Occasions

John Donne



**Reflect on what works well and try to replicate it, reflect on what doesn't and try to eradicate it, but recognise that it will never be perfect.**  
**Encourage those around you to observe your worst lessons as well as your best.**  
**Film yourself teaching on a regular basis.**  
**Try to contribute to discussions, but don't forget to listen.**  
**Be aware that the time it takes to do things in the early stages of your career will reduce as you get more experienced.**  
**Recognise that without your TAs you cannot teach effectively, value them and learn from them.**  
**Don't make presumptions about staff or the children.**  
**Be prepared to change things and to change yourself to maximise the pupils' potential.**  
**Listen and admit when you are wrong and when you don't know.**  
**Be consistent in everything.**

**Show humility and say thank you.**  
**Involve others in the things you do to ensure that they get done if you are not there to do them.**  
**Share your opportunities.**  
**Minimise anything that distracts from teaching the children or does not impact directly on their education.**  
**It should be all about the children, always, even when making the hardest decisions.**  
**Be courageous, innovative and take calculated risks to ensure that you provide the best possible education you can.**

**Simon Knight**

## **Composure and counselling. Keeping calm and carrying on.**

There was a discussion in school one day when someone asked what animal you would see as describing your personality. It was interesting, as someone immediately turned to me and nominated me as a swan; serene on top, but paddling like mad underneath.

Life's strange sometimes. I'd been thinking about the impact of a school having a sick colleague, when, for the first time in over eight years, while arriving for a platelet donation session, I met the son of the teacher who had died of cancer during my last year of headship. We each expressed surprise at the sheer coincidence and pleasure, in part because life's been kind to us both. He's married with two children and I've remarried after my wife died that same year.

We all know what it's like to feel a bit under the weather. The effects can range from just being a little off colour to being debilitated, especially if it is a little more than a cold. I'm not including man-flu, which obviously means instant medicalisation at the least.

Headteachers may often feel that they are married to their school; it can certainly be a 24/7/365 role, meaning that schools are like extended families, often sharing a member's pleasure or pain. A happy event is celebrated together. A sick colleague attracts support, either within, keeping a close eye in case of problems, or without, with visits to check up on progress. However, like all sickness this can become pervasive and can eventually distract the whole community, in extreme cases pushing individuals or the collective to virtual destruction.

If a head's door is regularly knocked with requests for five minutes, this soon adds up to significant disruption, distracting the HT from frontline issues and from development needs.

Reflecting back to my headship, of 16 years, I can recognise periods where there were significant strains, including the death of one teacher, as well as extended periods of development, supported by very active, fit and hard-working colleagues.

Coping with staff change can be seen as a form of institutional illness, in that there's a phase akin to bereavement for some, while the change offers opportunities to others for new relationships. It is, however, the impact of actual illness which can cripple a school, especially if the illness is terminal.

Seeing the impact on my own school over a relatively short time scale, of the death of a colleague, brought home the realities of life and headship. You are often in a lonely position as a head. To be the central figure through which significant information is passed, and being required to pass this to the rest of the staff, is a burden, as your messaging has to be tactful and supportive. That was February. In the April, my first wife entered the terminal phase of cancer. To say it knocked me would be an understatement, but for a couple of months, work-life continued, "as normal". It was the hospice phase that finally meant time off, with a subsequent knock on to the DH and needing a temporary cover teacher for an unknown timescale. Eye on which ball? Life's ball came top.

Ofsted, according to very many insightful blogs, can sometimes have a similar impact,

especially if the judgements mean some form of further intervention or worse. The school capacity to deal with this will determine the speed of recovery, if that time and capacity building is made available.

I was fortunate that the Local Authority was strong and prepared to intervene as needed, so there was a plan in place for issues which might arise and specific staff were alerted to the need to act with urgency if asked. With significant changes at LA level across the country, I am not sure if that support is easily available to every school.

I'd certainly counsel every head to put in place an emergency plan. The classic interview question to a prospective deputy as to their thinking in case of the headteacher being knocked over by a bus, can become a rapid reality.

.....

At one of the Grammar Schools that I attended, we had to learn by heart the creed and the act of contrition, the key words of which I still remember;

We have left undone those things which we ought to have done;

And we have done those things which we ought not to have done;

**And there is no health in us.**

This was an interesting concept for an 11 year old, reinforcing our place in the world; relatively low, as far as some teachers were concerned. We were made to feel small and guilty, to know our place in the world.

Teaching staff are accountable in many different ways, to their class(es), to their line manager, to the headteacher, the Governors, the parents, LA, Trust or Academy, Ofsted, Government. It can feel like accountability overload and I am wondering if there is a danger that it is the accountability, in itself, that might be causing significant issues for schools who find themselves in more challenging situations.

Holding to account is a top down model, a case of being done unto, with the implication of deficits to be addressed. This can put the person lower down the scale at a significant disadvantage.

I had the great fortune to sit in on a conversation between Dame Alison Peacock and Sir David Carter recently, in Bristol, during the filming of a discussion between them. Both occupy important places in the education pantheon, so their views are significant. They are listened to regularly by policy-makers.

There was some inevitably common ground, not least in the purposes of education, with children central to both sets of thinking. However there was also a discernible difference in approach between the two, which I will seek to summarise.

Dame Alison, at Wroxham School, inherited a school that needed substantial structural and communal change in order to improve. It was a case of professional, parental and child capital all needing an upgrade, to start to believe in the corporate aspiration and to see the

direction of travel. It was the visionary approach that was needed, to show everyone that change was possible, as well as essential. Time and effort was put into developing all of the different aspects of the school, celebrating the step changes that became visible. Celebration added positivity to the journey, so people kept up the momentum. As a result, the school came out of special measures and is now enjoying success.

Sir David's role is more overview and strategic; he was responsible for the Academy schools in the South West of England and has become the National School's Commissioner. He gave a very clear outline of the different levels of responsibility and accountability that underpinned decision making within the "authority" of the School Regional Commissioner. Some flexibilities were described, for schools operating at a discernibly high level. Intervention was a key feature of the accountability system.

**So, the person charged with improving a school took a bottom-up approach, whereas the bureaucrat articulated accountability levels to make schools improve. This is mirrored through the system, with pure data often driving decisions, where the reality "on the ground" is in need of a more nuanced approach.**

This last point developed broader reflections in my own mind, as the education system is fraught with seeking those things that will have the biggest impact on learning.

**Bright ideas are sought from across the world, by politicians, desperate to demonstrate that they are improving the system.**

Plug-ins in computer, website terms, don't always work, as an aspect of one plug-in might create an incompatibility with another, resulting in the system crashing.

Similarly, in medicine, over-prescription of drugs to a patient can cause one drug to work against another, again causing system breakdown.

**In both cases, system breakdown can be fatal, usually caused by human error; the law of unintended consequences.**

Bright ideas, unless their purpose, development and potential utility are well understood, fall down in education. A simple case in point would be the worksheet, "borrowed" from a colleague, downloaded from the internet, or created by a central authority. All goes well, until a number of learners encounter a problem. At this point, the teacher understanding can be compromised, reducing their ability to move the learning on. Thinking for yourself, to provide maximum benefit to learners, is a fundamental teacher need and should never be compromised. Teacher need to know their children well and also to know their stuff, so that they can fine-tune to the needs of the learners in front of them, not a generic group visualised by another author.

Initiatives cause distraction. It is hard to be working within a system, knowing that what you are currently doing is being superseded, so that you are planning at one level, while developing the replacement. Initiative overload can also occur if managers are not good at filtering out those bright ideas that will not add value to the school.

Thinking about this a little further, **accountability can, if mishandled, become disabling, of individuals, schools and ultimately the system.**

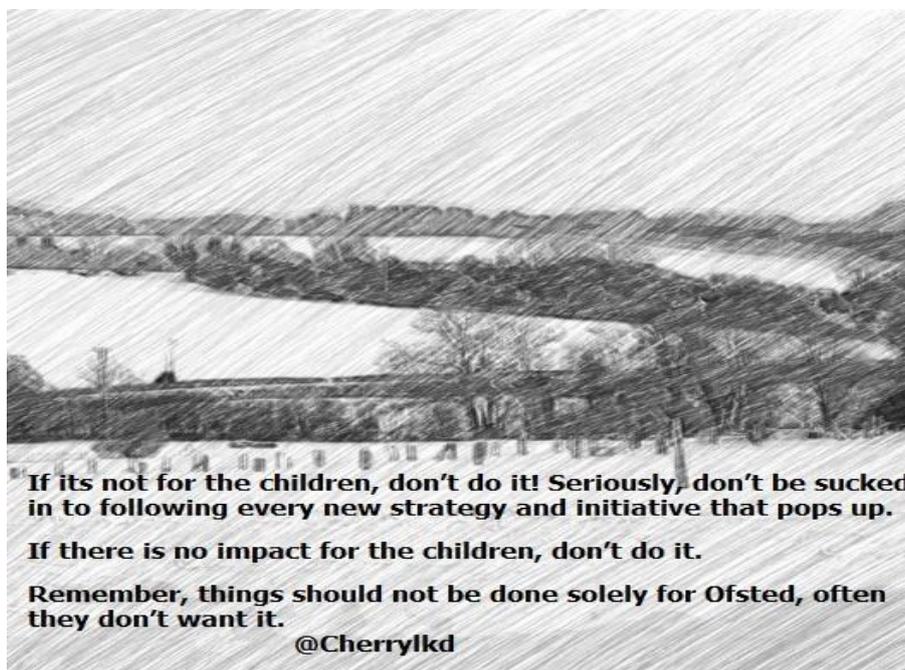
This links with autonomy, both personal and organisational, and having a clear rationale for the decisions that are being taken at different points in time. Having a plan of action and following through, with evaluation points built in, are the bread and butter of project management. Organising for teaching and organising the structures of the system, are all part of project management. If an end point can be visualised, the plan can become a clear journey map, or narrative, that can be shared with others.

**Communication**, across every aspect of the system is the basis on which everything succeeds or fails. A lack of good communication can allow parts of the system to become detached, so that the mechanism, over time, becomes less effective.

If I was to propose one area from this discussion that needs to be a part of the whole educational establishment, it would be to encourage system-wide discussion and development, rather than the top-down, edict-led, initiative rich and headline grabbing pronouncements. That way might allow all to move together. It would improve the lot of classroom teachers, whose role is to effect the change in learners. It is their daily role to make strategic decisions that will affect the learners for whom they are responsible.

**Management can hold teachers to account** if they have provided the cultural and physical environment where the teacher is likely to succeed. If day to day working decisions are compromised, the teacher will defer to authority and become less effective.

**Teachers in the classroom should be autonomous thinkers;** then they can be held accountable. That way too, we'll be growing the leaders of the future, capable of thinking for themselves. They need to be swans every day, not be kept as the ugly ducklings.



## Reflecting on experience. Beth Bennett @bethben92

Well, here it is, finally, my first writing.

I have read a lot of great blogs recently but it was reading the #Edn1000years collection that @ChrisChivers2 put together that finally made my mind up to do it. Surely with 27 years of teaching and learning experience behind me I could find something to say?

So, in the spirit of nothing ventured and all that, I give my 27 years younger me the following, using the medium of expressive dance...only kidding...the medium of song lyrics.

*"Any way the wind blows, doesn't really matter to me".* Queen

Actually, it does matter, because a day, an hour or a minute can change in the blowing of a breeze. Take it from me, wind changes children in ways you would not believe. Go with it, nature is not a force to be reckoned with, no matter how painstakingly you planned your lessons. IT IS NOT WORTH IT!

*"Honesty is such a lonely word"* Billy Joel

Be honest with yourself and others, admit your mistakes and move on. It may be very difficult at times, but it really is the best policy.

*"You say it best when you say nothing at all."* Alison Krauss

Bite your tongue at the right time. Although I just said that honesty is the best policy, sometimes saying nothing can also be the best policy. Choose your moments and audience. I have said so much to no-one at times just to say it out loud and be done with it.

*"At the age of 37 she realised she'd never ride through Paris with the warm wind in her hair."* Dr Hook and the Medicine Show

Do not have regrets. Do not put things off. Do not wake up one day thinking what might have been.

*"Should I stay or should I go?"* The Clash

If you took my previous advice about being honest with yourself then you will know the right time to move on and not outstay your welcome.

*"If it wusnae fur yer wellies, where wud ye be?"* Billy Connolly

I would still be on a Year 5 residential from 2001, stuck in a muddy field in Hornsea (3 shoes are still there in their earthy time capsule. BE PREPARED.

*"It's not often easy, and not often kind, did you ever have to make up your mind?"* Loving Spoonful

You will constantly have to make decisions. Sometimes you will have to act and it won't be easy. Sometimes you will have to support children through tough decisions by others that change their lives forever. More often than not the decision is the right one but the consequences are long lasting and this means...

*"I get knocked down but I get up again, you're never going to keep me down".*  
Chumbawamba

You need resilience. You need space and time but you never give up.

*"Train whistle blowin' makes a sleepy noise, underneath the blankets go all the girls and boys"* The Seekers

A blast from my childhood, this tune. Get as much sleep as you can. Sleep is good.

*"Ha ha ha, hee hee hee, I'm the laughing gnome and you can't catch me!"* David Bowie

Laugh, laugh, laugh. It really is the best medicine.

*"And I'm thinking about home, and I'm thinking about faith, and I'm thinking about work, and how good it will be to be here some day on a ship called Dignity."* Deacon Blue

Two simple messages here...keep your dignity (unless it is for charity) and...  
have a dream

## **The knitting ladies and MFL; Carmel O'Hagan @OHaganCarmel**

I have a memory of the staffroom from my early days of teaching. I think I have embellished this memory but it is the one that pulls me up short from time to time, when I am getting a bit cynical or grumpy about the present state of MFL.

In that staffroom there sat a group of "elderly" ladies. OK they were almost certainly younger than I am now but I was 24 and to quote the late, great Ewan McColl – "anyone over 12 years old was half way to the tomb." They used to sit and chat about these annoying new initiatives (ILEA at that time!) and how they would do nothing because the wheel would come full circle, they had seen it all before and there was no point in getting involved. I thought this was contemptible. I pledged that I would never be like them. How dare they think like this! They should just go...

Ah well!

So here I am thinking about retiring, having worked at all levels in Languages Education, still loving what I do currently, still feeling I have to fight the fight and yet also from time to time thinking to myself "who cares?" We have been here before. Be still and know. But then I am

reminded of the knitting ladies. In all honesty I am not even sure they knitted. This may be the bit I am embellishing...but I still don't want to be like them. So let's begin a whistle-stop tour of the last 28 years in MFL from a purely personal perspective.

Let me start by restating my position from which I have and will never waiver

**I believe in languages for all at both primary and secondary school**

**I do not believe in GCSE for all. This is quite a different animal.**

**1988**

I remember the excitement when GCSE came to knock O level off its perch!

Well GCSE wasn't perfect but it did over the years definitely improve upon the old O level/CSE divide. Particularly in the hands of teachers who were willing to take risks and avoid the false dichotomy between teaching the language and teaching the syllabus.

**1992**

**The National Curriculum in its first inception**

Good in parts and even as it got slimmed down over the years it still provided some reasonable foundation for MFL teachers to create their own Schemes of Work and safety nets for their pupils

**2014/2015/2016**

Like many I had hoped that the new National Curriculum and GCSE in languages would be fit for the 21st century and for the young people who want to use a language for practical as well as academic purposes. In my opinion the new National Curriculum and GCSEs are backwards looking, unclear in purpose and now rooted in a retrograde approach to why and how we learn languages. I am not even going to begin to look at the alarming lack of the use of modern technology in the new GCSEs. There are far better people than me to do this. I am going to focus on just a few of the things that worry me most, why I think these have come about and what may be the consequences. But also why I still believe that better days will come.

If we really are committed to languages for all then our main areas of focus must be:

1. language teaching that is **right for all**
2. assessment that allows **all learners** to show what they can do rather than penalise them for what they cannot do

**So have we really moved on from 1988?**

In the new GCSE – at the time of writing some examining boards are still to be accredited - learners still have to do some really bizarre things. Let's look at listening exams. Yes they are still built around the disembodied voice i.e. the tape recorder by any other name, in which the listener has to pick out certain details and avoid the occasional and deliberate red herrings put in by the exam writers *pour s'amuser? Ha ha that'll catch 'em out! They hear loud. I bet some of them won't know it's about a heavy lorry but will think that it is something religious.* This actually happened in one exam paper when I was still teaching! Our department complained but it is still happening now!

In my opinion this type of listening test is completely unfit for purpose. Surely listening is part of a conversation that usually takes place face to face? Or even on the phone when participants are aware of the context? Or even better why can't we have a listening exam that is a DVD of people talking? The GCSE student can then work out the context, see the person, look at the body language and facial expressions. These are all massive clues in real life communication so why do we still test understanding as if real life does not exist.

Is it still because we have been told for decades that this is simply too expensive? Well I am prompted to paraphrase; "if you think great testing in language learning is expensive then try bad testing." We all know the cost of this. And so much research has shown that students hate listening to the tape recorder or computer sound system. So alien to everyday life.

And as for the newly introduced translation tests! How high am I on this (dead) horse?

Translation into and out of the foreign language went out with O level. I remember post "A" level sleepless nights when I was convinced I had failed because I did not know the French for "a clearing" or the English for *le perron*. But in this new(ish) century pupils will once again be obliged to translate both into the foreign language and out of the foreign language into English. Now I have no problem with translation as a teaching activity and we can actually make it enjoyable. But in my opinion it has no place in GCSE exams.

What worries me most is the backwash effect that translation and old fashioned disembodied listening will have on language teaching and learning from Year 7 onwards. A strange and unwelcome move away from authenticity and a leap into the "my hovercraft is full of eels today and was full of eels yesterday and will be full of eels tomorrow" school of language teaching!

If the languages community is happy with the new National Curriculum, which of course has driven the new GCSE specifications, and then some may even be jubilant - their job here is done.

Languages are a key feature of the EBacc in the form of GCSE. But who is rejoicing? Many Head Teachers are worried and many MFL teachers are worried about imposing an exam – a single exam – that is not fit for purpose. My belief is that we are in grave danger of subscribing to the legacy of languages as an academic discipline, as in days of yore - aka O level - for some and not as a communication tool that should allow all learners to see the world beyond their immediate horizons.

## **Primary Languages**

Oh but I am limited! This requires a book in its own right! The best thing ever for MFL and yet at the same time, what I refer to as the Hokey-Cokey curriculum. Is it in, is it out, will it happen if we shake it all about? Suffice to say that since 1999 we have moved from voluntary to non-statutory to statutory but have gained and sadly lost so much along the way. Prior to 2010 and building on the previous 10 years of generous national and regional targeted support and research, primary languages were in my opinion, in their heyday and on the cusp of becoming an integrated part of the primary curriculum. They were embedded in primary pedagogy and not a watered down secondary approach and full of life, enthusiasm, curiosity and culture.

Since 2010 the picture has become less clear. Some DFE funding is around, but poorly targeted, short lived and again in my opinion does not leave replicable, sustainable models and skilled, trained and willing workforce for the future.

### **Are we our own worst enemies?**

We can be awfully precious too! I remember years ago a fantastic primary teacher made a mistake in a song that she had written for her pupils and posted on the Early Language Learning forum. She had used (please keep smelling salts at hand!) la Portugal instead of au Portugal! The year 6 pupils were singing the song beautifully, they were loving it and learning French and the names of all the countries who were playing in the European Football Cup at the time. Within minutes the Spot a Mistake police were at work and posting to the forum...the great teacher was distraught and said "I am not sure I should be teaching French. I will never have the confidence to share anything publicly again." Great result. Not.

When a group of us met with a certain Schools Minister in a "think tank" (misnomer if ever there was one) a few years ago he asked 2 questions about language teaching

1. Are they (primary children) fluent by the end of Year 6?
2. When do you teach the Pluperfect?

The above examples involving a primary teacher and a Schools Minister are for me at the heart of the darkness.

I find myself in an odd position nowadays. Having spent my entire career teaching languages or working with languages teachers and loving my job I seem to be highly critical of what is going on currently in the world of languages teaching. In fact someone on social media recently asked me if it is because I am monolingual! I will just restate my position

### **I believe in languages for all in both primary and secondary schools**

#### **I believe that every child must have the opportunity to learn at least one foreign language.**

I would love this learning to continue up until the age of 16 but I cannot subscribe to this at the moment.

My main concern is that languages in the UK really seem not to be producing young people who love to communicate with and get on with others from different countries and cultures. They start off with such enthusiasm and then, even if they do well at GCSE, they seem to want to walk away. It is easy to rehearse why this happens. It has been done many times. Here are some personal thoughts. This is not the fault of languages teachers who are some of the hardest working, creative and educationally caring people in the world.

My view is that the MFL "community leaders" who it has to be said, are rarely practising teachers, and those advising the DFE spend far too much time tub thumping, looking backwards and being "passionate about languages" and not nearly enough time looking at MFL in the context of how individual schools and general education function. Having worked closely with DFE during the CILT years I understand how Ministers and civil servants call the tune in many ways but I truly believe that the real influences on the future of language teaching should be brought to bear by school and subject leaders. These are the people who should decide what is in the best interests of their pupils. Is GCSE the right exam? Should it be several years of one language or should pupils learn less content in more languages? Are

there some pupils who should legitimately be withdrawn for reasons known best to the school?

We have to stop the almost evangelical approach to language teaching that seems to have got a grip. It terrifies me as it can devalue other subjects and perpetrate the "languages are academic and therefore more important than other subjects" myth. In my experience many of the claims that we make for learning languages are exactly the same as claims quite rightly made by other subject teachers for their subjects. In curriculum planning and options choices it is what is best for the child that matters.

Our exam system (and some of our linguists) values only perfection and makes us think that unless you can become fluent there is no point in learning a language and you should certainly not have the gall to speak it in public! So bad luck if you communicate badly but you get your message across. Strangely though we all praise the taxi driver abroad and the waiters who speak to us in minimal English and make us feel welcome in their country. Would they get GCSE in English as a Foreign Language?

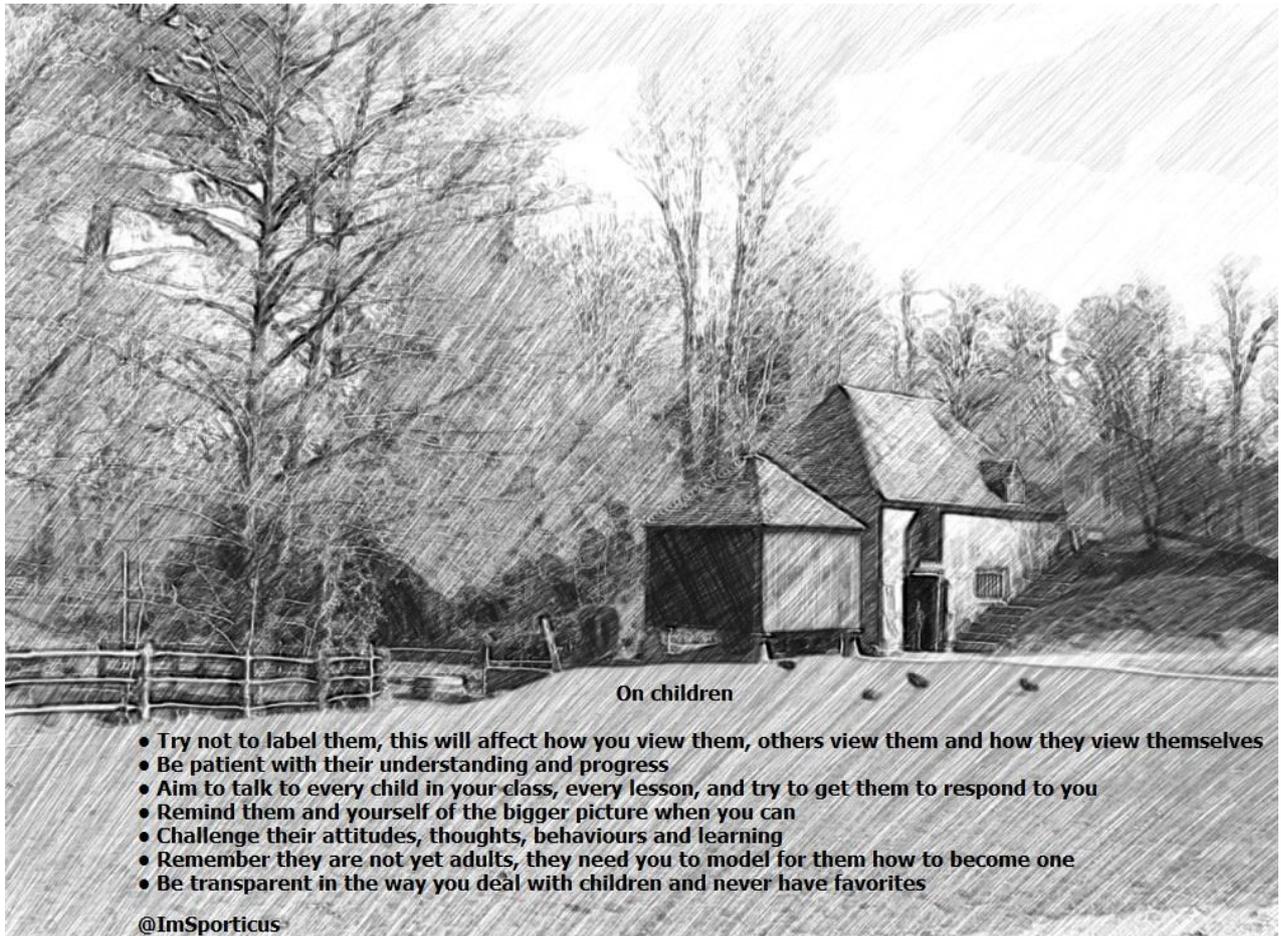
WELL! I can swim. I will never win an Olympic medal but nobody makes me feel ashamed of the bit that I can do or the way I do it. For me asking us all to be fluent is the equivalent of saying that unless we have a chance of winning the gold medal it is not for us. And we must never, ever pretend that we can speak the language, this would be audacity of the highest degree.

### **So why have I not joined the knitting ladies?**

I know that there are really good and influential people in the world of MFL who feel the same and who like me have strong views on how languages need to change and how we have to rethink the agenda. None of this is politically radical but I simply know that we have to ditch some of the past and be realistic and not sentimental about the future. This is not about lowering standards but about removing the fear of speaking another language.

As a PGCE course tutor I am privileged to teach talented, creative, clever and thoroughly decent young people who are going to sit in staffrooms, bite their tongues when necessary and just get on and do the job. I believe that they will in time challenge the status quo, they will change how languages are taught and learnt in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. There are great Head Teachers, and they are crucial in this debate, who are already questioning the how and why of good languages teaching. They are not against it. Many are very much in favour of language learning for their pupils but they need a new order of how things are done. An order that is right for their pupils and for the future. I truly believe they are waiting to pounce and take hold of this GCSE/Ebacc or die situation.

My final point is that I rail against the idea that comes from some MFL bods that those who do not speak a modern language are culturally deficit! This is arrogant nonsense. If it were true then many of my friends and family - clever, cultured, intelligent and knowledgeable and once again truly decent people would be culturally deficit. Truth is many of them are far more cultured in other areas than me - I am the person who just happened to be good at languages! Thank you Mrs Phillips, Mrs O'Hara and the Bertillon family! And they, the musicians, the artists, the sportsmen and women, the designers and others know what my reaction would be if they were to suggest that I am culturally deficit because I am simply not as good as them at drawing or playing an instrument or ballet or gymnastics.



#### On children

- Try not to label them, this will affect how you view them, others view them and how they view themselves
- Be patient with their understanding and progress
- Aim to talk to every child in your class, every lesson, and try to get them to respond to you
- Remind them and yourself of the bigger picture when you can
- Challenge their attitudes, thoughts, behaviours and learning
- Remember they are not yet adults, they need you to model for them how to become one
- Be transparent in the way you deal with children and never have favorites

@ImSporticus

## Counting the cost. Weighing up the positives and the negatives.

There is no doubt that the role of a teacher, in fact of anyone in a school, can be challenging, not least because the demand is to plan and prepare for each hour of interaction with a class, to perform at the highest possible level, in front of an audience, while exercising crowd control, creating the environment where all learners can learn, with reflection afterwards that informs the next plan. It can be a case, at all levels of responsibility, but particularly at headship level, of being all things to all people, responsible for a lot, to a large number, knowing that the buck certainly stops with you.

While it is challenging, it can also be the most rewarding job. To see young learners grow and flourish, to help them to overcome difficulty and to become life-long learners, is a source of great pride. To be told by parents, years after a child has left your school, that they have succeeded as a result of their start in learning, and that they carry fond memories of their time with you, can only create a warm feeling. Tick off one success.

Would I do it again? Certainly.

Teaching gave me a feeling of self-worth, and self-belief, enabled me to work in a variety of schools, each with a slightly different ethos, so growing me to the point where, as a head, I had a clear picture of what I wanted a school to be. To be able to make this a reality was a combination of hard work, vision, communication, challenge, team building, shared development, investigative approaches, all leading to a self-sustaining collegiate approach.

Finding a work-life balance was often hard, but, in discovering the joys of camping, summer holidays away from home became more real, especially in the days before easy wifi and broadband access. A point of relaxation was reached. Family time assumed a greater quality. A later decision to buy a small house in France, the size and cost of a caravan, ensured this for other holidays too. Quiet time, time to rest, to walk, to garden and to develop a set of new skills, in plumbing, electrics and heating, as well as carpentry, meant a different focus for an extended time.

Did I get rich? Not monetarily, but in terms of contentment, yes. Life has been rich as a result. That is worth a great deal.

### **On a personal level, what have I learned within my career?**

Learning is a skill, a habit; it is not a linear process, broken into neat bricks, hour-long packages to be delivered and put together one by one, inspected, found wanting but not necessarily supported to improve.

The school system works when it works and finds it hard to react when needed. Human systems are prone to human frailty, even illness and sometimes need TLC, not to be told to heal thyself.

Learning happens, if you actively are looking for it, accidentally when things happen, when you reach a point where you have reached the limits of a skill or a piece of knowledge and need to extend that to achieve.

Learning doesn't just happen because a teacher talks.

Active learners listen more intently, allowing teachers to teach better and develop greater challenges.

Learning is messy, with errors and misconceptions to be identified and explored.

Learning for yourself is most powerful.

Imposed "learning" allows you to be engaged or not.

Learning from enthusiastic others provides the buzz from which further learning occurs.

Life offers problems for which school learning may not prepare you, requiring resilience, resourcefulness, strength of character, the ability to solve problems and sometimes pure survival skills. Experience outside school is as strong a teacher as teachers in school.

Unthinking teachers, politicians and parents can do damage to systems and structures and individual children.

The pursuit of simple sound-bites is in danger of devaluing the study of education as a whole, for example, phonics is not necessarily the remedy to reading skill or pleasure.

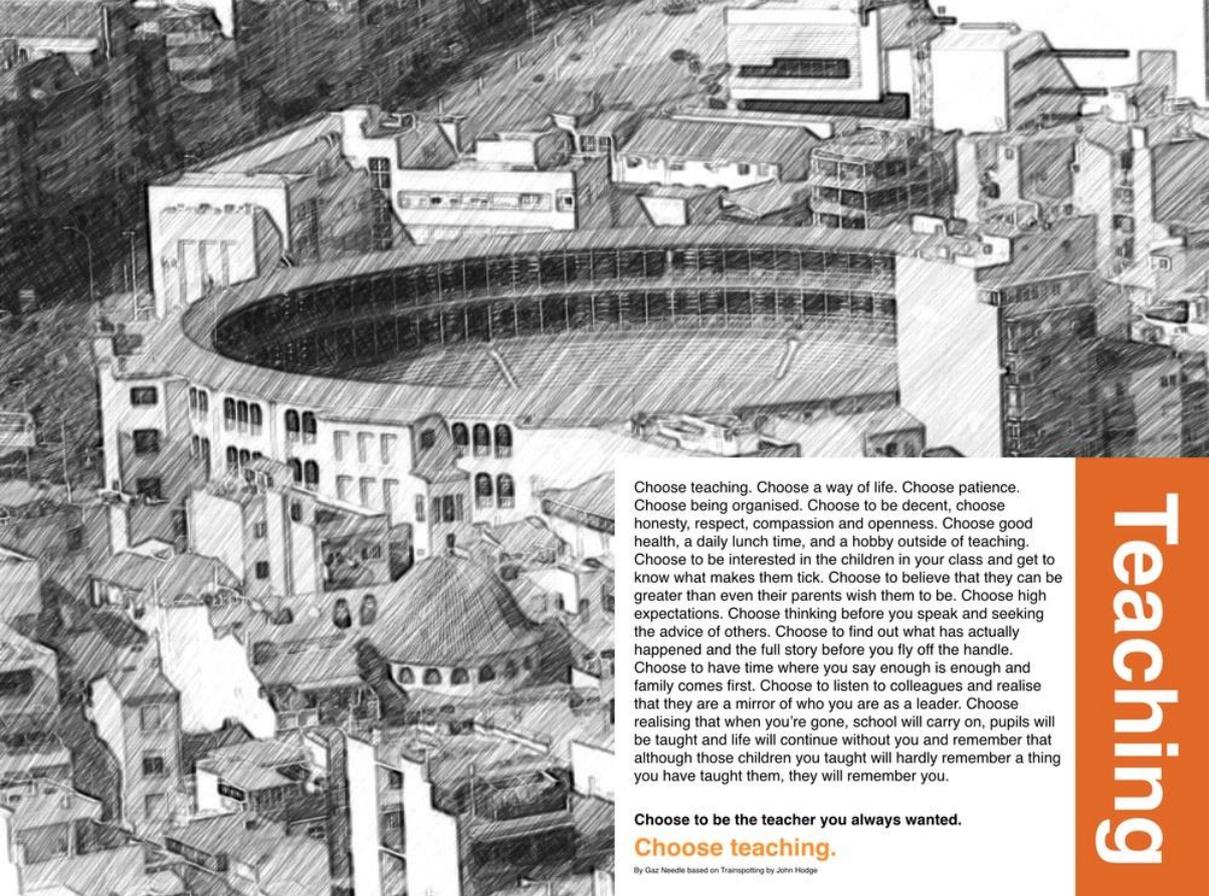
Fear and fear of failure has a significant, negative impact on learning.

Rote learning is one way among many. Being an imposed approach, it can become negative, especially if success does not follow.

The quiet child with a "nice" background may be carrying as much, if not more, trauma as the extravert from the "difficult" home.

Luck and fate can work for you or against you and you have to be able to react.

We all need a special someone at some time, mentor, teacher, relative, parent, partner and some kind of safe anchorage, in order to grow.



Choose teaching. Choose a way of life. Choose patience. Choose being organised. Choose to be decent, choose honesty, respect, compassion and openness. Choose good health, a daily lunch time, and a hobby outside of teaching. Choose to be interested in the children in your class and get to know what makes them tick. Choose to believe that they can be greater than even their parents wish them to be. Choose high expectations. Choose thinking before you speak and seeking the advice of others. Choose to find out what has actually happened and the full story before you fly off the handle. Choose to have time where you say enough is enough and family comes first. Choose to listen to colleagues and realise that they are a mirror of who you are as a leader. Choose realising that when you're gone, school will carry on, pupils will be taught and life will continue without you and remember that although those children you taught will hardly remember a thing you have taught them, they will remember you.

**Choose to be the teacher you always wanted.**  
**Choose teaching.**

By Gaz Needle based on Transpotting by John Hodge

# Teaching

# Emotional Honesty in the Soap Opera of School Leadership

**Brian Walton. @theoldprimaryhead**

The further you are away from something the harder it is to understand what you are observing. That dark spec on the horizon could be many things and as it gets closer you may still find yourself squinting with a perplexed frown.

School leadership is often the fine art of observing at a distance from a place in which you are seen to be the key mover and shaker, a world where you are expected to know everything, have total control and be as skilled as everyone else.

As a school leader you often feel like an astronaut, floating in a vacuum staring at your glorious 'planet-school' and wishing that everyone else could see what you see. You observe the passing of time and hope that you have done enough to have set it off, smoothly and in the right direction, so that all is well. This 'watcher-you' sees moments where you can only stare in horror as time accelerates and control is wrenched from your grasp. Sometimes in leadership you need to slow down to observe the car crash knowing that you caused the mayhem in the first place. That 80 page school development plan that was impossible to deliver, failed Ofsted inspections, your first tribunal or an angry parent mob using social media to point out why you really are a 'massive plonker'. These events need to be witnessed from distance and in slow motion as they come inexorably towards you with the weight of a ten ton asteroid. The impact usually leaves a scar of experience which makes you think twice in the future. The experienced head, slowly over the years, usually loses some of the Arctic explorer in themselves. Bravery and naivety are a heady combination and in my early days as a head I must have come across as fearless. Time has taught me to be far more cautious.

There are so many ways to watch and feel powerless in school leadership. A consultant once said to me, "Brian, remember everyone around you has silken butterfly wings and your wings are made from the thick hide of a rhinoceros. Remember this most when you are on your back and they have been ripped off."

Leadership is so often presented as though it is only for the 'super-humans' and 'special ones'; people who don't need space suits to survive in a hostile environment. The education landscape is full of words like, super, outstanding, world-class, pioneering and exemplary. This is then easily transferred from heroes to villains. The educational language landscape is also smattered with its fair share of bullies, megalomaniacs, tyrants and psychopaths. It seems it is only a matter of time before we hear of the Interstellar Curriculum or the Cosmic Education System either run by martyrs or evil corporate oligarchs. The problem with education is everyone has had one and they don't hold back when giving you an opinion about it.

School leadership is a place where good never really feels like it is 'good enough'. The truth is only the naive really believe they are this powerful and omnipresent. You never fully have the kind of super powers others think you have, for good or bad. School leadership is often about a projected version of what you do. From time to time I ask children, "What do you think I do?" A popular reply is, "Shout at naughty children". I haven't raised my voice in

school for more years than I can remember. My current school will never have heard me raise my voice, and yet that perception still exists.

The reality of school leadership is that the expectations on school leaders are enough to make Wonder Woman wince and Super Man squirm as he steps back, whistles and stares longingly at the sky. This pressure comes from many directions, teachers, support staff, parents, governors, local authorities, central government, and civil servants, as well as from the leaders themselves.

I am forever telling my staff that everyone is a leader, as though they have no choice. You get the teaching job and every Tom and Dick expects you to display the virtues of Gandhi and Mandela. Leadership in schools is an interesting concept. On one level we say it is an art and on the other we say anyone can display it. But can they?

I believe that to do leadership well you need to have a certain mind-set. A selfless streak in which your attitudes, beliefs and aspirations suddenly take a backseat in favour of those of the collective. Sometimes, your ideas shine. You stand tall and feel good as a seed is planted and everyone around you scrambles for the watering can. As a leader it is easy to assume these ideas are the best way forward. Everyone nods and agrees. Leadership is suddenly the easiest thing in the world. On other occasions you just need to point out the best spot to plant the seed and from a distance, simply turn the tap attached to the sprinkler. No one even notices you do it.

The problem is this though. Leadership is about making decisions and many of the choices we have to take are not as simple as we initially think they will be. On too many occasions the choices come with strings, strings coated in radioactive polonium. You start out thinking that you have solved a problem and then it turns out you have created many more and finding the trail back to the original problem is almost impossible.

How many of us who criticise leadership decisions will accept the responsibility and accountability of our decisions as we look up and see the vultures gather in the blinding heat of the desert sun?

There is a perception you know everything when you are the leader. I remember, in my first week of headship, a teacher running in to my office and with a look of horror telling me a child had just thrown up over another child who had then thrown up over their maths books. In barely controlled panic they asked me where the key to the cleaning cupboard was. When I just sat there and said I had, 'No idea?' you could see the hope that I was going to be a great head teacher, drain from their face. I had failed at the first challenge.

This is the crux of 'being' the school leader. How do you lead and turn your vulnerabilities in to strengths?

On the morning of June the 7<sup>th</sup> 2005 I was sitting in a meeting with an assistant head teacher from the local East End secondary school. Her phone went and she apologised as she said she needed to take it. As she listened I saw her face change to one of shock and confusion.

"I'll come straight back..."

She had just been told that bombs had exploded on the Underground and there was a possibility their school hall would be needed as an overflow from The Royal London Hospital which was moments away. We both fell silent and we could hear the wail of a hundred

sirens. I quickly looked up the BBC website and it still said that there had been a possible electrical failure on the London Underground.

I asked her again, as she got her coat, "Bombs, On the Tube?"

"Yes. Aldgate East?" And she left.

My wife worked at Transport for London. We were both proud owners of the new Oyster card, which seemingly allowed us the freedom of the city, and I knew at that moment my wife was traveling to the hospital for a check-up for our newly born daughter. I tried phoning her but the phone went to answer message. I remember standing in my office alone and thinking, *I have to tell the staff* even as I was wrestling with my inner emotions.

I was suddenly overcome, I didn't know where my wife and child were and I knew that at that time in the morning many of my staff's children and loved ones would be on the Circle Line. I breathed in and momentarily lost control but regained composure as I breathed out. I walked out of my office into the bright lights of the schools corridor and found my deputy. I told her what I knew and asked her to take a whole school assembly so that I could speak to all the staff.

By the time I got to the staffroom there was a sense of unease. One or two people had heard but were too shocked to mention it. No matter how hard I try I can't remember what I said next. All I remember (and I still get emotional thinking about it) were the faces. I said something about using phones to get hold of people but it was the sea of faces and uncertainty that made me feel so useless. The same useless I felt when my daughter was born. I was a passenger in other people's lives even as I felt my own spiralling out of my control. Initially, I saw this as a weakness. I now know that the strong leader never hides their emotions. It is only through being yourself that you become a true leader of people, knowing your outer edges and not fearing them when they come hurtling towards you.

This held true recently when I had to tell a member of staff that her best friend had been murdered that morning. When I had to tell the Year 5 teacher that a child in their class had just found out her mother had been killed. Nothing can prepare you for these moments and it is only through an authentic understanding of yourself and your human traits that you can get through these moments. It is only through acknowledging your own fears and uncertainty that you can find some strength in leading through these moments. At the end of that school day I walked home with nine members of staff, we walked through three Boroughs and it took us more than three hours. I was determined to be the last one to get home. All the time I selfishly thought about my wife and daughter.

The danger is you can't be a walking soap opera. When I became an Acting Head I used to tread the corridors and tell staff what a 'mad day' it had been. Handing over my issues to others so they knew just how hard my job was. I could not think of a worse approach now. It was the author and public speaker Jim Lawless who bought this to my attention:

"Brian, when you are at the front telling everyone how tough things are going to be and how hard you are finding it they are looking for your strength not your fears. When the ship is sinking it is the Captain the sailors look to."

As much as I need to be open and honest about my ability to be the leader, part of this is not burdening others with issues that I am dealing with and they have little control over. There is a fine line between being an authentic leader or a sinking ship dragging others to

the depths with you. I have always struggled with being honest alongside the images I have of the leader. It seems as though school leaders are sometimes raised upon pedestals of rock only to find them crumble into sand. That HARD leader quality that it seems like so many want from school leaders (Usually when a school is at its lowest point). Leadership that mimics dictators and steam rollers over anyone who dares to disagree with it. I have seen so many leaders who seemed to have hearts of steel and stares that could cut diamonds. They hide their emotions so deep down that you would be hard pressed to find them in the deepest darkest trenches of the ocean. These people seem to have an impenetrable barrier around them. I have seen many like this. They seem to soak up the most difficult situations; glide through conflicts and bounce troubles out the door. The problem is, when their armour is finally breached it usually shatters and it is almost impossible to rebuild again. When the emotions do come out they are wild and helpless.

Genuine feelings and emotions do not necessarily mean 'weaknesses'. I often tell my SLT it is harder to do the kindest acts publically than the toughest acts in private. The messages we want to send are often clouded by the message we think others want to hear. Therefore we let our instincts get pushed aside. An authentic leader should never ignore their feelings, especially when faced with difficulty.

The closer you are to something the harder it is to cloak your true feelings. Much in school leadership passes by so close you can feel the force of it beneath your skin. Take the time to learn from it as it approaches; do not be afraid even when it hurtles towards you so fast it seems it may shatter you. In fact move towards it and allow yourself to be who you really are. Face it true to yourself. That dark spec on the horizon may be many things but if you know who you are then you don't need super powers.

## **And Finally...**

Summarising over forty years of experience is hard. To seek to summarise the collected experience from all the contributors is even more difficult. However, beyond the summary about learning shared in an earlier chapter, I'd offer the following as a general rounding up. None of us can guarantee a lifetime career in any area, for a wide variety of reasons. I've enjoyed mine, throughout. There have always been compensations, even when things were tough.

On you, as a person.

- Keep things as simple as possible; they are then easy to understand and communicate. It is extremely easy to make or say things in a more complex form than they need to be.
- Be yourself, be strong and continue to be a learner and thinker. Have a hobby/life! You are first and foremost human. Do all that you can to retain that essential humanity that allows you to be a role model to others. That is a part of the job.

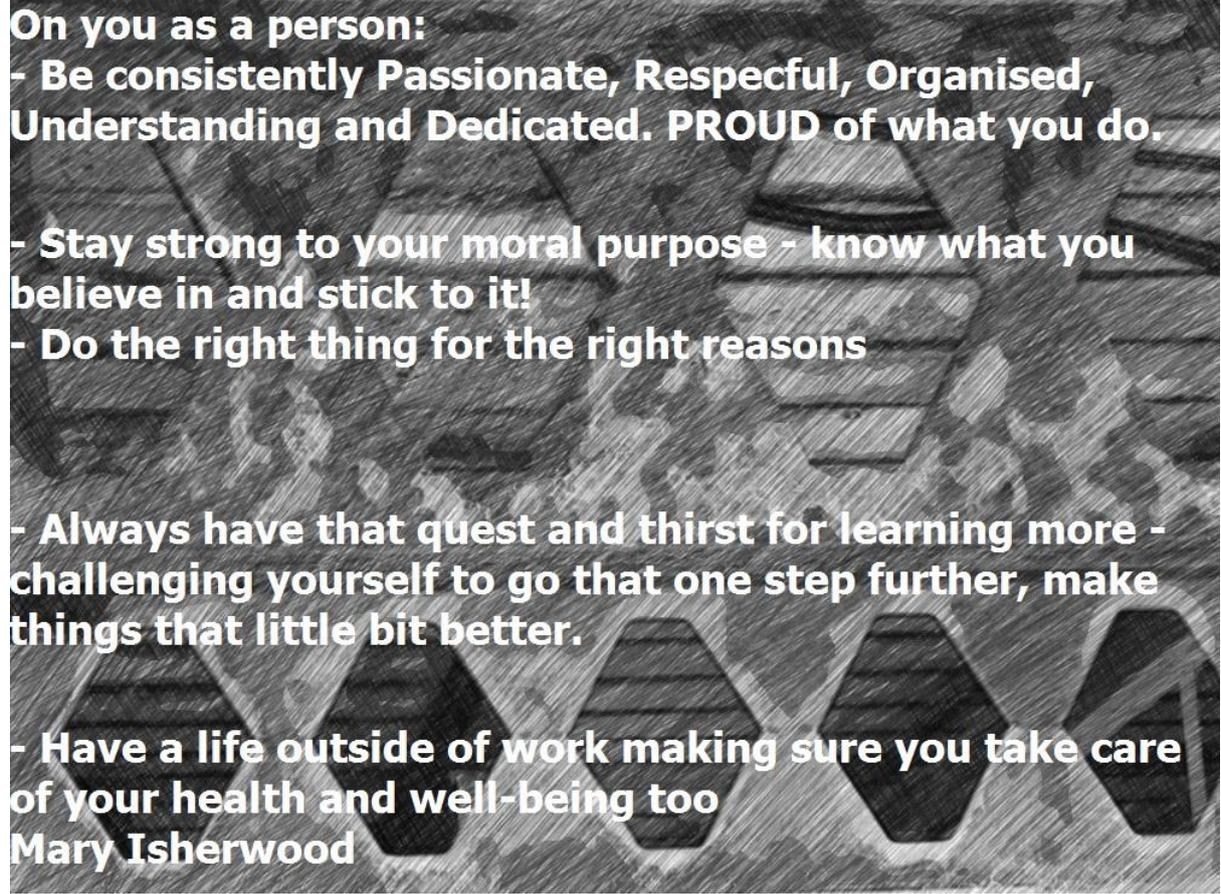
- Be a team player and a leader when necessary. Schools are stronger together. No-one can do the job alone. You receive children from colleagues and pass them on at the end of the year. Everyone plays a part.
- Organise a class space that supports learning, as well as your teaching. It is your space. Make it work for you.
- Resource effectively, for easy retrieval and return. That can allow children to do the legwork of getting things out and putting them back. Infants can do this, so can older children.
- Be ordered and organised, be strategic in your thinking and communicate effectively with everyone.

#### On children

- Know your children well.
- Plan for their learning, over different timescales, make sure the "story" is good and makes them think. There's a big world out there; open eyes, ears, hearts and minds.
- Think with them, talk with them and make adjustments when you see they are not "getting it".
- As you get to know them better, fine tune challenges to their needs.
- Parents are essential partners. Harness their energy appropriately. Make home activity count.

#### On management (working with people)

- Humanity should be a byword for everyone. Create a climate of respect. Model it.
- You work with and through your team, especially if you are a manager. You are responsible for their welfare, to enable them to be as effective as they can be. Value them.
- Teachers are well-educated, thinking people. Create the opportunities for them to be thinkers, developing themselves and each other through collaborative activities and collegiate approaches.
- Make sure the work environment supports their efforts, with appropriate space, resources and time.
- Goodwill works two ways; a "give and take" approach buys extra effort.
- Communicate, communicate, communicate; don't assume.
- Strategy is only as good as the explanation and the understanding. You can have all the plans in the world, but, if no-one understands them, they will fail.
- Take time to say thank you.



**On you as a person:**

**- Be consistently Passionate, Respectful, Organised, Understanding and Dedicated. PROUD of what you do.**

**- Stay strong to your moral purpose - know what you believe in and stick to it!**

**- Do the right thing for the right reasons**

**- Always have that quest and thirst for learning more - challenging yourself to go that one step further, make things that little bit better.**

**- Have a life outside of work making sure you take care of your health and well-being too**

**Mary Isherwood**

## **Postscript**

### **Towards a Teaching and Learning Policy with children at the heart.**

**The "vision": -**

- Everyone involved with the educational process at X School is a partner in progress
- This is encompassed in the statement: - Thinking, working and playing together.
- With each learner making guided progress, through individual and collective effort.

The school needs then to interpret their vision into clearer aims, again as a guide to collaborative, focused effort. This might seek to describe what the school would wish for children leaving the school after their 3-7 years in the establishment.

#### **A typical child leaving X School will have these attributes**

- Confidence in themselves, as people and learners.
- Awareness of the world around them, locally and wider, showing sensitivity, an enquiring approach, and a developing sense of awareness of themselves as spiritual beings.

- Capable of working in many different ways, with different grouping of others, and be able to sustain effort when required.
- Solve problems with different, but developing, levels of independence.
- Think creatively and reflectively when appropriately challenged, organising their needs, and being able to talk clearly to anyone with an interest in their activities.
- Accept guidance and apply it to achieve the best they can, with a clear understanding of their strengths and areas for further improvement.

Delving a little deeper, these aims are then best interpreted into a policy for learning, to secure the vision, as this guides the day to day actions of the adults responsible for children's progress. Clearly articulated, these secure consistency in approach and opportunity.

- Children, their thinking and learning, are our core purpose, within the context of a broad, balanced and relevantly challenging curriculum. They are to become active producers of learning, rather than purely passive consumers of teaching.
- Children will start as information gatherers, able to explain clearly what they are doing.
- Children will progressively become problem solvers, applying a range of relevant skills, able to articulate clearly in speech and then writing, the detail of their learning, and to have a developing repertoire of presentational skills through which they can show their ideas.
- Careful consideration of information, and logical thinking, together with the ability to explain their thoughts, using 2-D or 3-D models, will lead to secure links in learning.
- Learning processes will be clearly articulated to children, who should be able to explain what they are doing, and why.
- The processes through which the children will be challenged will be known to teachers, parents, support staff or any other assisting adult.
- The potential for learning across and between different abilities needs to be maintained, to ensure that children derive learning from as many sources as possible.
- The taught curriculum will be very well taught, with teachers working to improve their personal skills and practice across the curriculum.
- ICT in all forms will be a tool of development, where it provides the best opportunities.
- The school and each of its constituent parts, will see itself as part of a wider learning community, deriving information and good practice from sources that complement our own developing practice.

**Putting the vision into practice** is the key aspect of securing the vision and this area would need to be continually kept within developmental thinking, to ensure that initiatives would enhance what the school offered, by exploring the benefits across all aspects of practice. It might seek to make statements that guide operational aspects, such as teacher planning.

Teachers at X School plan to ensure that the vision and aims are put into practice, employing methodologies outlined in the policy for learning, through an approach summarized as Analyse, Plan, Do, Review, Record, Report.

**Analyse...** Teachers will receive information from a range of sources about the prior attainment of each child. This will provide a framework upon which to base decisions about working arrangements, suitable objectives for learning and tasks to achieve these.

**Plan...** Teachers plan over different timescales, in the first instance as an annual plan, based upon allocated topic specifications. It is for individual teachers to use these specs creatively to provide a dynamic approach to learning.

Contributing to planning detail will be the National Curriculum through school based interpretative descriptors. Literacy and numeracy will have a combination of specific lessons as well as opportunities to use and apply understanding within other curriculum challenges.

Planning at different levels; content, adjustments for known learning needs, space, timescales and resource use.

**Do... Tasks given to children will be creative, challenging and engaging, leading to defined progress.**

Task design. Tasks will have a definite purpose in progressing an aspect of a child's progress, known to the child and any assisting adult.

Activity presentation. Appropriate information sharing will be articulated and modelled appropriately and understood by children before being set to follow up tasks.

Independence levels, skill, knowledge and attitude will all be considered when devising the task parameters, as the different learning attributes of individuals and groups should be encompassed in the task challenges.

### **Children working**

- Understanding task... Children will have a clear grasp of what they are being challenged to achieve, be able to discuss and articulate purposes when asked.
- Task behaviours... Children will be expected to demonstrate appropriate approaches to tasks, developing persistence to achieve.
- Team working... Children will be challenged to operate as collaborative, independent learners on tasks specifically created to allow for qualities of cooperation to be developed.
- Oral skill... Children will develop appropriate descriptive, analytical, exploratory languages to communicate clearly to a peer or interested adult.
- Recording skill, written, pictorial, mathematical... Within any learning experience there will be opportunities for children to use different forms of recording to help them to remember sequences of events within an activity.
- Evaluation... Children learn about learning by doing, by reflecting on the process and activity, and evaluating changes to approaches for future reference.

- Review... Children will develop as primary evaluators of their drafts. Peer reviews will be developed over time, with the teacher giving informative feedback to help with the next phase of development.

By being given tasks that they will need to discuss, decide on action, carry out, review, re-evaluate and repeat, they will develop an insight into the ways in which adults work and solve problems.

### **Outcomes... Review**

- Teacher as reviewer and quality controller...Any piece of work from a child is the current draft capable of being reviewed and improved. Ongoing oral feedback should support the child within the learning process. Marking should provide opportunities for advice, and an overview of quality.
- Feedback to children...should enable each child to review their own needs in learning for subsequent pieces of activity.
- Room for improvement... advice on areas for development.
- Objective and subjective...Correcting spelling or an aspect of grammar may be clearly objective, whereas a commentary starting "I liked....." would be subjective.
- Moderation. At intervals it is clearly good practice to share views on achievement. Moderation allows a consensus view about a discrete piece of produced work.

**Record.** Teachers will keep records which assist them in progressing learning for individual children.

**Report.** At half year and year end, teachers will write reports to inform parents about achievements to date and areas for further improvement over the next period.

**Summative review, recording and reporting** might be required for a range of purposes; to colleagues at transition stages; to parents, at formal reporting times, or intervening times for specific purposes; significant others, external to the school, who may need information on which to make diagnostic decisions.