NURSERY TO YEAR TWO (ages 3 -7)

In each of these sections, I propose some changes to the curriculum, but more important are the proposed changes to our approach to teaching. Part of this is through the dismantling of mandatory record keeping in Reception and opposing the introduction baseline assessment for reasons that are explained below, but the main change is in changing children's attitudes to learning and the environment by teaching ethical behaviour and by inspiring children in the process of learning. As with all sections, this is a work in progress with yawning gaps, but that is inevitable in suggesting a new approach to learning – which may not always be that new

'In Japanese schools, the students don't get any exams until they reach the 4th grade. Why? The goal for the first three years of school is not to judge the child's learning ability, but to establish good manners and develop character. The Japanese scholars teach knowledge before manners.'
- NB In the Japanese school system children who have their 6th birthday on or before April 1 enter the first grade of elementary school of that year.

'Capitalism has continued to change since it was invented not yet two centuries ago. But the human beings that power it remain very much the same. Are (Christianity and capitalism) compatible? I fear not. For I suspect that the dangers of "self-love" will one day overpower all the undoubted good that capitalism does in bringing many out of poverty. (Addam) Smith thought the market could be held in check by the exercise of his very residual Presbyterian values. In reality, however, he contributed to their erosion. And a market without values, driven by "self-love", will eventually destroy itself.'
Giles Neal

"There is a lot of research that suggests if you want a more academic child, start academia later."
Dr Thomas Ellegaard, The Centre for Research in Early Childhoof Education and Care in Denmark.

"The 'EQ not IQ' movement recohgnises that it is creativity and emotional intelligence that will set human beings apart" Harry de Quitteville

Developing the Four Attitudes:

1. Attitude to learning: Group learning / following instructions / ethics and values / listening skills / flow charts / sequence / measurement / music / art exposure to learning (greetings in other languages etc

2. Attitude to the world we live in: environment, conservation, our own habitable space, food,

3. Attitude towards people: Kindness, tolerance through understanding, empathy; communities, shared rewards, race, colour gender, faith, bias and prejudice; 'non nobis solum' conflict resolution

4. Attitude towards ourselves: physical fitness , integrity and self-respect / health and well-being / healthy living and diet / high expectations and levels of application / self-discipline and organisation (looking after property, social acts, manners), the joy of learning

Key Points:

+ Learning how to follow instructions and acquire appropriate behaviours to allow learning to happen

+ Developing listening skills and oracy

+ Developing an appetite for learning

+ Developing self-discipline, empathy

+ Learning about ethics as pertaining to the environment, empathy, developing an appetite for learning

+ Being introduced to reading and simple mathematics as readiness allows

+ No formal tests or assessments

+ No profiling until end of Year 2

+ Encouraging creativity / art / music

+ Encouraging physical (explicit) physical and (implicit) mental health and well-being

+ Developing and encouraging a work ethic – cleaning, tidying, helping, developing a pride in their immediate environment and their wider community

+ Teaching myths and the map of the world. Avoid the old clichéd topics like Egypt and Greece (except for legends); Roman Empire more relevant, perhaps?); note that the four great civilizations of the ancient world were the Harappan Civilization of India (the largest of the early civilizations), Mesopotamia, ancient Egypt and ancient China.

+ By introducing ethics, integrity, values and morals into the early curriculum, we won't need to employ people to 'manage integrity' – a recent and unwelcome part of modern life. By stressing the rights and primacy of the individual and the needs over those of the group, we are teaching children that good exam results = successful and well-paying jobs, without any reference to the responsibilities and ethical behaviours attached to them. The evidence is in our financial, legal and political sectors that too often act unethically. Nor has education catered for those who would prefer a non-university (but not necessarily either a more practical nor a less academic pathway). We need to recognize how limited our measures are because of the defined outcome (best grades possible for tertiary education) and ensure that we start to educate our children differently, particularly in the way they see the world and their part in it.

(a) ATTITUDE TO LEARNING:

Preamble: At the start of their lifetime of formal (guided / instructive) learning (acknowledging that children have already done a huge amount of learning already, albeit determined in part by the family environment and their stage of readiness), it is crucial to embed attitudes to learning and to inculcate a joy or learning.

Foremost is an ownership for learning and creating an appetite for education. Because they will dip in and out of education throughout their lives, children will less bound by the school experience or place (the school as the "place" of learning might well disappear within the next generation). They need to learn to see continuous learning and upskilling (which happens implicitly, but not always in a formal way), as a normal part of life for which they need to take responsibility for (and want to do so). Education should never be adversarial, although to achieve the proper relationship between the child and learning, schools have to manage the process and set the expectations for a curriculum which should be always be seen as relevant and of benefit to the child. (i)

The Process:

Before any formal instruction, children should learn social skills by moving from a focus on self to a focus on classmates, the community and on the community.

An emphasis is on key skills, especially listening and building concentration, following instructions, (flow diagrams are the ideal lead-in to coding) and measurement, time, etc.

Values and ethics (how we should conduct ourselves with others, simple manners, asking the right questions when we are teaching young children – how do we know, who tells us, why are they doing this) are other important lessons from age four upwards.

Story, myth and language(s) should be a major part of the curriculum

Music, art, drama and oracy are key aspects of the curriculum in Reception and KS1 and the focus will be firmly on skills rather than a set body of knowledge.

Technology as a reference tool

In terms of learning, there should be differentiated reading and maths only if strictly necessary according to readiness, even if only on a one-to-one basis. It should focus on curiosity and memory only if appropriate. While the seven areas of learning and development in the EYFS, (the three prime areas, personal, social and emotional development, communication and language and physical development along with the four specific areas of mathematical development, understanding the world, physical, expressive arts and design and literacy development) would remain as guidelines only. Nor would there be the same requirement for the detailed record keeping that has made EYFS such an administrative burden for teachers.
The recent moves to reduce the importance placed on the Learning Journal is to be welcomed (it is now usually on-line and directly available to feedback to parents) and the requirement for no base line (although government plans to implement a new baseline test are deeply concerning). At present, profile points at the end of EYFS are still compulsory (for children of certain birth dates only), but even then, children are simply "labeled" as emerging, expected or exceeding expected standard. After all, the major emphasis of the Reception year would be on embedding positive attitudes to learning, on creativity and physical health and on ethics and values. Phonics or any other proven approach to learning or teaching methodology such the organic process of learning advanced by Sylvia Ashton-Warner (that all teaching should be relevant, real and rewarding) should be accommodated as appropriate. (i)
Assessment should be reductive, not predictive and avoid signposting

Data should be treated with caution and appropriate caveats:
'As technology philosophers have been pointing out for years, now, the trans-humanist

vision too easily reduces all of reality to data, concluding that "humans are nothing but information-processing objects." The use of data in education, with its narrow focus of measurement and its the inevitable academic bias should be treated cautiously in the absence of any measure of the immeasurable that more accurately reflects the child (and adult). Not surprisingly, the new baseline assessment test provider by the independent NFER is neither necessary nor appropriate.

Appendix (i) *'Learning must be real: it must relate to a person's experiences. The key rule is: "Start where the person is at."* Sylvia Ashton-Warner

Sylvia Ashton-Warner, author of 'teacher' and 'Spinster' believed children developed best when giving voice to their own experiences. This theme was pursued in later years by schools around the world that wanted to empower individuals and communities. One of her acolytes, Peter Senge explained it well by explaining *'The learner learns what the learner wants to learn.'* This organic approach develops what is already within; rather than imposing from outside. As Ashton-Warner explained, "By organic, I mean that way of growth where the strongest thing pushes up ahead of the less strong. I think of trees growing in a clump.
"The strongest get to the light. In speaking of a child's mind I mean the strongest impulses push up, irrespective of whether or not they should, at any given time ….'

(b) ATTITUDE TO THE WORLD WE LIVE IN:

Preamble: We live in an age of significant human and environmental threats to the very future of our planet from climate change, rising sea levels, mass migrations, global pandemics, nativist panic, and resource depletion. Naturally, as with the tobacco industry, the sugar industry and currently, mobile phone manufacturers, (and most proponents of big business and global investment), any talk of raising an issue of the environmental impact of anything from palm oil production to dairy farming is regarded as scaremongering propounded by enemies of the free market (usually Greens or alternative thinkers) or worse, by Luddites wanting to turn back the clock. (i) This view contrasts and deliberately belittles the desire of those to using technology for the benefits of all, but for that change to be underpinned with ethical consideration of the planetary boundaries, so whether it be investments abroad, trade, industry or new agricultural enterprises require environmental consents and are managed on the basis of a code that protects the well-being of the planet.

The collapse of the climate change talks shows how difficult that is when the market is involved, but part of that failure is a failure to educate children properly about the world they live in it and how this generation are exploiting the environment for short-term profits for the few.

What we haven't done rigorously enough is to question the ethics and values that underpin technological change, not just in regards labour costs (for while jobs are affected on a massive scale, new opportunities will open, albeit demanding new skills and knowledge). Rather it is about getting children to ask simple ethical questions and for these to become a habit in their lives. As Douglas Rushkoff explains rather better,

> *'As technology philosophers have been pointing out for years, now, the trans-humanist vision too easily reduces all of reality to data, concluding that "humans are nothing but information-processing objects." Is it fair for a stock trader to use smart drugs? Should children get implants for foreign languages? Do we want autonomous vehicles to prioritize the lives of pedestrians over those of its passengers? Should the first Mars colonies be run as democracies? Does changing my DNA undermine my identity? Should robots have rights?*
> *Asking these sorts of questions, while philosophically entertaining, is a poor substitute for wrestling with the real moral quandaries associated with unbridled technological development in the name of corporate capitalism.'*
> *(ii)*

If this all seems rather heavy for young children, if we spend time at this stage of their development to teach them lessons about cause and consequence and the social or environmental cost of doing anything, from anti-social behavior in class to throwing rubbish out a window, they will be much better able to act ethically than the generations that have preceded them.

Key points:

Below are some of the lessons we can teach our children:

(a) All animals are sentient beings – respecting flora and fauna and nature, the environment and the water.

(b) Learning about planetary boundaries (iii) – how we look after our world

(c) Learning about how we grow food and healthy food

(d) Learning about cause and consequence, action and reaction, short term and long term effect, renewable and non-renewable, (animal/mineral /vegetable is a useful game)

(e) Learning to appreciate the wonders of the world round them: icebergs, forests, animals, soil, rivers etc and why we need to protect them

Appendix

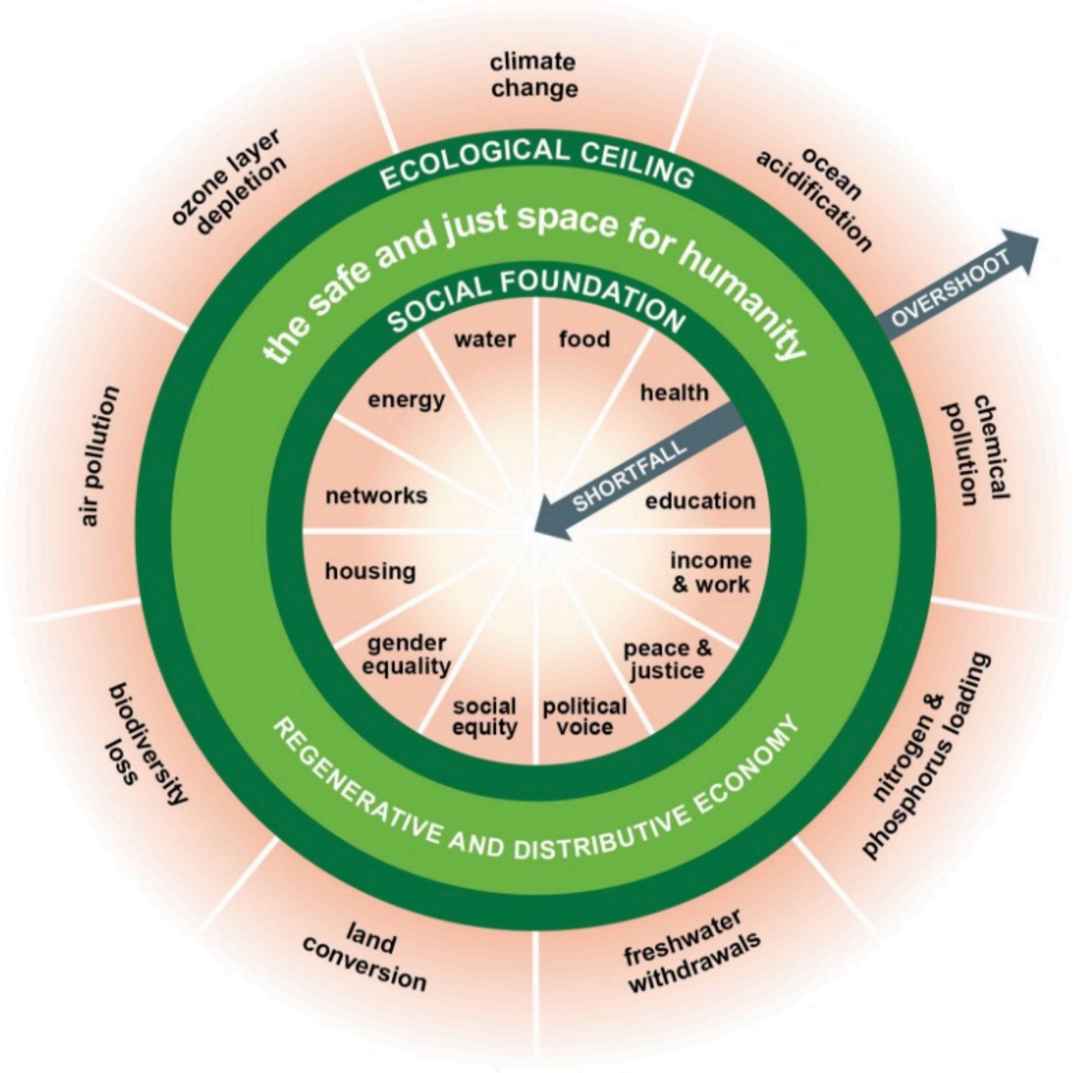
(i) The sponsorship of the Conservative Party Conference in 2017 by Tate and Lyle a case in point.

(ii) Rushkoff goes on to say that *'The more devastating impacts of pedal-to-the-metal digital capitalism fall on the environment and global poor. The manufacture of some of our computers and smartphones still uses networks of slave labor. These practices are so deeply entrenched that a company called Fairphone, founded from the ground up to make and market ethical phones, learned it was impossible. (The company's founder now sadly refers to their products as "fairer" phones.)*

Meanwhile, the mining of rare earth metals and disposal of our highly digital technologies destroys human habitats, replacing them with toxic waste dumps, which are then picked over by peasant children and their families, who sell usable materials back to the manufacturers.

This "out of sight, out of mind" externalization of poverty and poison doesn't go away just because we've covered our eyes with VR goggles and immersed ourselves in an alternate reality. If anything, the longer we ignore the social, economic, and environmental repercussions, the more of a problem they become. This, in turn, motivates even more

withdrawal, more isolationism and apocalyptic fantasy—and more desperately concocted technologies and business plans. The cycle feeds itself.' Douglas Rushkoff
(iii) The Doughnut of Social and Planetary Boundaries is based on the model created by Rockstrom et al which says that any economic decision should include reference to its ecological ceiling


climate change
ocean acidification
chemical pollution
nitrogen & phosphorus loading
freshwater withdrawals
land conversion
biodiversity loss
air pollution
ozone layer depletion
ECOLOGICAL CEILING
the safe and just space for humanity
SOCIAL FOUNDATION
REGENERATIVE AND DISTRIBUTIVE ECONOMY
OVERSHOOT
SHORTFALL
water
food
health
education
income & work
peace & justice
political voice
social equity
gender equality
housing
networks
energy

3. ATTITUDE TOWARDS PEOPLE: Ethics, kindness, tolerance through understanding, empathy; communities, shared rewards, race, colour gender, faith, bias and prejudice; 'non nobis solum' conflict resolution

Preamble: When 'Every Child Matters', designed as a policy to safeguard children was introduced in 2003, it had the unintended effect of placing the child at the centre of the family, a planet around which the satellite parents orbited, creating a generation of parents who allowed their children to shape their family life. The focus on children's rights and the idea that children can be treated like adults in terms of language and content did children few favours. Naturally ego-centric in their early years, the focus with children entering reception (and in Year One and Two), is on placing them in a bigger universe where they are part of a greater whole. Instead of individual reward and acknowledgement, they are rewarded as part of a group which helps to develop shared ownership of tasks and responsibilities, encourages teamwork and the looking after and supporting each other. Much has been written about developing self-respect (not self-esteem which requires nothing other than self-bestowal) and the importance of encouraging early formal learning (quite unnecessary and possibly damaging) when we see the effects of a focus on IQ above EQ in many public walks of life).
Looking at the behaviour of many of our leaders in public life, especially many involved in banking, law, corporate finance, politics, or working as venture capitalists or trust fund managers, we can see the effects of selective schooling, socially and academically and the absence of empathetic and community values. Children need to learn to think ethically about their communities and to take their responsibilities as members of the their society seriously from the very start of their education.

Key Points:

(a) Children learn about each other, what they like and don't like. Rather than writing about themselves, get them to write about another person in their group.

(b) Children need to learn to be part of a group, whether it be an extended family or the whole school community.

(c) Modelling behaviour is crucial, both from teachers who have to be aware of how they are perceived, and parents, who need to be brought into the education process. Having good role models is crucial to a child's development and one of the greatest challenges facing our children. Any new curriculum and new paradigm of education has to extend to include the education of parents and carers.

4. ATTITUDE TOWARDS OURSELVES:

Non nobis solum = not for ourselves alone

Preamble: It is important that our attitude to ourselves is based on our attitude and actions towards others as how we feel about ourselves is directly in proportion to how we relate to, and treat others. While this might reads as naïve and simplistic, that is where education of self should start to avoid a lifetime measuring yourself by the number of 'likes' on social media, bysexting and the insecurities created in some children by selfies. It is only when children learn to relate to other people, to share and empathize with other children and become part of a community that their character is able to move on from the narcissism of early childhood to build a sense of self-respect. We have, of course, an obligation to keep healthy, which involves both a good and healthy diet, healthy living and physical exercise and this should be an important part of education at all levels.

Key Steps:

(a) A focus on manners – courtesies, showing appreciation

(b) Introduction to the idea of charity

(c) Building self-discipline and organizational skills through moving from the centre of the circle

(d) Looking after their immediate environment and possessions

(e) Family trees and language trees

Where is technology in all this?

"Technology, whether through holograms or virtual reality (VR) , will create new opportunities for teachers and lecturers really to discuss what the science means or what relevance history has for the future, and help develop those higher-level cognitive skills. We are moving from a world of simple teaching to a world of exploring."
Julie Mercer, Head of education research at Deloitte.

More to come here – obviously!

RELEVANT ARTICLES: 2004 - 2018

Growing up Too Fast

'*Young people are growing up too quickly.'* – Dame Jacqueline Wilson

'More than half of parents believe childhood is now over by 11.' – Result of a survey carried out for Random House

'A boy becomes an adult three years before his parents think he does, and about two years after he thinks he does.' – Lewis B. Hershey, *News summaries*, December 1951

'I was wrong to grow older.† Pity.† I was so happy as a child.' – Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Flight to Arras*, 1942

One of my first impressions on coming to England for the first time in 1985 with a young family was just how sophisticated all the young children were. This was particularly so with girls who appeared more akin to adolescents in their fashion sense, their conversation, their interest in music and what they read. It wasn't just their self-confidence that made them stand out, their poise and interest in clothes, in make-up, in how they looked that was so unnerving and made my children look rather like naïve and innocent country bumpkins (which they probably were!). It was their whole manner that previously had strictly been the domain of teenagers in my rather sheltered world. And in many ways I admired the way these prep school children could relate to adults and the fact that they were so much more aware and knowledgeable, more like young adults, than their counterparts back home.

On reflection, though, I wondered about what had been lost, what had been jettisoned to allow them to be propelled through childhood at such a pace. I wondered if the loss of naivety and childish innocence was, in fact, such a good thing if somehow we were doing them a disservice by allowing them to move so quickly through these precious years. It is, of course, difficult to hold back changes in attitudes and behaviour, and that imposing censorship to counter the laxity of values and morality in society is a temporary measure at best. As well, I could see that it was often the parents who aided and abetted children in their desire to be teenagers whilst still in single figures, parents that bought the clothes and make-up, who acquiesced before their children in pocket money, in bedtimes, in dress and encouraged the children to prematurely dip their toes into the waters of adolescence.

A recent survey carried out by ICM for the publishers of Dame Jacqueline Wilson, suggested that the majority of parents felt that childhood finished at eleven. It is a frightening thought. There is no doubt that children will try to push the boundaries, always, endlessly negotiate, go on strike if necessary, sulk, rebel and hate you if you don't allow them to walk all over you, but that is exactly what parenthood is about, providing boundaries, setting the rules, managing the angst. Dame Jacqueline said that it was good that parents wanted the best for their children but it was also important to remember that youngsters still needed loving guidance and something to bounce off.

These days, more than ever before, childhood is under threat by that most schizophrenic of house guests, the internet. While it provides entertainment, information and immediate communication, it is socially inhibiting and brings an adult world into our homes whether we welcome it or not. In his book 'The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast, Too Soon', first published in 1981, David Elkind writes of the enormous pressure children find themselves under to act, dress and copy adult role models and stereotypes and the considerable emotional, intellectual and social cost. Not surprisingly, the 3rd edition published recently has new villains, most linked with techno toys, but his warnings have gone unheeded. Much of the blame, however, is down not only to the pace of life and the time parents spend indulging their children, but the example we set to children. The stability that children once enjoyed within families has been turned on its head by the explosions in divorce, drug abuse, criminal behaviour, imprisonment, and instability amongst their parents. The unpalatable facts are that over the past thirty years, among adults ages 30-60 (the ones parenting children and teenagers), divorce rates have doubled, drug abuse enjoy childhood. as risen 400%, arrests for theft have doubled and imprisonments have risen 300% thrusting the adult world and all its problems onto our children.

A recent battlefield has been that of sex education, acted out through the Children, Schools and Families Bill which sought to introduce compulsory sex education from the age of seven. The bill aroused a good deal of opposition from leaders in the community who felt that it would further erode moral standards and encourage sexual experimentation. Earlier this year, in a letter to The Sunday Telegraph, 640 signatories, including

Catholic bishops, parish priests, university professors, councillors and doctors called for the dropping of legislation that would mean children as young as seven are taught about sex and relationships. That they were successful was little more than a pyrrhic victory and the decision received the inevitable backlash from the progressives who described it as a 'disgraceful betrayal of the next generation, but I admired their stand and, like them, question whether giving too much information to children too early is a good thing, that by so doing, we are placing more responsibility on children to make moral and behavioural decisions by saying 'grow up' – albeit, prematurely. Where there were once rules, expectations, codes of conduct within families and schools, it appears that children have to wrestle with often weighty decisions and process adult information on their own. It was not so long ago that I looked at a PSHE programme in a senior school: drug education, alcohol awareness, smoking campaigns replete with diseased lungs, visiting a crematorium, studying mental illness, learning about eating disorders, visiting a courtroom, teenage suicide and so on. I remember thinking to myself at the time what a grim place the world must seem to our children and young adults. Why could we not show them something with a little joy in it, why this obsession with the dark and harrowing side of life with all its pitfalls, rather than focusing on celebration and the promise that life holds.

As parents, we can do something to help preserve childhood. We can spend time with our children and determine how they spend their days by monitoring technology; we can make house rules based on our own judgement, not on some quoted precedent about what other parents allow; we can share with our children in the simple things: a walk, a picnic, family games; holidays that have some collective element. We can dissuade them wearing jewellery or applying make-up until they are a little older and monitor the magazines they read, but most of all we can talk to them about joy, of living, of giving, of sharing, or being children. Childhood is a wonderful stage of life and we should be in no hurry to encourage our children to grow up. They will do that soon enough.

Now we are ~~six, five, four three~~ two and a half

Selective Schools look for three year olds who can: • Hold a pencil correctly

- Be a leader in group activities
- Listen and understand a story

- Recognise letter and numbers
- Sort teddy bears in order of size and colour – SundayTimes,2001

There's been a lot of debate over recent years concerning the optimum age to begin formal education. With nursery vouchers, the rigour of the foundation years' programme and the heavily prescribed targets of Key Stage One, there is a relentless drive to ensure that children are beginning their formal education younger and younger in order to meet some spurious targets, regardless of the damage caused to the curiosity of young minds (i). It is apparent that the response of government and its many Medusa-like quangos to raise standards in our schools is to demand more, for longer, starting younger. What arrant nonsense!

We don't have to look far for other education systems that contradict this blinkered way of thinking, where children start school as old as seven and yet by age 16 have literacy and numeracy standards that compare very favourably with ours. Nor does it take a lot of imagination to see that the same children, rather than being held back, are better adjusted, having had several years of play in the bosom of their families or failing that, in nurseries that properly recognise their jobs as surrogate parents rather than target-setters, developing co- ordination, fitness and a sense of wonder before being sent off to school before their minds and bowels are ready.

The confusion is based on the same attritional mentality that won us the 1st World War, namely that if you are prepared to sacrifice more of your young men than the enemy, then ultimately you will win. Money, heaps of it, has been thrown at education with the same thought, although in this instance, to little obvious end, because the officers in charge have no idea who they are fighting (although independent schools are often raised as a possible target). Too little thought is given to the quality of the educational experience; instead, the response has been to increase the mind-boggling time spent teaching children the pleasures of confinement with set targets to achieve, with classrooms little more than holding pens. Before the age of five, children should be looking forward enthusiastically to starting school, not fearing a premature ambushed without adequate defences. They should be properly grounded and be able to walk on their own, either within their families or at nurseries and schools that nurture the growing child and don't batter them with targets or unrealistic expectations. They should be learning in an unthreatening environment how to succeed and fail at a myriad of tasks and challenges, the results of which matter not a jot, thereby extending their boundaries without being scarred and losing confidence.

We all lament the fact that as parents, we are less able to spend as much time with our children in the formative years as our parents were able to. Sadly, the single wage-earner is now the preserve of few families and while we would want to spend more time with our young children, we cannot always afford to do so although, inevitably, there are choices involved. To assuage our misplaced guilt by believing that if children are away from home, then they must be achieving, however, is damaging for children and we all, parents and schools, must guard against placing such premature expectations upon them.

But this is all by way of a preamble to what is the real tragedy of starting too young. The real tragedy is the failure to acknowledge the concept of readiness in education. At times, one wonders if those steering the runaway train of barmy educational ideas have the slightest idea of Piaget and stages of development or even how children learn. Research tells us that children who start school 'late' i.e. after 5 years can take as little as three months to catch up to those who have been in formal education for the preceding eighteen months. Of course, those who can read early should do so for boredom is the greatest cancer of education. The real casualties, however, are those children who are simply not 'ready' to start to read at age 4. Being able to read at a young age is an age-old parental boast wheeled out whenever two or more parents are gathered together, yet the facility to do so has more to do with the child's stage of development and maturation rather than intelligence. Children who learn to read later because that is their natural time to do so are better off than those taught to read by mechanics and bombardment. Learning should not be a trial of forced labour and sweated tears, demanded by parents and inexorably delivered by schools, especially when the poor child has been prematurely wrenched from his or her play-pen having not even got to their fifth birthday.

The worse damage done and the worst possible start to school years is that by age five some children have learned a lesson they should never have to learn at such a young stage: they've learned how to fail. Not because they didn't work hard enough or weren't bright enough, but because they simply weren't ready to learn the complexities of language or numerals. That is the greatest and most inexcusable tragedy of all.

Piaget and All That

'The principal goal of education is to create men who are capable of doing new things, not simply of repeating what other generations have done – men who are creative, inventive and discoverers' – Jean Piaget (1896-1980) Swiss cognitive psychologist.

'*The current state of knowledge is a moment in history, changing just as rapidly as the state of knowledge in the past has ever changed and, in many instances, more rapidly.*' – Jean Piaget (1896-1980) Swiss cognitive psychologist.

'*Someday, maybe, there will exist a well-informed, well considered and yet fervent public conviction that the most deadly of all possible sins is the mutilation of a child's spirit.'* – Erik Erikson, (1902-1994) Danish-German-American developmental psychologist

'*...we discovered that education is not something which the teacher does, but that it is a natural process which develops spontaneously in the human being. It is not acquired by* *listening to words, but in virtue of experiences in which the child acts on his environment. The teacher's task is not to talk, but to prepare and arrange a series of motives for cultural activity in a special environment made for the child'* – Dr. Maria Montessori

Sometimes, when we are busy teaching – or raising – children and feel exasperated at the pace at which they are learning, it is useful to turn to some of the theories of development that we learnt about while undergoing teacher training. Even thirty five years on, I remember studying Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development and thinking what good sense it made and how useful it was in providing a framework for our understanding of children. The four stages of cognitive development that Piaget identified (sensorimotor or the mastery of concrete objects; preoperational or the mastery of symbols; concrete operational or the mastery of classes, relations and numbers and how to reason; and formal operational or abstract thinking and the mastery of thought) help us to see the natural progression of learning and encourages us to adapt our teaching to the needs of the children. As important as the stages was Piaget's caution that, while children pass through each stage in the same order, there is usually some variation as to the ages that they do so. Piaget gives some broad outlines (sensorimotor, 0-2 years; preoperational, 2-7 years; concrete operational, 7-11 years; and formal operational, 11 years +), but warns against anticipating readiness and that a delayed entry or exit from any stage is usually just due to maturation. As a teacher, being mindful of the different stages makes us, also, mindful of the needs of children and more able to understand and accommodate their learning at different levels. It is of course, just a theoretical construct, but a useful one.

Alongside Piaget, we were introduced to Erikson's theory on social development which ran alongside Piaget's cognitive theory. Each of Erikson's stages of psychosocial development which looked at human social development were linked with a conflict and a period of a person's life in which they were both raised and resolved.

Hope was the first virtue in which the conflict was trust and mistrust (infancy) followed by will in which the conflict was autonomy vs shame and doubt (toddlers); purpose in which the conflict was initiative vs guilt (up to age 6); competence in which the conflict was industry vs inferiority (age 6 to puberty); fidelty in which the conflict was identity vs role confusion (teenager); love in which the conflict was intimacy vs isolation (young adult); caring, in which the conflict was generativity vs. Stagnation (mid-life); and wisdom in which the conflict was ego integrity vs despair (old age). Each stage had its own descriptors and sub-text, but the framework, like that of Piaget, provided the means for us to look at social development alongside cognitive development, and while arguably less pertinent to teaching, gave a broad theoretical structure as to the stages that children move through.

Since then, of course, there have been a number of new developments and constructs by which children are measured. Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences asked more questions of the nature of intelligence and how we assess it, while current research on the brain continues to affect the way we currently think about education and teaching.

What is so important in any theory of knowledge, of course, is not that we follow it blindly, but that we are aware of it and make use of it where appropriate. It is vitally important that teachers keep well-informed about research and that we all, teachers and parents, understand the most vital fact of all, that all children are different and progress at different stages and that while the journey is the same, the timetable is at least partly locked in each child's genetic code.

The Invasion of Childhood

'Slow down, you're moving too fast (you've got to make your childhood last).' – Paul Simon, with apologies

'It is never too late to have a happy childhood'. – Tom Robbins

'I'd give all wealth that years have piled, The slow result of Life's decay,
To be once more a little child
For one bright summer day'? – Lewis Carroll *'Solitude'*

The release of the Cambridge review into primary education in October, met with widespread approval from those involved in education. Widespread, but not, it appears, from the government who keep pushing back the boundaries in their belief that the more you do for longer, the greater the benefit to the children. Yet despite their intransigence, the suggestion that we should be starting formal education later, as happens in many overseas countries, makes a lot of sense, begging the question as to why we start so young and yet lag behind other European countries in our levels of literacy and numeracy.

More frightening is the government's desire for pushing learning back into the early years has been the growing realization that many of our learning problems are quite likely, at least in part, the product of our desire to teach children to read and count before they have reached the requisite stage of readiness. Children who are not ready to read start to guess and keep guessing rather than learning to see patterns. By not being ready to learn at an abstract level, they are propelled into a spiral of failure simply by being pushed too far, too early.

What if, then, what if, all that money, all those resources, all that pressure and all those expectations had actually done the very opposite of what was intended. What if? What if what has been a central plank of government's programme has actually damaged our children? What if the government, rather than extending the years of education children had to spend in schools had spent the same money on improving pupil / teacher ratios? What if they had encouraged a different curricula that taught children better social skills, developed their awareness of the arts and culture, encouraged their physical development and co-ordination and not pushed them into formal learning until they were ready? Of course, many children are ready to read at a young age and will devour books, but this has as much to do with physical maturation as any innate ability, more to do with readiness than cleverness. It is when blanket expectations and teacher targets are in place that the greatest damage is done.

There is so much written about education that it is hard for anyone's head not to spin. Ideas and philosophies come in and out of fashion at an alarming rate: recent articles on the downside of the carrot philosophy of positive reinforcement and the value of tough love seem to have been pulled out of the hat once again along with constant pressures placed on schools and teachers to 'tweek' their already severely 'tweeked' curricula to fit in with the latest trend, the latest medical findings, the latest political rant.

Schools, of course, must change and many are lagging behind in many areas, particularly in a strategy to deal with managing the proliferation of technology. But change must be measured and protect what we do well. Happy, secure children learn best; children who are ready to learn, can make up lost ground in a very short time. Filling children's days does not equate with progress and we must not pretend that putting extra pressure on children is the only way for them to keep up with the rest of the world.

'The great cathedral space which was childhood.' – Virginia Woolf

Letting Go

Published in Attain Magazine January 2018

''There are only two lasting bequests we can hope to give our children. One of these is roots; the other wings.'

There is nothing that can prepare you for having a child. Suddenly, your life is turned upside down and the order and normality you once had are banished forever. And it doesn't matter how much you know that having children is a universal experience, or how many you know who have been through the same experience, having your own is somehow different. They become, for a time at least, a possession, and you are their protector as well as their champion. On the spectrum from subjectivity to objectivity you are anchored on the left, with your own child inhabiting, at least for a time, the centre of your universe.

Which is all as it should be, at least for a while. Lord Halifax once said that "Men love their children not because they are promising plants but because they are theirs" and he was right. Children are our future as well as our present and in them we invest more love, time and money than anything else we have – including our own adult relationships.

The problem (and it is often a problem) comes with the letting go. When do your see your son or daughter as their own person, no longer wholly dependent upon you? When do you start handing over responsibility, moving them along another spectrum from dependence to independence and at what pace?

It is a difficult path for parents to walk and many find it inordinately hard – and no wonder. While you have some control in your own home about your child's language and behaviour, once children go off to nursery or to school, the reins are no longer in your hands. Your children are now learning from those about them and at times you will be shocked with a word or behaviour they bring home. They will continue to do so. By adolescence you might even feel they live on a different planet and wonder why you were reluctant to let them go in the first place.

The task for parents is to give their children a good foundation – the "roots" (the values, manners and behaviours that the parents feel are important for life) as well as wings (the ability for their children to become independent and find their own way in the world).

The challenge is to see your child as someone distinct from you, someone with their own feelings, ideas, thoughts. One of the most suffocating, damaging (and ultimately selfish) emotions that parents can be guilty of is that of unconditional love, when you take upon yourself any slight or hurt your child suffers and don't want to accept that they can manage without you

– and have to. Yes, they need love and support and encouragement, but increasingly they will need their own space to grow.

In these early years, it is crucial that parents work at being good models for children – after all, most children first learn by mimicking their parents. Comments about the home and family often get repeated at school by children who have no social filters. More important, don't assume your child is going to grow up without some guidance and discipline. On this subject there are many worthy pieces of pithy advice: 'The surest way to make it hard for children is to make it easy for them' is one such; 'The ability to say no is perhaps the greatest gift a parent has' another. But there is also too much information out there on the subject of parenting that serves to confuse when all that is needed is common-sense. In essence, it is important for parents to consciously do less for their children as time passes while equipping them to do more for themselves.

It is crucial that parents show trust and confidence in the schools when handing their children over. Over my many years as a Head, it was almost always the parent who needed consoling at the moment of dropping their child off for the first time and seeing them run off with their classmates without a backward glance. No doubt it feels like rejection, but if the foundations are in place, it should be a moment of pride. You will find criticism of your child when it comes (as it usually does at some stage) hard to take, but support those who support your child and remember that on that same spectrum, teachers can see your child rather more objectively, but no less compassionately.

There should be a sense of sadness, but also great joy when seeing your child start out on their journey. It will be difficult; it will have its challenges; there will be times when you will just want to wrap your arms around them to protect them. But the best protection of all will come from preparing them well. Yes, there is a risk in walking to school, in taking part in various activities, in and out of school, in friends they meet and situations they find themselves in; it is unnerving when they are out of sight for the first time, and you don't know what they will be saying or doing; but risk is part of life and they need to learn to manage it, as we all do. For mums and dads to gather in the nearest coffee shop after drop-off and air their worries and anxieties is a normal response. But if you have prepared your child well and have given them a taste of independence and responsibility, then they are ready for the next stage in their lives. Love, support, encourage, care, but most important let them fly and celebrate their flight with them.

In his wonderfully reflective poem 'Walking Away' about his son's first day at school, C Day Lewis ends with the verse:

"I have had worse partings, but none that so Gnaws at my mind still. Perhaps it is roughly Saying what God alone could perfectly show – How selfhood begins with a walking away, And love is proved in the letting go.

WALKING AWAY - Cecil Day Lewis

It is eighteen years ago, almost to the day –
A sunny day with leaves just turning,
The touch-lines new-ruled – since I watched you play Your first game of football, then, like a satellite Wrenched from its orbit, go drifting away

Behind a scatter of boys. I can see
You walking away from me towards the school With the pathos of a half-fledged thing set free

Into a wilderness, the gait of one
Who finds no path where the path should be.

That hesitant figure, eddying away
Like a winged seed loosened from its parent stem,
Has something I never quite grasp to convey
About nature's give-and-take – the small, the scorching Ordeals which fire one's irresolute clay.

I have had worse partings, but none that so
Gnaws at my mind still. Perhaps it is roughly
Saying what God alone could perfectly show –

How selfhood begins with a walking away,
And love is proved in the letting go.

Modelling for Life October, 2017

'The younger generation isn't so bad. It's just that they have more critics than models.'

Children are very perceptive. Often, what they might not be able to understand intellectually, they sense intuitively, but invariably while young, they learn best by imitation, through what they see and experience in the home, rather than by what they're told. Prince Charles is reputed to have said '*I learned the way a monkey does – by watching its parents'* and that is true for all of us. After all, who else has such an overwhelming presence in our young lives. The parent is sometimes oblivious to just how much a child absorbs from all they see and hear going on around them. Sometimes the first realisation only comes after an inappropriate word or comment uttered first in the privacy of the home is innocently repeated in company by one of their off- spring. by all that children hear and see. If parents use inappropriate language, drink excessively or smoke, then such behaviours are legitimised; if they spend their time looked into their i-phones, they can expect to be imitated. Nor at they safe in sharing their more personal opinions. Children's honesty at school can often be disarming and little is safe with children when amongst their classmates.

The importance of parents providing an exemplar for their children can hardly be overstated. If children grow up in homes that don't value books, then they are less likely to do so. If parents openly criticise their teachers, it is hard for children to respect them knowing what they think. The same applies if politicians or policemen are constantly derided in the home. Yet even more important are the little things children learn by imitation: valuing effort; encouraging sharing; manners; respect; appropriate behaviour; and talking up the value and importance of education.

As children grow up, the resolve of parents will be constantly tested. During adolescence, children may become contrary, on the one hand appearing very moralistic, judgmental even, especially where adults are concerned and yet seemingly prepared to push the boundaries in their own behaviour, ignoring the role models presented to them by family and friends (although, in reality, seldom drifting too far from the values their parents espouse). By their teens, they may be better able to make their own decisions and intellectualize the concepts of right and wrong, but even in those tremulous years, they still learn largely by imitation, often through challenging the status quo.

It is patently obvious that children need strong and reliable role models as they grow up by mirroring the words, attitudes and actions of their parents and those others who have influence in their lives. In order to educate our children in those preferred attitudes and values, we should reflect those same attitudes and values in ourselves and give them voice. We must be aware of what we say in front of children and the legitimacy we give to behaviours and actions through our own words and example. If adults talk disrespectfully of other adults, they cannot then expect their children to act and feel differently. If adults are fair and measured in what they say about others, that also will show through in their children. Schools and parents need to be consistent and work together for if both are not singing from the same song sheet, then children never learn what is acceptable and what is not. This can be true of simple courtesies, like opening doors, writing thank you notes and being punctual, or some of the bigger things, like respecting the law and other cultures, peoples and societies. Children dislike hypocrisy and don't like being told one thing and shown another. They revel in surety, in knowing where they stand. If they are untidy they don't want to be told so by someone who is equally untidy. If their use of language is inappropriate or they are lazy, then they need to see the correct behaviours and standards in the actions of those who correct them as well as in the words. They respect strength and don't always appreciate being defended when they know they're in the wrong – as they occasionally are. Children's honesty is transparent and often their worries and concerns mirror the opinions and views of their parents or guardians or, indeed, their teachers. And so the responsibility is implicit in all of us, to ensure that the way we present to our children is consistent with the values we want them to acquire and acknowledge that, in so doing, words alone will not suffice. Children need models. They need be able to respect their teachers, their government, their police force, their town council, but respect has to be earned. That is why role models, whether sportsmen, like Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer or celebrities like David Attenborough or are a power for good. Children are good on imitation and if we want them to imitate the right actions and values, and grow up as we would want them to be, we need to be the people they aspire to – for if not, they will grow up reflecting the values and behaviours we most dislike in ourselves.

Educating the Whole Family ((published in the Daily Telegraph on-line on 30 July as *'Schools must take an active role in educating disengaged parents'*)

There has been a lot in the news of late about the importance of parents and the home in supporting children's education. The correlation between parents who play an active role in their children's education and achievement at school tells us what we have always known: that a supportive home environment is crucial in getting children to achieve and shaping their attitude to the importance of education. Without that support and encouragement, the path for many children is made hugely more difficult. The challenge is how: how to engage with parents, especially those families that are most in need of support, but eschew it; how to intervene in such a way as to make a difference to those children most in need; and how to ensure the support parents give is not blinding advocacy, but is realistic, encouraging and in the child's long-term interests.

So much is written about improving aspirations and life chances for the young and yet attempted in isolation, there is little chance of success. What is required to break down barriers to learning and improve social mobility is to raise the aspirations of whole families: somehow we need to develop the concept of 'whole family education.'

In such a model (and it is there, albeit in its infancy), school and home do not function as separate entities, but have a shared responsibility for education – as is happening through technology and better channels of communication between home and school, through tweets, twitter and various school apps that link home and school. Schools are no longer the only place where learning takes place, especially as the internet has allowed for increasingly sophisticated and inclusive providers of on-line education and new means of learning. Technology in its many guises, the rise of alternative models of education and different means of access as well as other models of learning, based on home-schooling and tutoring, represent a ground-shift from what has been the norm and has led to new ways of looking at education, including its delivery a shift which lies the home-school accord.

So where to start? Technology has already removed much of the mystique about education, allowing parents to be better informed of their children's education, and this is only the start. Curriculum and homework on-line, the use of texting to provide direct feedback to parents, as well as involving them in checking and reminding them of their role; these things are already in place and are having an impact. According to the findings of the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) released earlier this month, regular text messages sent to parents and guardians to remind them of forthcoming tests, to report whether homework was submitted on time and to let parents know about what topics were being taught have resulted in improved performances in Mathematics, English and school attendance. The question is how to reach all parents and how to ensure that teachers and families are working in unison. Courses run by schools or independent providers can encourage parents to take a more active interest in education and are important in encouraging and cajoling parents, but without state support, such measures are only likely to reach a small percentage of parents and, almost inevitably, the more committed. Which is why the onus should also fall onto schools, not just to communicate more explicitly and informatively with their own parents, (which has its own implications about the role of teachers and support staff), but to train their own teachers on the pressures faced by parents, how parents see their role and how they can work together for the betterment of their children. For it is by informing and equipping individual teachers to work with their class community, the parents and guardians of their pupils, that is most likely to bring success.

If we are going to move children across boundaries, shape aspirations and reach those families that don't see the point of education, we need to find ways of redefining education as something that sits in the home. We don't want to encourage the pushy parents, fighting to get their child into a good school, but rather advocate for the quiet parent who doesn't ever feel it is their place to question a system that should be doing the right thing by his or her child. So long as the terms, 'Good school bad school' linger, so long as so many of our children are receiving little or no support from home, we need to do more – and working with the whole family seems the best way of doing so

Time for a Moratorium on SATs? (ISC Website, May, 2016)

One of the first things I did when I first became a Head in 1998 was to withdraw my School from KS2 tests, admittedly to a certain amount of consternation from parents. Many independent schools followed, especially those that went through to age 13, and by 2012, the number was fewer than 20% and declining. Nevertheless, the current debate about SATs has relevance to all schools if for no other reason than to see which way the state sector is moving.

The recent debate about the SATs has, of course, resulted in considerable fallout. We have read, daily, of boycotts; the disclosure of leaked papers; the poll undertaken to assess the emotional effect of SATs on children; the 'Let our Kids be Kids' campaign; the comments about the negative effect of testing at 7 and 11 years; the untimely sacking of Natasha Devon, the government's mental health champion for schools; and the charge that the tests are really about measuring teachers and schools rather than pupils. During the past few days, this list has grown even longer, with charges of maladministration and cheating; criticism of the difficulty of some of the content in the test papers (and whether they are age appropriate); and the suggestion propounded by some observers that SATS and testing were one and the same and that to oppose one meant opposing the other and, as night follows day, having lower expectations. All of which raises the overwhelming question about whether it is time to step back and look at the purpose and content of the these tests, and if they do the job they are supposed to do and the arguments of those opposed to them. Despite the recent criticisms, the Government is right to want to raise standards, but perhaps it is time they consider whether the concentration of time and resources on SATs is the best way of doing so. It should at the very least address some of the concerns raised and sort out what, if any, criticism is valid. After all, when we read Allison Pearson's attack on those criticizing SATS and note her aside, that GCSE's are ''killing the love of learning for its own,' perhaps she – and we – should be mindful that SATs are quite capable of doing the same.

Nick Gibb said at last week's conference at Brighton College that the 'beautiful command of English' shouldn't just be the preserve of the middle class, a sentiment all would agree with, but it's rather more elemental than that. First, we should be ensuring all children have a good working knowledge of English and the tools to communicate accurately. Writing should be the vehicle through which children learn about tenses and agreement and parts of speech, not the other way round (and if we are insisting on a sound knowledge of grammar at this age, for goodness sake, let's continue it and make it a central part of national testing later on). When reference is made to 11 and 12 year olds being unable to read, should we be looking at the focus on SATs in Year 6 that, in many schools, dominate the year's teaching at the expense of extra reading and writing? Sometimes, the statistics of children unable to read and write hides a number of issues including the quality of teaching, classroom discipline (which is a societal as much as a school problem) and the swathes of time given over to teaching children how to pass tests, but also whether we are addressing the task in the best and most direct way. We need to clarify what we are teaching and why, rather than dealing with the extraneous (and the equally misguided suggestion that all students take Mathematics up to A Levels is another indication of killing by excess). Let's narrow down on what skills and learning take priority and get those sorted first.

The obsession for measurement, however unreliable it may or may not be, lies at the heart of the issue. Allison Pearson argued in her article 'SATs aren't damaging kids: Low Expectations are' that if you don't find out, 'the level a child is at when they enter school, then you won't be able to measure progress, or lack of it' which would be fine if the tests could do that. Inevitably the tests are skewed for a variety of reasons, including differing levels of readiness, which can vary considerably at age 7 and 11 and the impact of the home, school and tutoring. Piaget may not have the same central place in education he once did, yet it may be worth revisiting his stages of cognitive development, particularly the concrete operational stage which occurs between the ages of 7 and 11 to see what we should expect them to know and do at each stage, but also to the variables that can apply. The fact that parents are given their child's raw score (the actual number of marks they get) which will be set against the national average is deeply flawed, and will do little other than reinforce parental expectations, upwards and downwards. Frightening that at age 11, those around you, your parents and teachers, will have the marks by which to judge or excuse you, marks which will provide a benchmark for your onward journey to be used by those charged with your future education. Fine if you come from a middle-class literate household where parents are readers and writers and your children are confident and articulate, but there is a world outside of the liberal and often advantaged schools. Fine if you see the job of education at primary schools being about preparing for the tests through drilling and repetition, because that is what happens. Little wonder, then, the mad scramble for the places at the 'better' state schools, through the postcode lottery, often based on the socio-economic factors and ambitious parents wanting to seek every advantage, a situation more likely to be made worse by SATs, not better. Phrases used like 'in good schools children aren't stressed' asked today by Sir Steve Lancashire begs the question as to what happens to unfortunate children who aren't lucky enough to go to 'good schools'? Who is being judged? Who owns the 'mark'? Small wonder, also, that the desperation runs amok at this time of year with publishers and tutors offering assistance in preparing for SATs through publishing extra materials and practice papers along with the extra coaching and the distortion that can only distort the attempt at benchmarking. Fair? Not really.

Added to the mix is the effect, real or imagined, that SATs are having on parents and children. A recent survey (is it wise to survey children in such leading ways?) found that nearly 90% of 10 and 11 year old pupils feel pressure to do well in tests. Now, a little pressure is no bad thing, but so much depends on how well teachers and parents (at least as much as children) deal with it. When 28% of the children polled say they feel a lot of pressure and stress and 17% said the tests made them sad, moody and has affected their sleep, then we should tread a little more carefully as well as remembering it is often parents who are increasing the stress. This does not necessarily mean jettisoning the tests, but asking whether they cannot be handled a little more sensitively and the data gathered a little more discretely. SATs are made too much of in many schools, undoubtedly, but perhaps that is because the government has hung so much on them. And yes, parents don't always get it right in knowing how to support their children. Yet while the Government says the tests should not be stressful (and many heads have come out this week with calming strategies to set their pupils' minds at ease), the fact is that children, teachers and schools are being measured and that fact does not always produce learning and teaching that serves the best long-term interests of young children.

In all the arguments, I struggle sometimes to see clearly what do we want? if we want children to read better, are SATS going to help that happen? Do we want national benchmarking? If so, how do we ensure all children are treated the same and factor in problems of different stages of readiness? Do we want teachers to be held to account? Then give them the tools to enable them to ply their trade in properly disciplined classrooms and find other ways to measure their effectiveness than by their pupils' scores. Re-visit the question as to how much grammar is appropriate to be taught at this age (and some questions clearly were difficult even for adults)? How much of what we teach should we include in SATs so as not to detract from our primary goal of ensuring all children can read and write accurately in different genre. Ideally, the teaching of grammar should be an implicit part of developing such skills rather than being treated in isolation. If we want children to be able to read and write competently and accurately at age 11, then get them reading and writing, not preparing for multi-choice tests (and the answer may be fewer, better tests that focus on the key outcomes, parts of speech, being able to construct accurate sentences and paragraphs). And let's stop comparing us with schools in South East Asia. We will get nowhere mimicking other school systems; we just need to improve ours in different greater sense of purpose and a better work ethic (and a little more breadth in curriculum in Year 6 would help). In this, prep schools have led the way in abandoning SATs where they can to get on with teaching the skills that the workplace and society needs.

It is time for a moratorium: Not for the reasons that columnists who are busily criticizing parents and schools are proposing, nor to appease those parents talking about stress and boycotts. The issue should be is this the most

effective way of ensuring competency in English and is it achieving its goals of improving the ability of our children to read and write? If the tests are deemed necessary does the process need fine-tuning? After all, testing is time-intensive (even if schools are told it shouldn't be) and should not be driving teaching as it clearly is, particularly in Year 6. Children can handle quite complex language and literature, but not all, or not at 11 years. Rigour is fine, as are high expectations and tests, properly employed, but it is timely to look again at what we need to assess. We need to re-examine the impact of SATs, the process and the industry it has begotten and ask whether the tests are serving our children well and if not, be prepared to change them.
We can leave the last word to Allison Pearson who is fierce in her condemnation of ' touchy-feely educationalists' who decree that asking children 'questions to which they might not know the answer was a) unfair, b) discriminatory, or c) quite possibly a violation of their human rights.' Might it not be (d) that the question is irrelevant, wasteful or unlikely to do what it says on the packet?

I want to be Rich, I want to be Famous. Published on-line in the Daily Telegraph under '*Fame and Fortune Should not be the Only Ambitions of our Young,*" 5 February, 2016

Over recent years, there has been a significant change in the aspirations of young children. You only have to talk to a class of young children to see just how much focus has shifted from wanting to 'do' something in life to wanting to 'be' someone. In a survey conducted in late 2014, a sample of children aged under 10 were asked what they wanted to be when they grew up: 22% responded by saying that they wanted to be rich while another 19% said they wanted to be famous. Such responses may be dismissed as symptomatic of the times we live in and society's obsession with fame and money, but the implicit lack of purpose and ambition to 'do' rather than to 'be' prevalent amongst our children should concern us all. At a conference towards the end of last year, Nicky Morgan spoke of the need for children to be taught that instant success and money do not just happen, citing the deleterious effect of X factor on the young. Her argument concluded *". . . what I want to see in teacher training is more talk about character education. Children* *must be taught that there are no shortcuts to success and that "instant fame and money" do not happen overnight."* It is a commendable aim even if it begs the question about what form such 'character education' should take. But even more important than instilling grit and resilience in our young is the need to teach them values. Value education may have been out of favour over recent years, partly because of the inevitable concern about just what values we should espouse and promote, but without learning tolerance, integrity, honesty, the importance of community and the like, children will continue to be attracted to goals that are often vacuous and shallow. Rather than the reason suggested by the Education Secretary., the blame doesn't just lie with programmes like X Factor and similar various reality shows. Rather it is a reflection of what we read of in the daily papers, a society that shamelessly celebrates celebrity, fame and wealth (even when such goals are achieved through the manipulation of expenses, bankers' bonuses, tax evasion / avoidance and the like). With the widespread and undiscriminating celebration of wealth and fame, it is naïve to think that such views will not drip down to our children. It has not always been so. In a programme on BBC 4 just last month, there was a compilation of interviews with children recorded between 1967 and 1974 whose aspirations focused around service vocations including nursing, law and teaching. Their attitudes about money sound unnaturally idealistic today. One child commented, ' *"If somebody left me some money, I wouldn't take it, I don't think, for I'd like to work for all the money I get" (interviewer: WHY?) "Because I don't think it's fair – it should really go to poor people who work just as hard as I do."* There was also evidence of a social conscience rarely heard today. In response to the question, 'Would you like to be very rich?' the child replied "I wouldn't like it, but I think if I did have a lot of money, I'd make a school for the rich people and the poor people because I think that when poor people are separate from the rich people, they don't feel they're in with it and feel they are worse than they really are." Naïve and innocent, perhaps, but there was a strong sense of idealism in their responses and in their choice of vocations that were largely jobs focused on service, in areas such as health and education. Children are a reflection of the society they live in. They may need grit and resilience, as Nicky Morgan suggests, but even more important, children today need to learn the value of community, of looking after each other, of honesty and integrity. Character education is important, yet when the focus of our children is increasingly on seeking self-promotion, instant gratification and looking after self rather than on having a sense of purpose and vocational aspiration, then we have work to do.