Most recent articles first

9. Keeping it Simple

School is one the few common experiences on which everyone has a view. As teachers well know, parents remember how things were done in their day and that experience often colours their attitudes, for good or bad. Similarly, writing about education through the prism of your own experience as a pupil - or as a teacher – is fraught with difficulties. In terms of what we now know, the past can seem like another country, where teaching was didactic, formal and prescriptive, employing methods that range from unfashionable to draconian. Yet we dismiss it at our peril.

It is in the nature of teaching today to look for ways to enhance the delivery of lessons, some new method or resource that can unlock the door of learning. Teachers who now have the freedom to develop their pedagogy and aware to the resources are spoilt for choice – and advice. More continuing professional development, including

so-called masterclasses and resources ranging from embedded video and audio clips to interactive touch panels and VR headsets are there to assist teachers deliver ever more varied and engaging lessons in ever more attractive and well-appointed classrooms.

Yet instead of enjoying the freedom to enrich their teaching, many teachers feel constrained by data, by budgets, by examinations and assessments so that, despite the plethora of resources and approaches at their disposal, there is either too little time to invest in planning or the vital connection with the child is lost in the smorgasbord of experiences. Education should not be this complicated. Sometimes teachers go looking for answers without, when they lie within, in the proven, the unfashionable process of rigour and deep engagement.

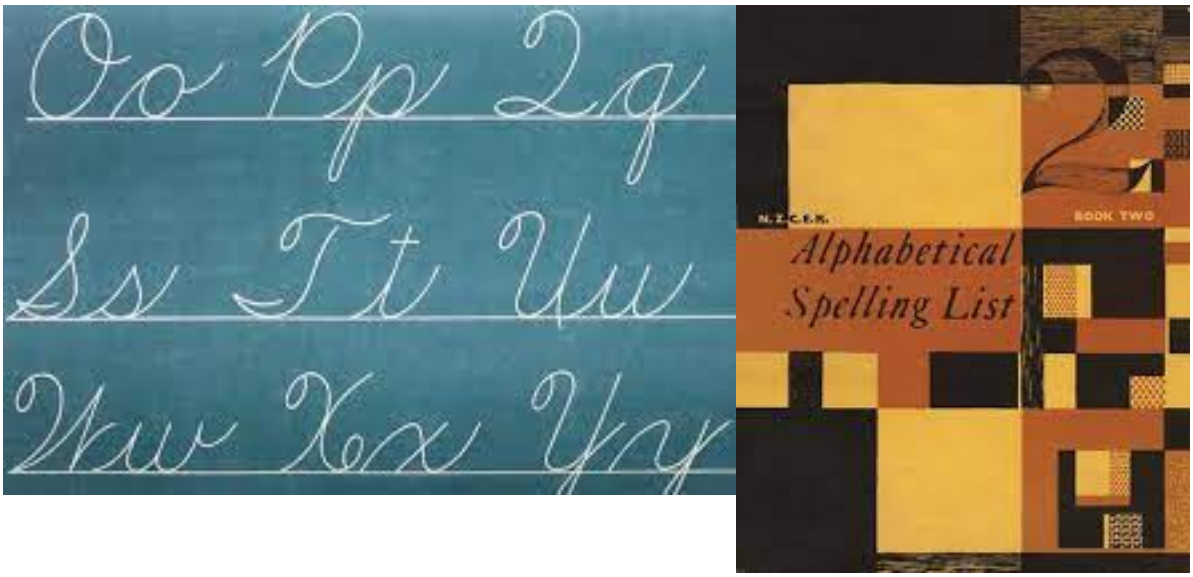
If I took you back to the early sixties, where I grew up, schools taught cursive writing, school spelling schemes were based on a spelling text that a series of levels that was published for the government. Tables were rote learnt as were simple formulae while reading had few other resources outside of School Journals.

Some years later, in my first year of teaching, in a remote country school, I had a class of 34 children of mixed ability (although I would never have thought that way then). There were various reading groups, maths groups and spelling 'levels' and each pupil worked their own way through the spelling levels. There was no stigma attached to where you were placed as each grouping was different. The sort of competition, when teachers and schools began to differentiate, still lay ahead. The value of class teaching was clear to see – the sense of a class identity, a shared project, where children would help and encourage each other. One of the themes that ran through our teacher training was that of readiness and how crucial it is. Baseline assessments would have been anathema, a betrayal of the obvious for the convenient.

Fast forward two years to my next school where I met one Year Four teacher whose teaching of the core subjects was characterised by rigour, practice, repetition, and memory. It sounded daunting, but because she gave endless encouragement to every child and had such high expectations for them all, they loved her kindness and belief in them and accordingly, took great pride in their achievements. I remember children who couldn't print at the start of the year ending with excellent cursive writing; children so proud about knowing their tables and being able to read aloud. Children

who accepted the rigour and repetition and thrived because of what it gave them. How she did it I don't know, but I knew that children who came through her class were a joy to teach. What that teacher did was to enable me to teach the way I did, to teach about art history, T S Eliot and the Vietnam War in Year 7 because the children were so secure and well-grounded in their core subjects.

This is not about looking back and heading off on the route of 'In my day . . . .' The reality is that we see the same singular approach and minimal resources in the third world, where the focus is on the relationship between teacher and learner and upon the ambition of children and their desire for education. I appreciate that by now I will have alienated most teachers and educationalists, but I believe that at certain stages in education, children do respond best to teachers who are relentless in insisting on the rigours of learning through repetition and memory, and a simple and direct approach. When I saw the pride in those children's eyes, the lesson has stayed with me.



Which made me think more about why schools or groups of schools today couldn't use a single spelling programme, one bespoke writing scheme and employ the same approach to mathematics, and especially learning tables: one approach, common for all teachers and children. Why do we think that shopping round for a fresh approach, anew schemata makes sense – after all, we are talking here about core skills and understanding that have sat at the very heart of education for aeons. What if all that money spent by teachers on their own favoured schemes was able to be spent and

that all teachers knew they were teaching the same core skills and knowledge up and down the country? By embedding these core skills, the children can enter the creative world, armed with their imaginations, knowing they have the means to express themselves.
Sometimes we make excuses for children which does them no favours, saying they can't cope. Can't? Or won't be allowed to try? There will be children, many, no doubt, who will struggle as before and will need specialist help, although the same rigour, repetition, memory training is usually of benefit to all children. And perhaps will recognise again the special value of teaching a class, the family, the identity, the common goal without always trying to make things brighter, smarter, more relevant, while forgetting that some learning requires repetition and memory, structure and discipline to get started.

Why don't we have one consistent approach to teaching reading and spelling? Why do we no longer have the confidence to say, this is how we teach reading in our schools? Why can't we stop looking for other ways to peel an orange and make life a little more simple – for children and teachers?

8. **'What's in a Name?'** (*published as 'Cancel culture: It's safer to name school houses after plants' on ISMplus*) November 2021

What's in a name? These days, the answer is a great deal – when it comes to some of the names chosen by schools to designate buildings or houses.
Recent newspaper reports that Holy Trinity Church of England Primary School in Richmond was changing the names of houses bearing the names of Winston Churchill and J K Rowling resulted in the usual backlash about "cancel culture". There was widespread scepticism of the claims that "the children across school have been keen to change the names of some of the school houses to be more diverse" and that "the change was entirely driven and led by our pupils . . . ."
The decisions taken should, of course, be respected although one hopes that the reasons for change were properly explained to the pupils (aged three to eleven). Removing Churchill's name, in particular, has caused a significant backlash

from the public and the school needs to explain their decision in order to build understanding of the issues involved.

Teaching diversity is a challenging, yet vital part of education today and schools do have a moral responsibility to take a lead — as I am sure the headteacher Alison Bateman and the governors and Diocese of Southwark who were behind her decision, would agree.
What is less explicable is why so many schools chose the names of public figures in the first instance and continue to do so, rather than using the names of people who are connected to the school or of some incorruptible sentient beings, such as plants.

After all, putting aside the concerns raised about Churchill and JK Rowling, the views and relevance of leading public figures can be transitory, set in time and place. Safer by far to look elsewhere, to their founders and alumni, to their geography and their own history (bearing in mind any possible links to the slave trade).

Most public schools are traditionally more cautious: Harrow, which counts Churchill amongst its alumni, has a tradition of naming most of its boarding houses after their founding housemasters.

At Radley, they call their houses "socials", labelling them simply A – L. At Sherborne, houses are named after previous headmasters or the buildings they inhabit; and at nearby Sherborne Girls, the names of several former headmistresses are commemorated.
Of other leading girls' schools, Benenden has a mix of names, most from established local families whose land and buildings have become part of the school and tree names (Oak, Elm, Birch and Ash are always a safe bet).
Heathfield School uses the names of inspirational women: Austen, Somerville, De Valois and Seacole. In some of the other schools I have known, the houses were called red, green, yellow and blue (although I can see even these would draw comment today) and Aiden, Cuthbert, Oswald and Durham (clearly a good ecclesiastical institution). Greeks, Romans, Trojans and Normans are considered a safe bet too, reckoning they go too far back to cause outrage.

I can sense today that those schools with houses named after Raleigh or Cook, certain battles and historic events or particularly, with connections with slavery are feeling a little nervous.

But rather than being defensive, what is needed is a conversation and a re-examination about what the school stands for and the choices it made, and continues to make, in relation to its values and mission statement.

Attitudes and values change and there is nothing shameful about reappraising past decisions and rectifying them if needs be. We are all learning, and if there is a lesson for us, it is for the need to listen and to learn what to hold onto and what to change – for change we must.

Society is moving at a pace that is often bewildering to the older generation whose default position is too often blinkered or even reactionary instead of accommodating. Samantha Price headmistress of Benenden wrote last week: "This so-called 'woke' generation are actually simply young people who care about things: about causes, about the planet, about people. It ultimately comes down to something very simple: being kind"

She cautions against the older generation dismissing the "energetic changes of this generation" in "derogatory tones and sighs".

It is a point well made. Our children are growing up thinking differently about the world – and as adults, we should be thinking differently too.

7. **A Model History Curriculum?(No, it's a New History Curriculum that's needed!)** Published on November 10, 2021

Last week, The Minster of State for School Standards, Robin Walker, announced the government was developing a "model history curriculum", with diversity at its heart. This was the culmination of a journey that began in February this year at a session of the Parliamentary Petitions Committeeheld in response to the hundreds of thousands of people who signed petitions calling on the Government to diversify and decolonise the curriculum. Despite a rigorous defence of the current curriculum by the previous Schools' Minister, Nick Gibb and his colleague, Andrew McCully, by July the Minister agreed that there was, indeed, a case for a model history curriculum to '*tell the story of who we are and what, as a country, we have done; right and wrong'* and to ensure the place of Black history and cultural diversity was properly represented in the curriculum. (i)

According to the current Schools Minister, this model curriculum would "*equip teachers and leaders to teach migration, cultural change and the contributions made by different communities to science, art, culture and society*", and, moreover, will be an "*exemplar of a knowledge-rich, coherent approach to teaching history*".

A response to the growing demands for a proper root and branch reform of the curriculum is long overdue. The argument that the national curriculum already allows for teaching of diversity, migration and slavery, conveniently ignores the fact that the curriculum is so broad and open-ended that schools can avoid topics they feel uncomfortable with – and despite the opportunities being there to teach a good deal more about diversity, many do (as the chair of the Committee succinctly put it, the '*challenge between what is possible'* and '*what the reality is*.')

The result of doing little for so long has meant that the model curriculum is now caught in a polarising debate, trying to appease various interest groups. The irony is that history is always more than content and including topics of diversity into the curriculum is only part of the answer. The focus of History is, and should be always be, on learning the requisite tools of the historian, the skills of deduction, enquiry, analysis and interpretation, so students learn how to question and assess evidence and challenge the presumptions we make every day in looking at ourselves in relation to different peoples and cultures. In some ways, content is of less importance for the reality is that there is so much history that the most important thing is to know how to access and use it. (ii) When we hear politicians linking History with the teaching of patriotism and key British Values or talking of promoting a common sense of belonging and shared history without providing the framework and definition to do so, we should be nervous. The truth is we are in a mess of our own making, and that by doing nothing for so long and focusing on our island's story, we have accentuated the division between those on the fringes who see history as the vehicle for either promoting or slating our own country. We only have to look north to the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence to see how finding a common approach to a history we can properly call 'British' is far from simple. David Abulafia**,** one of the editors of History Reclaimed quoted George Orwell's words from 1984 in a recent article, that '*Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past'*, using it as a stick to beat the woke zealots who ' **. . .** *exploit history as an instrument of propaganda – and as a means of bullying the rest of us.*' As leaders and governments have long tried to do.

So we should re-ask Orwell's question: who controls the present? Who is the model curriculum for and what is the extent of the ambition of its writers? If it is merely to offer a guide to pointing out how diversity can be found within its present wording, then that is not ambition. Putting aside the arguments of those seeking greater diversification in the curriculum and the counter arguments from those defending the status quo, it is the curriculum itself that has to change. In a recent newspaper article David Abulafia, who is co-editor of the website 'History Reclaimed' along with Professor Richard Tombs wrote *'A lifetime studying history has taught me one simple truth: to understand the present, we must examine the past. If only our leaders had a serious grasp of Afghan*

or Iraqi history, they might not have perpetrated such a litany of foreign-policy disasters in those countries recently – just as a deeper knowledge of Ireland's past could have eliminated some of the terrible mistakes made in Ulster' (iii)

Yes, I say, yes, and while we are about it, let's understand the demographics of the UK through its people and why people migrated here; explain the creation of modern India and Pakistan, Bangladesh and Hong Kong; the division of the Middle East after World War One; the scramble for Africa and so on – each would make today's world more comprehensible to our young and perhaps make us all more tolerant of other peoples and their histories. Diversity should be at the heart of our curriculum, not some afterthought and while the idea of reclaiming history poses as many questions as it answers (from what? For whom?), as does attempt to radicalise it, neither approach can stand alone, coming as they do from vastly different starting points. What is needed is proper leadership from historians and from schools, rather than the Ministry. History is arguably the most influential subject in our schools, yet more prone to interpretation, subjective judgements and political interference than any other. What is important in designing a model curriculum is asking what skills and knowledge do we want our students to garner and what questions should they learn to ask. We need to change the language of the debate and look at history as a discipline and not just as a body of facts, something to fit a national narrative. We may need to make some aspects of the curriculum mandatory to ensure skills and attitudes are taught to all. For there are many histories of Britain that have long not been properly represented as well as those determined by race and gender. We need a return to the middle ground, to a definition of history as contested knowledge, to an appreciation of the skills required to be a historian, (including asking the right questions), and to listen to the history teachers in our schools in order that our children can better understand the world they inhabit.

Finally, and more specifically for our independent schools, the recent annual survey by the History Association identified the independent sector as lagging behind state schools in teaching about diversity. In some ways this is understandable, given their more traditional approach to education, but it is also disappointing. Historically, independent schools, with their greater resources and freedoms have led the way in curriculum reform, notably in modern languages and science. History may present an altogether different challenge, but it is one they would do well to embrace.

Footnotes:

I was intrigued to read Nick Gibb's eulogising of Katherine Birbalsingh telling the committee '*I read an interview by Katharine Birbalsingh, the very well- known and esteemed headteacher. She said: "I have never met a history teacher who did not teach colonialism and slavery.*

...At our school, we certainly teach about slavery, about the Amritsar Massacre as part of Indian history, about Gandhi, about the Irish famine." I found this particularly pertinent as I had recently written an article using the teaching of history at Michaela Community School as an example and found that it highlighted rather spectacularly where the curriculum failed. Of course, Katharine Birbalsingh is not an Historian although she has her strong views on what history should be taught.

Later in the discussions, it was pointed out, sixty-nine per cent of teachers said that they disagreed or strongly disagreed that the curriculum gave children an appropriate understanding of Britain's diverse history when they were at the age of leaving primary school. Katherine Birbalsingh may be a favourite of Government, but to take her words and observations above those of History teachers as a collective, is simply bizarre

(i)

https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/empire-part-british-history-peter-tait/

(ii) 'Presumptive history' A suggested (mandatory) unit of study

https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/presumptive-history-peter-tait/

(iii) This article which was provocatively entitled 'We can never surrender to the woke witch hunt against our island story' appeared in the Daily Mail on 9 September, 2021

6. Don't fear 'opening the floodgates' to Parent Feedback

Communications experts Karen Dempster and Justin Robbins speak to Peter Tait about how to crack the parental communications nut

October 29, 2021


One of the challenges facing schools today is how to successfully engage with the parents and guardians of their pupils and students. Gone are the days when parents were kept at arm's length, when the school's word on education was accepted as gospel and where parental support was unwavering, even in instances of draconian discipline and poor teaching.

Now that expectations are different and education has become more child-centred and holistic, how can schools tackle the challenge of fully engaging parents in the education of their child?

Where do schools tend to go wrong on parental engagement? And what sort of strategies can work?

Educational consultant and former prep school headmaster Peter Tait spoke to communications experts Karen Dempster and Justin Robbins about how to approach the task. They are the authors of a new book *The Four Pillars of Parental Engagement: Empowering Schools to Connect Better with Parents and Pupils,* which aims to guide schools through this minefield.

Peter Tait: Where should schools start if they want to improve their relationships with parents?

Justin: Schools often want to jump to solutions, such as introducing a weekly parent newsletter, when they see a need for action. But we suggest first taking a step back

and evaluating the starting point. Make use of all readily available information, such as parent evening attendance statistics, parent open or response rates to requests, even pupil retention data. Then cast an ear out online, google the school and find out what people are saying about it. Finally, talk with parents, understand what is working well so you can build on this, and find out what is causing frustration and angst.
It's important to dig deeper into complaints such as "we get too many emails" or "parent events are always at inconvenient times" and understand the real issues. It could be that every department is doing an end of week parents' update, so each parent is only actually receiving five emails a week, but they are all arriving within a short space of time, thus creating the issue of perceived overload, which five emails a week certainly shouldn't. Or maybe a parent had a bad experience of school themselves, which is a huge barrier to them then attending parent evenings.

"It's important to dig deeper into complaints such as 'we get too many emails' or 'parent events are always at inconvenient times' and understand the real issues."

When you understand the starting point, you can then determine where you want to get to and then plan how to get there, using the four pillars. Even if the destination is three years away, it's important to set short term visible milestones to keep you on track and the team motivated.

Peter: Consistency of message is always a problem when delivered by different school team members — how do you ensure you achieve consistently high standards of communication with parents?
Justin: This is a real challenge for schools when messages to parents are written quickly and at short notice by busy school team members. Spelling mistakes and grammatical errors can often get through and undermine even the most serious of messages.
One way we recommend is to have one or more school team members, who have both the skills and time as the "communication expert" to centrally manage distributed parent communications such as emails, letters and online messages. That way they each go through the same rigour and review to guarantee a consistently high

standard. This person or persons might be a trained communicator if school budgets allow, or school team members who have additional training.

Where time and resources are potentially scarce, and communication is more decentralised, we recommend developing standards, guidelines and key messages for the school team to follow.

Peter: How do you engage the dis-engaged, those who feel that education is for school and not for the home?

Justin: The first of the four pillars is "knowledge" that aims to address exactly this point. It's challenging to encourage a parent to actively support their child's education if they don't know the impact this might have. As we discuss in the book, from research published in 2008, the effect of parental engagement over a student's school career is equivalent to adding two or three years to that student's education. Quite simply parental engagement can make a huge difference to their child's future. Once parents understand this, it becomes easier for them to actively engage and move on from believing education is just the responsibility of the school.

Peter: How do you ensure your school team are confident and effective communicators, including what and how they speak/write with/to parents?

Justin: Communication training is not a standard part of the teacher training curriculum. And yet, 85 per cent of our success is down to how well we communicate. It's quite astonishing really, that such a critical area isn't covered for those who are teaching the next generation.

"The effect of parental engagement over a student's school career is equivalent to adding two or three years to that student's education."

We encourage schools to offer every school team member a basic level of communication self-awareness to understand their own natural communication style. For example, if they are naturally quieter, they might need support for parent evenings to give a positive impression to parents. Similarly, for those who are more comfortable being outspoken, they might benefit from practising how to better listen and allow space in a conversation.

Peter: You state all schools should have someone in charge of all communications. Who should that person be and how should they ensure the messages and conversations fit in with the school culture?

Justin: Some schools, generally larger or private schools, they may be fortunate to have someone who has responsibility for marketing communications. As the majority don't, it's an additional, but very worthwhile task, that has to be part of someone's day job. It doesn't have to be one person and might actually be better if it isn't. For example, someone to proofread and review proposed communication messages might not have the same skills or personality as someone who is engaging with teachers and parents every day.

If a school is following the approach to parental engagement that we discuss in the book, they will have a short term and long term plan with milestones along the way. This plan will reflect the school culture, which will in turn support the school vision. So, the critical element to ensuring that every communication fits with the school culture is to start with a planned approach to parental engagement.

Peter: What impact do you see technology having on parental engagement, going forward?

Karen Dempster: Technology offers many benefits to support parental engagement and we've seen a change in how this is being used by parents during Covid-19 when many had to learn quickly how to access online schooling, when they may previously have seen parent portals as optional.

While it's good to understand the benefits of available technology, and to understand how this impacts parents' expectations of what your school offers (to be perceived as modern and responsive), face to face is still a critical part of how we build human relationships. So, combine different ways of communicating, choosing the approach that best helps you to achieve the outcome.

Peter: Which areas of school life must parents know about, and which ones are nice to have?

Karen: Let's consider that the elements of school life that parents need to know about can be categorised into three areas: urgent and important; important; or nice to know.

Urgent and important may relate to a school crisis or a child safety or behavioural issue. Important may include term dates, school contact information and how parents can support their children in their learning and development. Nice to know could include a social or charity event.

"The elements of school life that parents need to know about can be categorised into three areas: urgent and important; important; or nice to know."

Recognising these three areas, schools can develop a simple guide so every member of their team can understand how to communicate for each category. This guide can include what should be communicated (headings), who should sign it off and how it is communicated, to ensure a consistent approach that creates the appropriate parent response.

Peter: How can schools avoid information overload with parents?
Karen: We recommend an "air traffic control" type approach to managing information. Simply develop a shared document that can be accessed by anyone who communicates with parents. This should include details about any planned information that is being sent to parents, including the date it will be sent, which parents will receive it, the outcome of the message, the school owner who will ensure it is sent and who should sign it off.
Those who access and update the document should be encouraged to check it regularly to ensure there are no points when parents will receive excessive information and there may be ways to combine some messages.

Peter: Is connecting with parents the same as connecting with pupils when it comes to messaging? How do you recommend the messages aren't blurred or negated at home?
Karen: It is not the same but, of course, by connecting with parents you can work in partnership to positively influence pupils to better connect with school. This connection needs to be reinforced regularly to ensure the messages aren't blurred or misunderstood at home.
We believe that pupils should be at the heart of every school interaction with parents and there can be a real benefit in communicating with parents and pupils together.

The voice of pupils can be underestimated in helping schools to identify what pupils need from their parents to support their learning but also in identifying ways to help their parents to do this confidently, working with school.

Peter: How do you provide opportunities to hear parent ideas and feedback without opening the floodgates or making promises that can't be kept?
Karen: We recognise there is a level of fear in "opening the floodgates" to parent ideas and feedback. However, if you keep them closed, they simply go underground, and you don't hear them as well so can't act on them.
It's important to have a planned and sustained approach to listening to parents. This can be formal around key topics, such as pulse surveys or focus groups, or informal where teachers are trained to listen empathetically to parents or ideas are encouraged through online crowdsourcing in closed groups. However you listen, ensure you demonstrate that you heard and either act or respond to what people say to build trust and encourage future feedback.

5. Education and where it's Heading: Re-visiting John Stuart Mill

- Published on November 2, 2021

The changing of the guard at Westminster seems as good a time as any to examine what changes could be afoot with the new brigade. Gone are the state school educated Gavin Williamson and his state school sidekick (Grammar school, mind you), Nick Gibb, replaced as Education Secretary and Schools Minister by Nadhim Zahawi and Robin Walker respectively, both products of highly selective London independent schools. Perhaps there is a message there although who would be brave enough to interpret it.

Where better to start any discussion on education in the round and who it is intended for than with that great libertarian John Stuart Mill who wrote:

"A general State education is a mere contrivance for moulding people to be exactly like one another; and as the mould in which it casts them is that which please the dominant power in the government, whether this be a monarch, an aristocracy, or a majority of the existing generation; in proportion as it is efficient and successful, it establishes a despotism over the mind, leading by a natural tendency to one over the body.'

It's a refrain picked up two centuries later by Kevin Bingham who, perhaps tongue in cheek, described the purpose of a state education . . .

'*So you can be moulded into a state approved homogeneous drone that cannot think outside of the prescribed consensus. You will learn to repeat information instead of how to think for yourself so that you don't become a threat to the status quo. When you graduate you will get a job, pay your taxes, in order to perpetuate the corporate system of indentured servitude.*'

You might say this is stating the obvious and that in order to make education equal to all at the point of delivery, there needs to be a clear vision of what education is for (and this is an answer that keeps changing). With 8.9 million children in full-time education in England in 2020 – 2021, any change of direction, however slight, is extremely difficult – akin to turning a super tanker in the Suez Canal.

So, before even discussing whether education as wheeled out in our schools is meeting the needs of our children and our society, we should accept that it is easy to criticise, but not easy to right. As is, the system is intended to be all-inclusive (it isn't of course), to be above politics, (sadly not), and to educate the child according to a national curriculum that measures how successful each child is, by criteria that are inevitably narrow, nuanced and inevitably work better for some children than others. Education is big business, a term I normally shy away from, but since education is increasingly dominated by funding issues and measured by top-line results, that seems a little naive. Apart from school fees, the education grant and top-ups (pupil premium being to the fore), there are many other vested interests in education, an army of people and providers who have invested time and capital in its delivery, who will also want to be consulted. And all the time, change is hampered by the intransigence of governments, obsessed with international data and reputation and the conservatism that defines our education system. We need wide-ranging discussion not just about how we implement change, but what that change will be. And there will many, passionate and dispassionate, with a lot to say. It should not be a debate to be limited to insiders. John Stuart Mill again,

'Education is one of the subjects which most essentially require to be considered by various minds, and from a variety of points of view. For, of all many-sided subjects, it is the one which has the greatest number of sides.'

And despite the views of many teachers, outside is also a side . . . .

What shape this new education would take is a subject for conjecture. Will technology, remote learning or a less prescribed curriculum drive educational change? Or new, pragmatic forces from universities and employers, demanding changes to

subject domains or a greater a focus on new skills necessary for employment and further education win out? Or something else altogether, a synthesis of past and present knowledge and experience to help inform a future model? But no more tinkering, trying to squeeze something else into a bloated curriculum. It is more than a debate waiting to happen; it is a revolution that is required.

We need to find the answer to the question, *'what is the best education we can give our children to help them live in the world of the future*' and then keep asking it, for the answer will be ever-changing. We need to encourage the growth of thought, of imagination, of creativity (James Dyson recently wrote,

"*It makes me sad and concerned that schools are failing to teach creativity* . . . when . . . . *life today demands it more and more*).

We need to take note of what the world of work requires by way of more critical thinking, tech savviness, better listening and communication skills, the ability to write clearly and coherently, adaptability and teamwork - but not be bound by it. For education is about more than securing a job, important though that is. And we need to ensure children see it as relevant and embrace it with passion and a sense of belief. We need more ambition.

Perhaps the place to start our new curriculum lies with John Stuart Mill:

'Wherever we end up education makes a man a more intelligent shoemaker, if that be his occupation, but not by teaching him how to make shoes; it does so by the mental exercise it gives, and the habits it impresses.'

Let's go.

4. **How can we place Personal and Social Education at the Heart of our Curriculum?** ***(published as 'Universities won't need lessons in woke with a better school curriculum' on ISMplus website on October 11, 2021)***

The recent headline that St Andrew's University, third oldest university after Oxford and Cambridge (and recently named the top UK University in the Good University Guide), had introduced compulsory modules on sustainability, diversity, consent and good academic practice was met by a good deal of public consternation and suspicion. At the heart of the concerns voiced in the media was the statement that, in

order to matriculate, students had to agree with several statements, one of which involved accepting 'personal guilt.'

St Andrew's may be in the vanguard, but are not alone in treading this path, despite the reaction from academics, students and politicians who described the report variously as '*grim policing of thought and behaviour'* and *'the antithesis of what university should be.'* The statement that "*Acknowledging your personal guilt is a useful start point in overcoming unconscious bias'* in particular, was seen as contrary to free speech and, according to one academic, nothing less than a form of indoctrination.

There is little doubt that the way the feature was presented didn't read well. The word 'mandatory' and phrase 'accept personal guilt' rang alarm bells that we were, indeed, seeing yet another manifestation of the blame culture, another Orwellian strike against the very bastions of intellectual thought and freedom, our universities. In their defence, the University suggested that the students had requested the modules and had in place for several years now, and that they were developed to align with St Andrews' strategic priorities (diversity, inclusion, social responsibility, good academic practice, and zero tolerance for GBV) and help develop skills and awareness valuable to life at university, and beyond. The media having made the snatch and grab headline, then largely ignored the arguments for the defence; it was ever thus. Yet in provoking a reaction, it did raise an important issue, albeit inadvertently, especially as many businesses and workplaces now require their employees to be similarly compliant about a whole raft of policies to do with respecting others.

If, indeed, these requirements are so important, as St Andrew's clearly thinks they are, it raises the question: why does a university see the need to make these mandatory at tertiary level and not earlier? Schools, of course, will say, we do all this, wheeling out their PSHEE (Personal Social, Health and Economics Education) curriculum, their School Values, the RSE programme (Relationships and Sex Education), as evidence. They are right to do so; most schools work hard at this aspect of education within the confines of their curriculum and resources. But most schools will also concede that in recent years, PSHEE has become a catch-all for the new foci in education as well as the development of character and citizenship, health and well-being and all things pastoral. A few schools do work hard to embed or teach key aspects of PSHEE within their core curriculum, but they are in the minority. Instead, most are busy juggling their timetables for space to accommodate it while wrestling

with such questions as who should teach it and how it should be measured. After all, like the PREVENT programme, intended to out root out radicalisation in our schools, and what passes as character education, the process of teaching philosophical and moral issues is not something anyone is equipped to do. Teaching pupils, for instance, *'to distinguish right from wrong,'* requires a clear vision to avoid it either being laced with bias or being a mere fudge: where for instance, where does membership of extinction rebellion sit? Or tax avoidance? Even driving a diesel car? Who knows? In the same way, teachers are expected to '*encourage*' pupils to show initiative and '*understanding'* of how they can contribute positively to their local communities and society when so much of their education is about self, personal attainment and getting the best grades and ultimately, by <u>what they do</u>, their jobs and achievements, their possessions and status, rather than by <u>who they are</u>, the families they belong to, their personal values and the role the play in their communities.

In this, schools and universities are not that dissimilar. And even where core values are spoken about in assemblies, championed in reward systems and aired in other classes than PSHEE, it is never enough because it sits outside the high-accountability system we have. Something more fundamental is needed than a clip-on lesson or two taught in isolation to change the path of travel.

That is the challenge: How do we change the messaging that should underpin our learning, and not just leave it sitting slightly apart in the PSHEE and HSE curriculum? For as we talk up mission statements, and haggle over the values and ethics that sit at the heart of our institutions, the reality is, both in schools or in public life (as enshrined in the Nolan Principles), the words, however well-meaning, are often little more than mere compliance, a tick in a box.

We need to re-set our curriculum. That means starting at age four and going down that other fork in the road with the promise of a different destination. This can mean one of two things in the short term. Either we reshape every subject to reflect the values and attitudes we already profess to champion in education in order to ensure everything we teach is properly grounded in our values; or we abandon our attachment to traditional subjects and move towards a new way of teaching and learning, one based more on skills, on inter-related knowledge, collaboration teams and the relevance and applicability of what we teach.

In practical terms, this may start by something as simple as introducing social studies with its ability to draw together strands of history, geography, anthropology, economics, philosophy – into our junior schools. The flexibility it would give teachers to approach subjects from a multi-disciplinary approach would be considerable, as would be breadth of information provided to children. In secondary schools, a move away from GCSEs, much talked about, would allow more opportunity for subjects to be able to dig deeper to reflect the pertinent values, behaviours and attitudes taught in PSHEE. Geography, for instance, might require looking at the subject through the prism of the economic doughnut, the socio-economic impact of climate change or the scarcity of resources such as water and, specifically, at our responsibilities in each instance. In the Sciences, an understanding of ethics and social responsibility, as well as an awareness of sustainability, may form the bedrock for what follows.

At A Levels, we are already hampered by the reduction of the curriculum to, usually, just three core subjects, often knowledge rich to the point of gagging, insular and jealously guarded and with little potential for overlap. The International Baccalaureate is preferable in respect of the breadth it offers, but still tied to subject boundaries that we have stayed hemmed within for decades. We need to do better.

Perhaps it's time to revisit the spirit of the Rede Lecture of 1959, on 'The Two Cultures', where CP Snow talked of the need to narrow the gulf between the sciences and the humanities to create a broader-based curriculum - one founded on an altogether premise We can identify those subjects which may need to remain essentially as they are (which would most probably include Mathematics, English, foreign languages), but look at different ways of teaching others so that they are dynamic, more relevant, more aligned to what universities and employers want, with evidence of greater creativity and critical thinking and based on values that are grounded in the community, in environmental and societal considerations rather than in wealth aggregation and material definitions of what success looks like. To do this, we need to look at what we teach in PSHEE and character education, the values and mission statements we give voice to, and make them our bedrock. For too long schools have been marking children by the wrong scorecard, one determined by the shape and priorities of the curriculum. St Andrew's response might seem a little draconian, but they are right to call out their students on the need to be educated in

the round and to assert that values and attitudes matter. Perhaps it is time for some reinvention in our schools.

3. The Imperial Mind (i)

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A draft chapter of a book I am currently researching and writing on 'The British Empire in the Pacific, 1870 - 1920' looking at how contemporary attitudes and policies towards Pacific Islanders were shaped by a new and, at times, insidious form of racism that grew in legitimacy and usage during the late 19th century. While in many respects the inhabitants of the islands and island groups that fell under British control were more fortunate than indigenous peoples in other parts of the Empire, in order to understand the decisions of the Colonial Office and the actions of traders, settlers, sailors and missionaries, it is useful to understand the context and environment in which such decisions were taken. Spoiler: the Colonial Office was better than most . . . .

N.B. It <u>is</u> a draft chapter so any comments and suggestions would be welcome.

To understand the forces at play in the Pacific by the late 19th century is to understand what we might conveniently label the 'imperial mind'. This process of identification with the views and opinions of governments and prominent leaders and agents of change is not a means to excuse, justify, shame or celebrate contemporary behaviours, prejudices and actions, is the wont today, but to help understand them. In order to do this (and to avoid going back as far as the Athenian City State), a convenient starting place especially in tracing the British variant would appear to be the mid 18th century with its combination of the American and French revolutions, the propagation of the ideas of the enlightenment and writings of Rousseau and Diderot, Herder and Paine amongst others; and the development of folk theory and new national mythologies. It is a period that coincided with the age of exploration and discovery in the Pacific, when the largest corporate trader in British history, the East India company held sway over all of India, the burgeoning of the industrial age and the spread railways and urbanisation. Moving on from the temporal to the spiritual, (although in the Pacific they were inextricably linked), it was a time the formation of new missionary societies, notably those of the Catholic and Anglican churches spurred into social action by John Wesley and his Wesleyan Society, whose aim was not only to convert, but to civilize, primarily by hastening the process of assimilation.

It was a time of noble sentiment and romantic notions leading at home to the Catholic emancipation, to the Poor Laws and penal reform, but also of the workhouses, to profit-making enterprises based on selling the new world and its resources, on imperial ambition, and of racial and cultural assumptions based on a Eurocentric world view that brooked no other. It was also a time of humanitarian zeal, when the movement to abolish slavery was gaining momentum and the British government was beginning to question the impact western civilization, often in the guise of their own merchants and agents, was having upon indigenous peoples. It was a period of flux that created those huge -isms so favoured by schools keen for such labels to make sense of the past, including the sequential phases of romanticism, nationalism and imperialism.

In England the seeds of the anti-slavery were already stirring. There were many who saw slavery as abhorrent and challenged the wealthy and influential landowners and slave traders. Possibly the most significant of these was Granville Sharp, who is remembered today for his pioneering work as a civil campaigner on behalf of the enslaved. His most famous case was that of the slave, James Somerset, who was brought to Britain by his 'owner' Charles Stewart. Seeing the opportunity to remain in England as a free man under British law, he was determined not to be sent back to the Colonies. The case was held before the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Mansfield, who was deeply uncomfortable about making a judgement that might affect thousands of slaves in England while also upsetting the slave owners in the American colonies at this precarious moment in American history, yet ended up being manoeuvred into doing just that. In his crusade, Sharp was supported by such counsels as William Davy, Francis Hargrave, Thomas Clarkson and John Glyn as well as numerous church goers, Quakers, Wesleyans and Anglicans, who assisted by baptising slaves, in the mistaken belief that these would mean they were no longer heathens and therefore safe. Along with others who saw slavery as abhorrent, they challenged the law, citing the ruling made in 1569 that *'England was too pure an Air for Slaves to breathe in'* and that that applied to all who lived there. (ii) It was a great moral surge that led to the abolition of the British Slave Trade in 1807 and the banning of British citizens from being involved in the Slave Trade in 1838 when 800,000 slaves were purchased from slaveowners by the Government and released from bondage. The crusade against slavery gathered momentum after the formation of the Abolitionist movement in 1787 that managed over the twenty years to galvanise the nation with meetings, protests and petitions (one of over 400,000 signatures was presented to parliament in

1806). It is worth recalling this moral outrage that swept the country against enslavement a century later when racism had become embedded and institutionalised, encouraged by nationalism with the idea of a distinct national identity, fuelled by Darwinism and the maxim of the survival of the fittest and by the missionaries who contrasted Christians with the heathen without.

The idea of the noble savage, that was resurrected by Rousseau in the 1770s, of a people untouched by sin who lived a truly noble life was one that captured the European imagination. Rosseau's writings were loosely based on the accounts of travellers who were experiencing new cultures through contact with peoples whose beliefs, languages, and religion (as well as attitudes to land and resources) were vastly different to theirs

Early responses were, indeed, an endorsement of Rousseau.

On his early voyage around Australia, Captain James Cook described the Aborigines of Australia:

'*They live in a Tranquillity which is not disturb'd by the Inequality of Condition: The Earth and sea of their own accord furnishes them with all things necessary for life, they covet not Magnificent Houses, Household-stuff, they live in a warm and fine Climate and enjoy a very wholesome Air, so that they have very little need of Clothing. . . ,*'

and were, in Cook's estimation,

"*far more happier than we Europeans". (iii)*

Meeting other islanders, similar words and phrases kept appearing: Of the Tahitians, he wrote,

' . . . their features in general comely and pleasing, and their eyes animated and expressive. They are courteous and affable in their deportment, easy and graceful in their persons, and brave, candid and unreserved in their dispositions.' (iv)

The inhabitants of New Ireland were a

'*gentle, inoffensive people, and fond of beads and trinkets . . . .*' (v)

while the inhabitants of New Holland, were described as

'*a clean-limbed, active people, with chocolate complexions and tolerable good features.' (vi)*

Beneath these largely complimentary (although irritatingly patronising) observations were others, more critical and damning, highlighting the savagery of some of the island populations and their ignorance of science and technology and social mores, but on the whole, the idea of the noble savage was writ large in Cook's journals. Omai was a young man taken back from the Society Islands to England by Captain Cook and, in 1776, he was painted in classical garb by Joshua Reynolds, that perpetuated the image and added to the mythology.

In the same year, at an exhibition at the Royal Academy, the descriptions of Cook were collaborated by the paintings of William Hodge, an artist who accompanied Cook on one of his voyages. His depictions of South Sea islands, particularly Tahiti, with its tall palm trees, luxuriant foliage, with their lagoons and waterfalls, populated by semi-naked local women often depicted in classical poses enchanted the London public and added to the allure and the mystique of Oceania. This mythologizing of the South Pacific, itself a significant part of the Romantic movement, was to continue well into the 19th century and for many of the smaller and more remote islands, beyond that.

Happier or not, the pressure for change to the islanders way of life was going in the other direction. Increasingly contact threatened or broke down local chiefly hierarchies, laws and traditions, provoking a number hostile responses to which the counterpunch was invariably ever more brutal. Although the myth of an idyllic lifestyle and a semi-paradise lingered, particularly in western culture throughout the 19th century, as reflected again in the controversial works of Paul Gauguin, the truth was that the noble savage could only be tolerated as an ideal, never as an impediment to the western idea of progress. It was not long before the concept of the ignoble savage, needing to be saved, replaced that of the noble savage and, before the end of the century, both were overtaken by the notion of 'the dying savage' as island populations were at their nadir.

As the romantic period unfolded, Western Europe looked once again to glorify the past and to draw from its own history and civilization, feats of valour and endurance. In Western art, the French public celebrated the image of Gericault's *The Raft of the*

Medusa' with its heroic, yet doomed crew and Delacroix's *'Liberty storming the Barricades'* and the triumph of the people over their tyrannical masters. In England, *'The Death of General Wolfe'* by the American artist Benjamin West and John Singleton Copley's '*The Death of Major Pierson'* served the very same iconic purpose, of promoting the heroic and glorifying the state. In literature, also, writers celebrated the past, through history and mythology, lore and legend, including such diverse writers as Sir Walter Scott and the Brothers Grimm. The Grand tour which had strengthened the attachment many Europeans had to their own past, with classical Italy and Greece being amongst the favourite destinations of the Romantic poets, made nations more acutely aware of their own history and mythology. People were encouraged to look more closely at their own cultural cache, their cultural heritage and what made them distinctive as a race of people.

It was to be the creation of the nation-state that fuelled the second, and most powerful movement of the 19th century, nationalism and led to the shift from a distinct national group, that is a group of people who identified with a common history, language, culture and religion, into a state (a separate single political unity) with the result being the creation of the nation-state. The most obvious examples of this process are Belgium in 1830, Italy in 1861 and Germany ten years later, but it was a roadmap that was followed invariably as national movements transformed the political institutions around them to create the nation-state. (vii) It was ironic that the same calls for self-determination and self-governance when exercised by subject peoples of the empire was to meet with such resistance.

The links between romanticism and nationalism are intertwined, yet have a profound impact on what follows. At the heart of nationalism is the emphasis on identity, on what makes a people and a country distinctive form others. It is an intellectual, if not an artificial construct emphasising a common past, language, religion, culture (for instance, the music of Wagner and the brothers Grimm were important in feeding into German identity and belonging). Yet with the sense of belonging and national pride, nationalism was also responsible for producing animosity between peoples and rivalry amongst nations, especially when the lines on the map cut across linguistic and racial groups. With its focus on the uniqueness of the state it is no surprise that rivalry, persecution, pogroms, even war have all been waged in order to preserve and strengthen it, a process that in Western Europe by the mid-nineteenth century, meant accumulating an empire.

The step from nationalism and the loyalty and adherence to the state that it created, to imperialism, the idea extending that rule to include the subjugation other lands and peoples, was a relatively small one, especially with power rivalries, and increasingly as a by-product of industrialization and the demands it made on countries to find new sources of raw materials., Even the conversion of the Pacific islanders to Christianity took on the appearance of a national competition for saving souls, as the various Christian missionary societies saw it as their role to convert and civilize indigenous peoples, making their own judgements of religion and worship through their own prescribed spiritual prisms, seizing the opportunity to piggyback on colonists and settlers albeit with a quite different, but equally harmful agenda of evangelical humanism.

The power of nationalism had, at its heart, its exclusivity. In order to set apart and define the national group, it was set against those excluded who were seen as not belonging and almost always, inferior. The creation of a nation-state invariably adopted or manufactured its own national mythology, whether by glorifying its common history or cultural achievements or by racial comparisons. This belief in the primacy of the nation-state, that had its nadir in Nazi Germany, has started to emerge again in the 21st century in such movements as 'Make America Great again' and in right-wing nationalist movements that are emerging throughout the western world.

Nationalism thrives on promoting competition amongst neighbours. Rivalry and tensions, fuelled by overt patriotism, are just part of the cocktail. When mixed with the need for labour, land and raw supplies especially from the late eighteenth onwards, the link between nationalism and imperialism, however contradictory, is complete.

In order to deny the previous existence of communities and nations in the areas of the new world that were settled and exploited, imperialism worked by a new mantra, that of doing good, of measuring new countries and territories by a western rule. The introduction of western European ideas, beliefs, traditions, and technology, intended to lead to either assimilation and betterment if you followed the word of the church or subjugation to the needs and requirements of foreign powers if you listened to traders and settlers. All that was needed was a rationale and a mechanism. The idea that, in order to convert people, it was first necessary to civilize and westernize them was one the missionaries were only too keen to advocate. (viii) The mechanism,

however, had more to do with what was in the economic and political interests of Britain and the settler governments.

By the late 1840s, however, with the heady days of abolition passed, Britain was coming to terms with some of the realities of abolition. While the West Africa Squadron patrolled the coast of Africa and intercepting slave ships when they could, there was a palpable shift in public opinion in England, exacerbated by the economic pressures that were being felt in the cotton industry in the Midlands and in the large slave port, and most notably Liverpool. As the American Civil War loomed and cotton supplies dwindled, support for the Confederate defence of slavery grew.

In 1849, the essayist Thomas Carlyle wrote an essay (anonymously at first) entitled "Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question' that attacked the abolitionists head-on while attacking the enslaved and free blacks in words that were shocking. He wrote,

'my obscure black friends you are not "slaves" now nor do I wish, if it can be avoided, to see you slaves again; but decidedly you will have to be servants to those who are born wiser than you, that are born lords of you - servants to the whites, if they are (as what mortal can doubt they are?) born wiser than you.' (ix)

Anti-abolitionist feeling grew as the economic consequences of abolition became more evident, especially in the cotton mills of Lancashire and led to further unlikely contributions to the debate, once such from Anthony Trollope who wrote,

'The negro's idea of emancipation was and is not emancipation from slavery but from work. To lie in the sun and eat breadfruit and yams is his idea of being free.' (x)

Meanwhile, back in England in 1859, a newly published book was causing a considerable stir. 'The Origin of the Species' by Charles Darwin with its hashtag taken from Herbert Spencer, 'survival of the fittest' not only posed a threat to the Church with its radical ideas about evolution, but provided another justification for imperialists to latch on to and to include in their rhetoric. Herbert Spencer was quick to adapt the theory to society, thereby providing imperialism with a political and racial justification in the form of Social Darwinism for competition for life and land.

It was soon incorporated into the growing trend to categorize people by racial type. In 1863 mid-Victorian racial stereo-typing gained a further disciple with the founding of

the Anthropological Society of London with its founding members including the explorer Sir Richard Burton and his admirer and devotee, the poet Algernon Swinburne. The Society opposed the anti-slavery movement and belittled the abolitionists and do-gooders, notably the various missionary societies. Many of their number were also followers of the cult of phrenology, the pseudo-science that believed that the measurement of a person's skull could determine their intellectual capabilities. (xi) As a result, by the second half of the century, racism in Britain was becoming more accepted and institutionalized, whether intentionally or not, either in its mild form of presuming to care for a weaker people or in its denunciation of the idea of equality using pseudo-science and the interpretations of social Darwinism.

This was the basis for the growth of paternalism, the idea of one country assuming the responsibility to look after (albeit to control) the interests of another, based on racial lines. Yet within the Empire, there were hardening attitudes, possibly exacerbated by the experiences of the First Indian War of Independence (still known as the Indian Mutiny in many textbooks) in 1857. As the abolitionist anti-slavery of the first decades faded, there was a hardening of racial attitudes. In 1865, an uprising occurred in Morant Bay, Jamaica to which the Governor, Edward Eyre one time magistrate and protector of Aborigines in Australia and later Lieutenant Governor of New Zealand, responded by ordering reprisals that resulted in the killings and / or executions of over a thousand Jamaicans and the burning of a similar number of homes. At first it was celebrated as a victory in Britain (an article in The Times commented that it demonstrated that it was '*impossible to eradicate the original savageness of African blood')* before evidence came out of the ruthless and unwarranted brutality that eventually led to a government inquiry. (xii) And yet, despite the judgement of his actions being *'barbarous, excessive, wanton and cruel'* leading to a charge of murder, and the ignominy of his dismissal and recall to England, on his return he was feted, not only by the anti-abolitionists, but by a committee set up to defend Eyre and his actions, that included several leading literary figures of the day. The tide had well and truly turned. (xiii)

Britain's move towards paternalism that was to have wide-spread consequences throughout the empire, was underpinned by racial stereotyping and a growing self-belief in the superiority of the British mission. As Churchill observed,

"I have seen enough in peace and war of the frontiers of our Empire to know that the British dominion all over the world could not endure for a year, perhaps not for a month, if it was founded upon a material basis. The strength and splendour of our authority is derived not from physical forces, but from moral ascendancy, liberty, justice, English tolerance, and English honesty." (xiv)

Toye notes that Churchill was both a son of empire, by schooling and breeding and a reflection of the prevalent views of the time, that

". . . although he was undoubtedly sincere in his intention that all races should be treated with justice, that notion was perfectly consistent in his mind with the concept of white supremacy. For him, there was a duty incumbent on the superior British race to safeguard and improve lesser ones. That, indeed, was part of the justification for imperial rule." (xv)

While Churchill never went quite so far as Cecil Rhodes whose belief was that being born English was to win first prize in the lottery of life, his views were those that commonly prevailed by the turn of the twentieth century which were based around a widely held belief in racial type. The enemy were described as savages or as devils, especially when the unexpected happened and the other side prevailed against the might of empire (as happened with the defeat by the Zulu forces at the Battle of Isandlwana in 1879). After the pomp and ceremony of Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887 and her diamond Jubilee in 1897, with the Empire was near its zenith after the carve up of Africa. Kipling' wrote the poem *"The White Man's Burden*" to emphasis the moral obligations (in this instance, that of the United States in the Philippines), to advance the cause of non-white peoples by civilizing and converting to them Christianity. As the colonization of Asia, Africa and the Pacific rim gathered pace in the 19th century, other countries sought to justify the right to take land from less developed peoples whose land or way of live became an obstruction to settlement and colonization. In the United States, God was invoked on the side of settlers through the idea of Manifest Destiny, a phrase first used in 1845 to justify the right of settlers to move west, (popularly by the Oregon trail) onto any Indian land and communities in their way, thereby expanding the dominion and spreading 'democracy' and 'capitalism' across the entire North American continent, a process that was pre-ordained and destined by God.

This acceptance of colonial imperialism as a moral burden by the white race, and the imposition of Christianity at the expense of traditional religions is one that we can see time and again throughout the Pacific during this period.

This assumed duty of the white peoples to manage the affairs of the less developed non-white peoples was one that was very acceptable to the population at large who were seldom aware of what it actually meant for the colonised peoples – or indeed even what 'development' meant. Even into this century, the view persisted that imperialism worked better than the alternative of self-rule and even remains prevalent today amongst some politicians and historians. In 2010, Boris Johnson wrote of Africa that,

"The problem is not that we were once in charge, but that we are not in charge any more" (xvi)

going on to suggest that

"The best fate for Africa would be if the old colonial powers, or their citizens, scrambled once again in her direction". (xvii)

It was a short step to another dogma seized upon by imperialists, that of eugenics. Coined by a half-cousin of Darwin, Sir Francis Galton, this new "science" went way beyond providing a justification for the survival of the fittest by advocating an active policy of ridding society of its "undesirables. While eugenics didn't garner much traction in the Great Britain (unlike in the United States where it was used against Black Americans and other minorities), its influence still lingered. In 1910, Churchill was newly promoted to the Home Office when he wrote,

'I am convinced that the multiplication of the Feeble-Minded, which is proceeding now at an artificial rate, unchecked by any of the old restraints of nature, and actually fostered by civilised conditions, is a very terrible danger to the race.' (xviii)

All of these forces: the concepts of romanticism, nationalism, imperialism; social Darwinism and eugenics; conversion and civilization; paternalism, westernization and assimilation – contributed to the state of the imperial mind in the late 19th century. The official view of government and of the army ranged from altruistic on one hand to economic self, or national, interest on the other. In looking at the 'what' however, we also need to consider the 'how': what were the vehicles that promulgated these

ideas and turned them into a creed for the Empire builders? What happened to the moral crusade and belief in the liberty of all races and peoples that held sway in the late 18th century and early 19thcentury? Why did Britain appear to countenance more outright racist opinions and action in 1900 than at start of the preceding century? How was a consensus of ideas constructed that explained the rationale and basis for imperial policy?

In the late 18th century and early 19th century, concurrent with the period of nationalism and the expansion of the empire into the Pacific rim, Britain saw what Colley describes as '

the emergence of a genuinely British ruling class.' (xix)

that was nurtured and consolidated by

'*a uniform patrician education'* (xx)

that stressed patriotism and noble deeds, taught through such vehicles as Classics that highlighted heroic deeds and values of the past

But it was, she went on to argue, a

'. . . patrician patriotism <u>in the British present</u> that the public schools and universities sought to inculcate' p. 168. (xxi)

This job of inculcation was led by a number of public schools as well as the universities of Oxford and Cambridge and was intended to educate a conveyor belt of young men ready to play a leading role in the Colonial Service and armed forces, according to values commensurate with preserving and extending the Empire.

This strain of fidelity with its cult of heroism and service to country and empire sitting at the heart of the leading public schools meant that men from landed backgrounds became significantly more prominent in the Army and Royal Navy, in Parliament and in the Colonial Office during the eighteenth century.

By 1800, 70% of all English peers received their education at just four public schools – Eton, Westminster, Winchester and Harrow - while 60% of English peers spent

some time at university; it is easy, therefore, to see how a coherent message of service and of empire was channelled through the institutions.

That this was happening at a time when the empire was expanding was no coincidence. Precipitated by the loss of the American colonies and feeding on the acquisition of new colonies and territories, for exploitation, for settlement and for 'civilizing', a common view was being forged, both in the traditional public school and through a new breed of schools, established in the shadow of Waterloo, with links to the army (Wellington College) or the East India Company (Haileybury). Their founding articles were full of the rhetoric of patriotism and public service, embedded through a narrow traditional curriculum and abetted by such innovations as cadets and ball games, creating what was labelled '*public school form*,' giving rise to alumni who were later to be credited with running the British Empire.

In a letter from India in 1911, Lady Wilson described the process.

'*What impresses me most perhaps, in our talks about everyday life, is the tyranny of public School 'form'. It is not more characteristic of soldiers than of civilians or any typical Englishman. "The trail of The serpent is over them all" and they go through the short spells of life with the tall hats as the armorial shield of good form held carefully over here hearts*. (xxii)

. . . before going on to wonder,

' *. . . if it is not just this traditional 'form' and its code, the only certainty that a boy carries away with him from his years at a public school, which will land him successfully at the North Pole or help him to rule the inhabitants of the equator.'*

(xxiii)

This view of the heroic that was instilled into the students was one of bravado and a sense of adventure, themes running through speech days, school magazines and essays and evident from the destinations of their alumni. The bravado and confidence they learnt was never forgotten, as was well-illustrated by Winston Churchill's diary entry on the north-west frontier.

'I forgot everything else at this moment except the desire to kill this man. I wore my long cavalry sword well sharpened. After all, I had won the public schools fencing medal. I resolved on personal combat . The savage saw me coming. . . .' (xxiv)

They contributed, inadvertently perhaps, to the widening social divisions that we see today. For there was another victim of empire we often forget and that was the British working class many of whose lives were subject to the same economic and political hardships and consequences of economic ambition that affected many in the colonies – and still do.

One other notable expression of empire was the Boy Scout movement, founded in 1910 by Robert (later Lord) Baden-Powell. After a military career serving in India and South Africa, he had founded the Boy Scout movement in Dorset to engage the young in a programme of outdoor education, to learn, amongst other survival skills, woodcraft and hiking while promoting a love of country and patriotic duty commensurate with that expected by the Empire. Before long however, the world was to be immersed in World War One, a conflagration that ended with the creation of new mandates and protectorates over former German territories, a reconfiguring of the Middle East and the growing agitation for self-determination in India . While little changed between the wars, by 1945 the idea of empire was on its last legs. The Second World War saw the defeat of the extreme views represented by Nazism (including that of eugenics) and the creation of the United Nations in 1945, who were to champion the right of self-determination. For the British Empire, ruled by a bankrupt and war-weary Britain, it was to signal the beginning of the end. The independence of India and Pakistan in 1947, and the beginnings of the decolonisation of Africa in 1957 with Ghana's independence, blew ever harder after Prime Minister Harold Macmillan's '*Wind of Change'* speech in February 1960. This was especially so in the Pacific territories whose fortunes were to change dramatically over the following two decades.

When we turn our attention to the 19th century and to the Pacific Islands that were under the flag of Great Britain, notably Tonga, Fiji and Samoa, it is, therefore, helpful to keep in mind the context under which contact and settlement were conducted, and to start by identifying the official attitudes at the time. When the Treaty of Waitangi was signed in 1840, for instance, bringing New Zealand / Aotearoa under the British

crown, there was little official appetite for expanding the empire back in England. After all, as James Belich noted in his authoritative history of New Zealanders,

'Britain had the lion's share of world shipping and industrial trade goods; they got most of the profits from trade with far-flung regions anyway. As long as trade could flow freely with far-flung regions, why go to the bother of governing them? Whalers got their whales, pork, sex and potatoes, and merchants got their flax and timber in New Zealand, empire or not …. It was reinforced by humanitarian police that empire despite the best intentions, was often a bad thing for indigenous peoples, and by the colonial offices most consistent principle: parsimony, an extreme reluctance to incur new costs." (xxv)

By 1870, however, this view had changed due to a renewed demand for trade, the push and pull factors of migration and settlement, often driven by the agents of contact who, with financial backing in England, who became effectively agents of empire in the Pacific by selling their vision of empire back home; the settlers themselves; and by the Methodist and Anglican missionary societies who were responding to the increasing activity of the Catholic Missionary Society in the Pacific.

Even so the impact of empire moved slowly in the Pacific, due to the paucity of raw materials to be exploited and to the vast distances and small, isolated communities that, once claimed, had to be administered. (xxvi) Hence, as attitudes to empire changed, British attitudes and ambitions as reflected through policies of the British government often dulled the impact of the less salubrious aspects visible in India and South Africa at the time, (less of Rhodes Anglo-centrism and racism and more of Kipling's emphasis on paternalism and responsibility) due in part to scale, the paucity of valuable resources and the benign, even romanticised attitude the British displayed towards the Islands. Even so, this gently-gently approach was to prove as deleterious to the Pacific people, the death toll of islanders in 19thcentury Pacific being overwhelmingly the result of disease. (xxvii) The truth was that any contact was harmful, regardless of the motivation. When the intention was couched in paternalistic terms, in Christian terms by stripping away traditional cultural and spiritual belief systems, or in terms of economic possibilities, none profited the islanders.

The popular presumption by the 1880s that indigenous peoples were likely to die out was also behind a more conciliatory approach to the island communities. After all, the

South Sea isles were places of Romance, a view promoted as such early explorers and later visitors including Robert Louis Stevenson and Paul Gauguin. Yet the reality was these idealised societies were already under the sway of western civilization with its trappings of diseases, weapons and alcohol that were decimating local communities. In New Zealand, as Maori numbers plummeted, primarily from warfare and disease, the belief was that Maori Race was doomed and that those who did not die would be assimilated, a view given voice by the physician and politician Dr Isaac Featherston in 1856 when he said it was the duty of Europeans to

'smooth down . . . (the) dying pillow of the Maori race.' (xxviii)

In 1901 Mark Twain followed up the words of Kipling with an attack on this soft empire, noting in his essay, 'The People Who sit in Darkness' that

'The 'Blessings-of-Civilization' Trust, wisely and cautiously administered, is a Daisy. There is more money in it, more territory, more sovereignty and other kinds of emolument, than there is in any other game that is played,' while at the same time warning that 'the people that Sit in Darkness' were starting to see the light.' (xxix)

Other writers also questioned the Christian and civilizing approach to empire, attacking imperialists and missionaries alike, whose stated goal of "*helping the savages,"* was no more than a justification for the rapaciousness of European society. Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness' highlighted the greed and spiritual darkness that lay at the heart of Western society and the extent of its destructive force, made worse when vested in the hands of missionaries. (xxx)

Yet while some novelists flailed the vested interests of the Empire in their books, and increasingly those of the settlers, after 1870 and particular to the Pacific, the British Government was more often minded to help protect the indigenous people, especially the vulnerable and non-threatening, from the interests of settlers – no easy task when the latter were determined to acquire land and as 'johnnies on the spot' were able to influence and manipulate laws and information and exert some considerable measure of control over the administrators.

But there were larger forces at play in the second half of the 19th century than just those of the new settlers. Following the reunification of Germany, the Congo Conference that was held in Berlin in 1884 paved the way for the scramble for Africa

as the major European powers engaged in an unprecedented land grab. This was fuelled not so much by the acquisition of wealth and resources, (some of the territories were considerable liabilities, financially and administratively), but as a means of extending power and influence in competition, resulting in an increase in formal European control over African territories from ten percent in 1870 to almost ninety percent by 1914. (xxxi)

While Africa was the major battle ground for the playing out of imperialism ambition, the Pacific was its much smaller cousin, the micro to Africa's macro. Yet all the major powers were keen to stamp their mark here as well. In the north, Russia, Japan and the United States extended their spheres of influence (to Hawaii, Aleutian Islands, Taiwan and Sakhalin) while to the south the European powers made their presence increasingly felt after 1870: Germany (in New Guinea, The Solomon Islands, Samoa, the Bismark Archipelago, the Marshall Island and the Marianas); the Dutch in Indonesia; The French in Tahiti and New Caledonia; the Spanish in the Philippines; the Portuguese in East Timor; and the British in Tonga, Fiji, Cook Islands, New Hebrides, Kiribati Tuvalu and Vanuatu. War changed the flags of many territories in 1898, in 1919 and in 1945 as territories were bounced between ruling powers (none more so that the German territories in Micronesia that were passed over to Japan in 1919 and then the United States in 1945), but for the British, there was to be little change. Instead, they set about discharging their responsibilities of stewardship in the Pacific, first through local contacts and agents and thereafter through the British Western Pacific Territories act of 1876, legislation that was to endure for the following ninety-nine years.

So when we come to answer the question, what were the forces at work in the period 1870 until 1920 that informed imperial policy in the Pacific, the answer is many layered. The obvious pressures were those generated by power struggles far away in Europe, between countries intent on growing their empires and on missionaries, attempting to do the same for their churches. In the Pacific itself, there are agents of change and settlers, promoting trade and settlement, exerting pressure on the British Government although increasingly making their own decisions. There are the intellectual forces that are swirling around, shaping attitudes and actions, from eugenics and racism to paternalism and humanitarian ideals, however misguided or inappropriate. And then there is the British Foreign Office, underfunded and largely toothless, trying to protect the interests of indigenous peoples from those driven to

act through self-interest. It was a cocktail that rumbled throughout this period and beyond, shaping the politics of the Pacific, then and now.

Footnotes:

(i) The empires of the future would be the empires of the mind' declared Churchill in 1943, envisaging universal empires living in peaceful harmony. Robert Gildea exposes instead the brutal realities of decolonisation and neo-colonialism which have shaped the postwar world in his book, 'Empires of the Mind: The Colonial Past and the Politics of the Present.'

ii For an excellent summary of the judicial proceedings against slavery, read Chapter 4 of Black and British: A Forgotten History by David Olusoga

ii Cook's Journals, August 1770, p. 323 (he added by way of a footnote, *The native Australians may be happy in their condition, but they are without doubt among the lowest of mankind. Confirmed cannibals, they lose no opportunity of gratifying their love of human flesh. Mothers will kill and eat their own children, and the women again are often mercilessly illtreated by their lords and masters. There are no chiefs, and the land is divided into sections, occupied by families, who consider everything in their district as their own. Internecine war exists between the different tribes, which are very small. Their treachery, which is unsurpassed, is simply an outcome of their savage ideas, and in their eyes is a form of independence which resents any intrusion on THEIR land, THEIR wild animals, and THEIR rights generally.*

iii Martyn, William Frederick p.580

iv Ibid p. 576

v Ibid p. 575

vi In Papua New Guinea in 1974 we can see the process in reverse where an independent state was created first before a sense of identity had been established, a process that happened through education, through promoting a common language, history, and symbols by using schools and the army.

vii The concept of bringing of western European ideas, beliefs, traditions, and technology to other cultures

viii Speech to the Conservative Club, November 1903, cited in Toye, p.93

ix Olosuga, p.371

x Ibid p. 373

xi ibid p. 374

xii The Times 13 November, 1865 Olusoga p. 388

xiii ibid p. 394

xiv Richard Toye, Churchill's Empire: The World that Made Him and the World He Made, Macmillan 2011 p. 121

xv Ibid

xvi Boris Johnson *'Africa is a mess, but we can't blame Colonialism'* in The Spectator, 2 February 2002 (Boris Johnson was a former editor of the Spectator magazine)

xvii Ibid

xviii Churchill, W S in a letter to the Prime Minister H.H. Asquith, December 1910 cited in Toye, R p.126

xixColley, L. p. 164 Britons Forging the Nation, 1707 - 1837

xx Ibid p. 167

xxi ibid, p. 168

xxii Wilson, Lady p. 140

xxiii Wilson, Lady p. 141

xxiv Churchill, W S My Early Life- A Roving Commission Chapter XI, The Mamund Valley

xxv Belich, J Making Peoples p. 182

xvi The best known account of a Colonial Administrator is that Arthur Grimble whose account of his time in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands (now Kiribati and Tuvalu) from 1913 until 1919, A Pattern of Islands, first published in 1952

xxvii It is estimated that the population of most Pacific island communities declined by 50 – 90% during the 19th century largely through epidemics of smallpox, influence, dysentery, tuberculosis, typhoid, whooping cough and leprosy.

xxviii Isaac Featherstone cited in Belich, J p. 248

xxix Twain, Mark, The People who Sit in Darkness, 1901

xxx A theme that other writers since, from Jean Rhys's novel 'Wide Sargasso Sea' to Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart have developed and expanded. Time moves on, however, as do attitudes. More recently, Chinua Achebe labelled 'Heart of Darkness' as "*a totally deplorable book*" by "a bloody racist".

xxxi Only Abyssinia (Ethiopia) and Liberia remained independent.

2. **We need more than Legislation; We need a Culture Change.**
Published on March 19, 2021

Over recent years, we have been confronted by a succession of protests and campaigns about pressing public issues: Black Lives Matter, Extinction Rebellion; the rights of LGBTQI; and, most recently, protests about violence against women. In each instance, the protests have been the result of a groundswell of public opinion, in two instances precipitated by an appalling act of violence. As a result, at times the letter of the law has been by-passed: Statues have been defaced, covid regulations ignored, property damaged.

There has been a government response. After all, there are various ways to address the issues raised and legislation is one such avenue. Unfortunately, most attempts have been flawed or, as in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill currently before the House, focus more on dealing with the complainants than in addressing the complaints. Yes, we have the Domestic Abuse Bill before the House; we have legislation to deal with religious and racial hate crime; we have the Human Rights Act; the Race Relations Act, the Equalities Act, plus specific legislation to deal with acts of harassment, prejudice, climate change and gender violence. We are making progress.

But at the heart of each of these movements is something much more fundamental than government intervention. It is a heartfelt plea for us to change the way we think about, and act towards each other and the world we live in. Each one of these movements is a callout for equality, regardless of colour, gender or sexual orientation; a callout to save our planet which affects all of us; a call out for greater tolerance and understanding; and the expression of an overwhelming desire to feel safe and respected as fellow human beings. None of which are radical. All of which are eminently sensible and justified.

Instead of relying on legislation, we need to change the culture, and the means and responsibility for doing so lies in our homes and schools. We need to change the way children think about themselves and about others. We need to start at the very bottom of the education tree and examine what are the underlying values and attitudes we are imparting to our children when they first learn to socialise.

Several countries around the world have recently abandoned Gross domestic product (GDP) as a measure of their country's wealth, replacing it with a measure of well-being. Instead of focusing on a model that rewards obsolescence, tacitly encourages waste, ignores those who do charitable work or are unpaid carers and encourages the growth and accumulation of capital, "wealth" is, instead, defined by the mental and physical health of all people, not by the few. Put into the context of our schools, we might well ask whether our undue focus on academic achievement or sporting success does exactly the same. Those who work hard, who are motivated, who find school relevant and are supported at home and are able to access the curriculum with ease succeed. We celebrate them in our schools and in our marketing. We use them to advertise how successful we are as educators ; we reward them when they have their reward already, as governments are too inclined to do by using the honours system to

reward winners twice over. We encourage this system every time we boast about the achievements of selective schools, or the success of our sporting teams. Indeed, we tacitly accept that there are winners and losers, indeed we help make them so; and too often, we fail to ask why. Why do we value some talents and abilities above others? Why do we assume that one measure of success fits all? What of those others? Why are we not giving them equal value? Why are we not defining success by altogether different and more ethical, more holistic, criteria?

We may reference the Parable of the Talents with its contrary message '*For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. But the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.'* That's how it must seem for too many children. That's why we need to change the culture.

So, how? The process of divide and rule, through selection, through the creation of school elites, through allowing a business model into schools that demand a measurable definition of achievement, and by accepting wastage. Human wastage. Children whose needs haven't been met, sometimes because schools aren't equipped or even designed, to do so. Yes, we need to look at what we are teaching and whether our old subject domains and our content is still relevant to a different generation of children aspiring to work in a dramatically changed work place and in a society whose values change depending on whose shoulders you are standing. The curriculum should not be a fixed body of knowledge, but should be dynamic and ever-evolving . What we need to do is focus on human values. Not British values per se although there is some overlap. But values of empathy, kindness, charity and ethics. We need to pull back on the rhetoric of 'you can do what you want to do' until we make the conditions for that to happen as more than just an occasional aberration – after all, what is liberal for one person is entrapment for another; and free choice for one is no choice at all for another. We need to work out how to measure the success of education – proper holistic education – by more than a bundle of grades.

At the start of reception, we need to work at teaching our children more as groups of co-dependent children rather than as individuals. I don't mean in ignoring each child's individual needs which are fundamental; but in the way we define success. By not promoting individual achievement above that of the community, but by rewarding the group. Even at this very young age, we need to focus on creating the idea community, on shared success, on building tolerance and understanding about equality, taking

turns to walk about in another's skin. We need to teach them how to treat others, not to be selfish and how to think without rather than within, so they will go on teaching each other. Male attitudes, prejudices and preserves need to be changed. Racial and gender stereotypes need to confronted, and not by learning the right things to say, but how to act and feel. We need to teach children about the connected world, about the richness of diversity and how to think ethically and ecologically. I can think of few things more reckless that propelling some of our most able (an Ofsted definition!) onto university and into well-paid jobs without giving them a moral and ethical compass to live by. But we do. And then bemoan the widening equality gap. Every time we place IQ above EQ; every time we define our children by their learning outcomes; every time we mix up our expectations of our children because of some DfE Matrix that, at heart, we know makes no sense, we fail a percentage of our children.

For children, changing the cultures in a school is akin to pushing at an open door. Children like sharing, like helping each other and benefit from doing so; they like looking after their own and supporting classmates who struggle, physically and emotionally. They like the identity of the group, the cohesion and safety and security. And then we lose it. We still promote fairness and equality, and looking after each other, but as the school system pulls us apart, we increasingly do it as spectators, not as participants, so it is no longer a shared journey. Teaching about the entanglement of life, of shared responsibilities, of sharing, of living in a community is all. Tolerating and respecting all people, regardless of race, colour, gender and ability should be the great learning of early years. The great moral mission should be to understand what can be done to help others along the way, to share any good fortune and to be stakeholders in the health of our communities and wider society. That who we are is always more important than what we are. If only our schools were allowed to fully embrace this model. Perhaps then we wouldn't have so many protests about issues that should be fundamental rights for all of us.

1. Finding the Lost Generation

- Published on March 9, 2021

'Longer school days and shorter holidays are among the measures the government is considering to help pupils in England catch up on lost learning." Education secretary Gavin Williamson BBC Website, 7 March, 2021

"It is the quality of our work and not the quantity which will please God." Mahatma Gandhi

The closure of schools over recent months to all, but the children of essential workers has significantly impacted upon the amount of course work that most children have been able to be complete. Some students, no doubt, have made sure they have kept up, but as schools return, a serious concern has been over the growing inequality gap between those who have dutifully covered the work on-line with all the necessary equipment and support and those who have fallen behind, because they lack the facilities, motivation, or simply the encouragement to do so.

This week teachers will be picking over the holes in their children's knowledge with half an eye to meeting national benchmarks. In a survey by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, two-thirds of parents asked were concerned about the amount of learning lost with some parents thinking that their children will never catch-up. It is an issue that demanded a measured response and Government schemes to assist those who have fallen behind such as the £700 million package to help pupils catch-up on lost learning, including tutoring and summer schools have been welcomed, but it is telling that almost as many parents were as concerned about their children's well-being as their academic regression. And rightly so.

And yet, despite the impact of the crisis on the reduced coverage of the curriculum and exams and the anxiety of children and parents, public education is in a unique place. There is an opportunity for real and substantive change to a curriculum predicated on A Levels relevant to fewer students each year and on pedagogy and the delivery of that curriculum. While we may all have had enough of remote learning at this time, the advancements made in on-line teaching and the possibilities of blended learning will alter the landscape for the better when we embrace them. But first, we need to look at our current paradigm of education and try to see it differently.

For now, the focus is on a return to the status quo and applying crude calculations on how to make up for the hours of schooling lost during the pandemic. While there have been calls in the past for longer school days and longer school terms, we have never faced a situation where so much teaching time has been lost. The Minister has

indicated that all things are now on the table including moving to a five-term year or changes to summer holidays, but strangely little to do with reviewing the content and application of the curriculum, even temporarily.

Before looking at proposals to extend school terms and extending hours spent in classroom lessons, we would do better looking at how we effectively we are using the time we have. I recall being involved in a set of appraisals that measured the effective teaching time in lessons once all the interruptions, white noise, and other distractions were removed and the evidence was that proper learning time, the minutes the children were properly engaged was dramatically reduced. Sometimes, lessons are places that test the stamina of children instead of engaging and challenging them and that when they don't seem to be concentrating, they are likely just bored or tired. Of course, teachers' lessons invariably vary, often based on the time they spend planning, quality of resources etc for there are always some lessons that take much more preparation, and demand the attention of students, than others. The time of the day and the pressures on teachers and importantly, their relationship with the class all come into play. Too often, teacher expectations become reduced to seeing ability within the boundaries of what is being taught rather than what students are capable of, cutting off discussion that wanders off piste, keeping students firmly on task, often defined in the data that is recorded. There are so many examples of successful academics who felt constrained by school, often failing their A Levels and yet later ending up in academia or as leaders in public life. Rather than looking at lengthening lessons and the school day and applying Boxer's maxim, '*I must work harder*', we need to look at how children learn best and the relevance of what we are putting in front of them. We can evidence European countries that don't start formal schooling until the age of six; or that spend substantially fewer hours in the classroom (the UK sits comfortably above the European average with Finland spending almost 25% fewer hours in the classroom). In the normal run of things, why do we need more time when we waste so much of what we've got? And is turning school into a marathon going to improve learning? I doubt it! Education is not about the filling of the pot, so we are told, and yet we keep overfilling it. Do we teach that much more content in certain subjects than other countries? Certainly not in foreign languages! But if so, it may be that this year a number of courses could simply reduce their content without any deleterious effect (I think of A Level History or other subjects that have blocks of learning that are heavily content based and are more repetitive than integral to an understanding of the subject). Or are we geared to move at pace through a curriculum

just to get it done? And this is without looking at the elephant in the room, which is what we teach and is for another time. We should look at how effective we are in the classroom before the Minister budgets for another dollop of hours. After all when we are told something will take weeks to do, we should always ask for the number of hours and then decide our own priorities. Improving punctuality, minimising disruption, looking at the content of what we are teaching, the quality and amount of actual engagement and how we can make better use of blended teaching would be a good place to start. After all, when push comes to shove, we can move mountains if the will is there. Having written that, I think it was a bold tweet that I read this morning, especially coming from a teacher and author who asked the question: '*if you get one of the best teachers, you will learn in six months what an average teacher will take a year to teach you. If you get one of the worst teachers, that same learning will take you two years. Discuss'.*

Yet perhaps, just perhaps this generation, rather than being the one that missed out, has been the one that has been challenged and liberated. They have been tested in extraordinary ways and learned a whole raft of new skills and attitudes. Maybe we have seen assessment and examinations for what they are – prescribed boundaries that constrict rather than liberate thinking. Maybe they have seen education as something they take with them and not leave at the door of their schools and universities. Maybe they see education is on-going, without walls, without much of the artifice that accompanies it

From this pandemic, there will be many students who will need help to catch up, especially those who have been most disadvantaged by lockdown. Tutoring and extra classes will help. But their situation should not blind us to a bigger issue, about the value of what they've actually missed out on. Evidence would seem to show that it is the social aspects of school, the exchange of ideas, face to face, the banter and the incidental learning that goes on at schools that have been the real casualties of lockdown. And that even more important than classroom learning, will be the need for reassurance, for re-building self-confidence and focusing on well-being, and no longer telling our youth they have missed out when they may well have had the best education of all.

The crucial issue moving forward will be to look again at what we teach and its relevance to the world our children find themselves in after being adrift in over these past twelve months. Is it really, hand on heart, the best, the most appropriate, the

most useful and relevant education we can give our children, today, now? Of course, we don't have to change the core of our subject knowledge or lower expectations – quite the contrary. But we do need to be open to asking the bigger questions when it comes to defining education.

There is a lot of talk about this being the lost generation and yet I wonder. I wonder at the resilience they've shown, the social skills they've developed, their articulate offerings in lockdown, on climate change, on social and political issues, on education and technology and wonder perhaps, just perhaps, this will be the generation that takes us beyond the straitjacket of our traditional school system and sees opportunities without. One thing that was clear from lockdown was the role of the school as a social place. It should be so. It should be a place where children want to be, where learning is not defined by subject boxes, by Ebacc and national testing and exams, but a place where teachers endeavour to give the best education possible for children, where learning can become a joy, where the curriculum is relevant and dynamic, rather than just by the sum of hours spent at the chalkface.