

The Right To Connect

Diane Elliott

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For Information please contact:

Delliott944@gmail.com

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The United Nations Convention On The Rights Of The Child

article 1 (definition of the child) Everyone under the age of 18 has all the rights in the Convention.

article 3 (best interests of the child) **The best interests of the child must be a top priority in all decisions and actions that affect children.**

article 6 (life, survival and development) Every child has the right to life. Governments must do all they can to ensure that children **survive and develop to their full potential.**

article 12 (respect for the views of the child) **Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them,** and to have their views considered and taken seriously. This right applies at all times, for example during immigration proceedings, housing decisions or the child's day-to-day home life.

article 13 (freedom of expression) **Every child must be free to express their thoughts and opinions and to access all kinds of information,** as long as it is within the law.

article 17 (access to information from the media)

Every child has the right to **reliable information from a variety of sources,** and governments should encourage the media to provide information that children can understand. Governments must help protect children from materials that could harm them.

article 28 (right to education)

Every child has the right to an education. Primary education must be free and **different forms of secondary education must be available to every child.** Discipline in schools must respect children's dignity and their rights. Richer countries must help poorer countries achieve this.

article 29 (goals of education) Education must **develop every child's personality, talents and abilities to the full.** It must encourage the child's respect for human rights, as well as respect for their parents, their own and other cultures, and the environment.

article 31 (leisure, play and culture) **Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.**

article 39 (recovery from trauma and reintegration) Children who have experienced neglect, abuse, exploitation, torture or who are victims of war **must receive special support to help them recover their health, dignity, self-respect and social life.**

article 42 (knowledge of rights) **Governments must actively work to make sure children and adults know about the Convention.**

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INTRODUCTION

The UN Convention

The United Nations is a global organisation, established by international leaders in 1945 to maintain peace after the horrors of World War II. Membership has risen from an original 51 countries to 193. The headquarters is based in New York City, USA.

The four main purposes of the U.N. are to:

- Maintain international peace and security;
- Develop friendly relations among nations;
- Achieve international cooperation in solving international problems; and
- Be a center for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of these common ends.

The UN Treaty Collection provides a legal source to determine international human rights law. Member nations have signed a document stipulating that they will abide by those laws.

Included in the treaties is the ‘Convention on the Rights of the Child,’ which was enacted in 1990. It is the most widely ratified human rights treaty of all. The U.K. and Northern Ireland signed the treaty in December 1991. The only country which has not signed is the United States.

Whilst the treaty focuses on addressing serious crimes against childhood such as child trafficking and child prostitution – it is also highly concerned about the global mental health of children and young people.

A 2018 report from the U.N., shared information from their specialised agency, The World Health Organisation (WHO), which focuses on international public health. The report states: Half of all mental illnesses begin by the age of 14, but most cases go undetected and untreated. Depression is one of the leading causes of illness and disability among adolescents and suicide is the second leading cause of death among 15 to 29 year-olds.

The UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, asks for mental health to be nurtured from an early age, saying that any problems which arise are then “both preventable and treatable.” He also says that poor mental health can cause an increase in violent behaviour and

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substance/alcohol abuse, and also has an impact on educational achievement.

The WHO recommends governments implement actions including:

Investing in: greater integration of mental health into broader health and social care systems, under the umbrella of universal health coverage; mental health resilience-building through parents and teachers; and psycho-social provision in schools and community spaces.

The WHO states:

Evidence is growing that promoting and protecting adolescent mental health benefits not just adolescents' health, in the short and the long-term, but also economies and society as a whole, with healthy young adults able to make greater contributions to the workforce, their families and communities.

In putting the spotlight on schools for the “psycho-social provision” of good mental health - can we see the fruits of an education system, which has provided a holistic, nurturing foundation for children and young people? Has the system resulted in mature and capable adults, ready to find solutions to create a just society and a healthy environment for future generations? Or has the system focused on more materialistic improvements?

As a species, we have made huge advances. The website ‘humanprogress.org’ provides access to vast amounts of information related to areas of progress and how the state of humanity is improving.

They outline the following points:

- Poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy, child labor and infant mortality are falling faster than at any other time in human history.
- Life expectancy at birth has increased more than twice as much in the last century as it did in the previous 200,000 years.
- The risk that any individual will be exposed to war, die in a natural disaster, or be subject to dictatorship has become smaller than in any other epoch.
- A child born today is more likely to reach retirement age than his forbearers were to live to their fifth birthday.

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- Vastly improved communications are available to most, improving business environment and economic freedom.

They also tell us that we now have:

Better access to education and cheap energy, cleaner environments, more food, greater gender equality, improved governance (on average), better health, improved housing, an overall rise in human freedom, progress in labor (fewer work hours and fewer on-the-job injuries), more leisure time, falling prices of most natural resources, increased tourism, cheaper and safer transportation, declining violence and growing wealth.

This all sounds admirable and excellent, these are the areas we should continue to strive to keep improving.

Fortunately, today, most of our young people don't face the hardships of the previous generation, and live in incomprehensible luxury compared to the war-torn lives of their grandparents and great-grandparents. However, as the state of their materialistic lifestyle has become more comfortable, the state of their psychological lives, for many, has become more concerning.

The reasons are varied. Three of the most prominent which I have witnessed are:

- High expectation of success and fear of failure, fuelled by schools and parents.
- An addiction to compare themselves to others, fuelled by social media.
- Isolation and loneliness, a feeling of not fitting in, fuelled by disconnection in school.

We tell our young that they are privileged, that they have access to opportunities we did not, and that they should take advantage of them. But the pressure of privilege has built to a deafening crescendo of expectation. The loud message from most schools (and many parents) is the fear mongering announcement that if exams are not passed and university is not attended, a successful life will be out of reach. But that's not true. The future of work is uncertain, and guaranteed job security will not be in place for anybody, regardless of degree status.

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For many boys, they see the traditional roads to success, such as medicine, law, politics, as out of reach. They look at jobs such as plumbers, lorry drivers, or farmers as not ambitious enough. They would love to be a rock star, but that also seems unlikely. It wouldn't worry them so much if they didn't think it was worrying the hell out of everyone else. They are often reluctant to seem clever in the classroom as they'd get a hard time from their friends. They worry about their future and have no clue what it will look like. They can't see the relevance of what they told to learn and how it will fit into their future lives, how can they transfer what they are doing in school to what they will need in life.

The boys see the girls as more self-assured and more mature, and no wonder, girl's brain development is generally a couple of years ahead. But the girls are toting around their own personal tormentor – their phones. Access to the internet brings about a constant state of comparison - how they could be more thin, beautiful, fashionable and popular. They are allowed access to their phones 24/7, so there is no getting away from it. The repercussions can often be severe.

If we are to seriously address these challenges, the first priority is to take stock of where we are now. How are most children doing in school? Are they thriving in a nurturing and personalised environment?

If not, what is being done?

The UN Convention articles go a long way to provide an agreed approach towards childhood to ensure that children and young people do thrive. But do government policies ensure that schools align with the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child?

In condensing the articles down to five points from the list at the beginning of the book - do policies support:

- CHOICE
Provide different forms of secondary education - available to every child?
- MENTAL HEALTH
Protect and support all victims of Adverse Childhood Experiences so they receive immediate and ongoing support

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to help them recover their health, dignity, self-respect and social life?

- **AUTONOMY**
Allow every child the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters which affect them?
- **ARTS & PLAY**
Safeguard every child's right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities?
- **POTENTIAL**
Establish a curriculum in which every child's personality, talents and abilities are developed to the full?

Anybody involved in education knows that we are often failing to meet these requirements for many students. This is not to attribute blame to the teachers, many of whom are drowning under too many regulations and not enough support. This is reflected in the U.K.'s National Education Union survey, which reports that 81% of teachers said they have considered leaving teaching because of the pressures of workload.

Thousands of parents are giving up on our education system and pulling their children out of school to home educate. This is not a decision which is taken lightly, home-ed message boards and social media sites are full of reports from parents who are overwhelmed with the prospect of personally providing a good education for their child, but feel they have no other option.

Connection

For the past fifteen years I have worked in schools. Initially as an educational consultant and then as a founding director of a primary school in Los Angeles, and then a secondary school in Scotland. I have watched as young children and older teens have attempted to navigate through their worlds of connection and disconnection, with each other, with themselves and with their ideas for their future.

I have been extremely fortunate – I've had the opportunity to approach education from a clean slate. I was able to apply a scientific approach to education by observing, asking questions, constructing a

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hypothesis and analysing the data. The data was the responses from the students; were they more engaged and motivated? Did their commitment to producing good work increase? Did the quality of their work improve? Were they prepared to take more creative risks with their work? Were they developing socially? Did they seem joyful?

I could then communicate the results to the teachers and parents and apply the various educational approaches, including drama projects, immersive art programmes, non-exam subjects, character education, critical thinking skills and perspective taking.

The schools were successful, the students were happy to come in every day, they engaged with their work and learned how to get along with their peers, regardless of their initial academic and social ability.

When you open an alternative school the students who come along are mostly boys (approximately 80%), who have tried mainstream schools and have not thrived within them. This “failure to thrive” was primarily related to academic or social challenges.

The academic challenges related to an inability to access or engage with the curriculum, either finding it too difficult or too boring. The student would usually then exhibit one of two behaviours, anger and loud aggressiveness (usually the boys) or disengagement and quiet withdrawal (usually the girls).

The social challenges related to feeling socially unsafe in their previous school, which ranged from feeling different to the rest of the crowd to being physically and/or verbally attacked.

Over the years, I kept detailed notes and wrote about the challenges and strengths of each student and the tactics we would implement to ensure a shift towards healthy development. We were determined to see them re-engage both academically and socially. My notes also included conversations with parents and comments from the teachers.

I wrestled with these notes for quite a few years, trying to form them into some semblance of a book which I wrote and re-wrote over and over. I would then put it away in frustration. Who knew writing a book could be so difficult? Would anybody want to read this anyway? I was looking for and not finding the missing thread that would sew everything together and would hopefully make my experiences interesting and relevant.

What I did know, was that the two schools *had* provided choice, protected mental health, allowed autonomy, safeguarded the arts and

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play, and nurtured the potential of every child and young person. However, this provision had presented differently for each student, and to generate an encompassed method seemed impossible. What was the overarching approach, which could be applied intentionally as an educational philosophy? This was the ungraspable problem I faced - until I came across an author who had grasped the problem and had managed to put the pieces together.

That author was Johann Hari. A few years ago, I read his book entitled *Chasing the Scream: The Opposite of Addiction is Connection*. My interest in the book was linked to a curiosity about the beginnings of disengagement and disconnection, when and why do feelings of inadequacy and failure begin and why does this often lead to a search for something to alleviate those feelings? Hari's book is really powerful and shines a light on why people become addicted to drugs and/or alcohol.

When I heard about Hari's second book I pre-ordered a copy right away. This book is also about disconnection, entitled *Lost Connections: Uncovering the Real Causes of Depression – and the Unexpected Solutions*. This subject resonated with me on such a deep level due to witnessing many children and young people who have come into our schools struggling with anxiety and depression. I was glued to the book and fascinated by the ideas Hari presented.

Hari shows how anxiety or depression can be attributed to various areas of disconnection:

- Disconnection from Meaningful Work
- Disconnection from Other People
- Disconnection from Meaningful Values
- Disconnection from Childhood Trauma
- Disconnection from Status and Respect
- Disconnection from the Natural World

I read Hari's book over a weekend. Then I started to see that I had found what I needed to help me assemble the pieces together, the overarching approach which could be applied to what had been happening in the schools. A picture of the story I wanted to write began to form in my mind and I suddenly knew how everything linked together. I realised that the main message throughout my

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experience of working in schools, the one element which created a healthy environment was the same conclusion Hari had come to – the presence of connection.

In fact, there were three strands of connection which stood out – the student’s connection to:

- Their peers and their teachers, how they got along with others.
- Themselves, how they felt about their place in the world.
- Their future and how they envisioned their life would play out.

The initial connection is the most vital - the connection to others. If children and young people do not feel safe in their environment, or if they feel disconnected from their peers or their teachers, they won’t develop to their full potential, they won’t freely express their views and feelings and they won’t feel able to relax and enjoy learning.

The image on the front of this book is the graphical representation of information from a U.S. research paper. The research applies to the friendship connections between a class of students which developed over the course of three immersive drama projects. In the words of the authors of the research, these projects “eliminated social isolation in the classroom” (more on this later).

I witnessed this elimination of social isolation through the connections formed between the students, and the subsequent effects on how they felt about themselves, their work, their opinions and their future potential: Connection *is the key* to unlocking the UN Convention requirements for the Convention on the Rights of the Child. And all children and young people have the right to access those connections in all areas of lives, including their educational experience.

I went to Johann Hari’s website and sent an email telling him I had read his book and that it had helped me to define my experiences within education. I asked him for permission to use his reasons for disconnection and to apply them to my writing. A message from Johann on his website tells his hopeful correspondents that he receives a hundred emails every day and apologetically says he can’t reply to each one. I sent the email off anyway, not expecting a response. However, ten minutes later, an email from Johann appeared, telling me I could use his disconnection descriptions, he thought it was a great project and he wished me luck.

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The causes of disconnection and solutions for connection Hari refers to, mingle together somewhat in my writing, but the essence of what he puts forward is clear.

In this book, I have reduced the categories down to four sections:

Part I - Connection to Other People

Part II - Connection to Themselves

Part III - Connection to Their Future

Part IV - Reform.

In looking at the opposite of connection, disconnecting from other people affects how you function as a person, and disconnection from how you feel about yourself causes weak interactions with others. Being human is a complex and mysterious process. Are we the product of the workings of our own mind, or does the environment impact how we feel and think? Are we the product of hereditary factors or are we shaped by external experiences?

The either/or approach historically put forward by different areas of science now states that both genes and environment play a part in our psychological development.

The most interesting aspect of the nature/nurture debate is the fact that particular skills or personality traits can be embedded in the genes, but they need certain environmental factors to switch on. The most important lesson I learned throughout my time working in schools is that the environment created around a child is key to their intellectual and social development. The environment is the switch.

Students arrived at our schools with reports from previous schools listing various challenges from mild dyslexia, or low-level anxiety to full blown daily anger outbursts, totally disconnected from others around them and from themselves. However, every one of our students, with nurturing, understanding and time, re-balanced their inner lives, which brought these young people back to themselves, to the joyful, curious and trusting nature that was there before it was stripped away. This totally changed how they felt about themselves and their world.

I am relieved the years of writing down notes came to something and I eventually pulled it together to tell the story of how - alongside wonderful teachers, courageous parents, magical children and amazing young people - we created school communities which developed social and academic inclusion for every child.

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I now urge parents and guardians to find out about the culture and the environment within their children's school. Ask yourself if your child has access to different forms of secondary education – including the arts. Are they able to freely express their feelings and be involved in decisions about their own learning? Are they developing to their full potential? Do they receive support if needed?

If the answer to any of these questions is no, then the government, through the local councils, is not upholding its international agreement with the United Nations.

In looking at connection within schools, questions could be asked of school staff such as:

1. How do you ensure students connect to each other in a respectful, mature and intellectual way?
2. How do you encourage students to connect to themselves in a creative, reflective and resilient way?
3. How do you offer students a way to connect to their future in an optimistic and realistic and flexible way?

The answers should not be sound-bites taken straight from their website. They should be able to give you concrete answers of how the school provides these vitally important connections for the happiness and success of your child.

It might look to teachers as though their students are connecting to each other, though this is mostly a superficial and surface connection through harmless interactions. Talking about the latest social media trends, gossiping about other people, or even chatting about films or sports – are all normal ways of communication. However, this connection is unlikely to develop character, instill responsibility or foster brain maturity. As we'll learn from Gabor Maté later – peer orientaton does not generally result in positive behaviours.

The development of students through connection and communication is often not present in classrooms, whereby the students are required to apply themselves to only academic pursuits. But it is not enough to focus on academic success, even if the highest grades are achieved, it is not a guarantee for a meaningful and successful life. Even The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), who issue the much sought-after international PISA ranking in schools, have recognised this, they are planning to extend the criteria of cognitive-only testing to include

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creativity and critical thinking and how to educate the whole child – including developing communication and connection.

By not designing student connection into the classroom curriculum, an opportunity is being missed for students to develop intellectually. If they don't form strong respectful relationships; if they don't connect to themselves and gain an understanding of who they are, of their true nature; if they don't connect to their future and develop an interesting and an exciting vision of who they could be (not only what they can do) then their education has left a huge gaping hole of blackness, which they can fall into and be lost to the plight of mental and emotional anguish.

It is a huge task, to ensure these connections take place within school life, but it can be done. Together, with many hard working parents and teachers, I have proved it can be done. Schools *can* compete with the excitement of social media and gaming, parents *can* help their children to find out who they are, where their interests lay, and how to plan for a bright future. We *can* help our young people to be ready to go out into the world meeting challenges and enjoying success.

Can I answer those vital questions I suggest people ask of themselves and of their schools? Yes, I can. Those answers and approaches to education can be found in this book. I would now like to put this information forward, to determine if improvements, on a bigger scale, could be produced by these approaches. I am sure there are many teachers and parents out there who have great ideas for improving education, the time for deep discussion, reflection and action has arrived.

In *The Book of Circles: Visualizing Spheres of Knowledge*, the author, Manuel Lima, shares his feelings about putting his writing out into the world, and says:

The task seemed paralyzing at times. Faced with such a demanding goal, one can either become too frightened to act, or simply move forward in the hope of advancing our evolving collective knowledge by at least a single step.

My wish is that the information and the stories in this book will move our collective knowledge about education forward, and ignite our desire to improve education through a focus on student's mental health, autonomy, potential, choice and access to the arts.

By even a single step.

Diane Elliott
Aberdeenshire, Scotland
June 2019

PART I

Connection To Others

CHAPTER 1

Emotional Disconnection

In chapter two of Hari's book, *Cause Two: Disconnection from Other People*, he writes about a neuroscientist researcher and psychologist, John Cacioppo, who sadly passed away last year. Hari tells us about Cacioppo's work on loneliness and how as a young researcher, he wanted to explore more than what was happening just inside the brain, which was the only research taking place at the time. He wanted to study the brain, not as an isolated island, but as an island connected to the outside world by a hundred bridges, with signals travelling back and forth. Cacioppo's mentors told him this was too complex to figure out, and they wouldn't be focusing on it, he would be on his own.

Cacioppo thought about this for years, until the 1990's when he started to study the effects of people's mental state when they felt cut off from the world around them. He wanted to know if or how it would change the brain and if or how it would change the body.

Cacioppo would eventually pioneer what is now known as "social neuroscience" which includes the understanding that your brain changes according to how you use it. To fully understand how this works is to know that loneliness will physically change your brain, and reversing the state of loneliness will also reverse the state and structure of your brain.

Some animals live in isolation, other animals form tribes, they prefer safety in numbers and to raise their young surrounded by plenty of protective adults. They also collaborate to hunt and forage for food. We humans obviously also evolved in tribes, once upon a time we depended on each other to survive, we needed to work together for food, shelter and protection. For our ancestors, the consequences of living without a tribe would have been catastrophic.

That need has shifted now, many people live in isolation, or as an isolated family, removed from relatives and the supportive family

structure. However, within our coding a calling to the tribe and a need to belong still runs deep.

In conducting experiments to determine which came first, loneliness or depression, Cacioppo's experiments showed that loneliness leads to depression and stress. Stress causes the heartbeat to raise and your bloodstream to be flooded with cortisol. Loneliness induces anxiety, causes low self-esteem and feelings of un-likability and insecurity. Loneliness increases illness and decreases life-spans. Someone who is lonely for an extended period of time will shut down, and be suspicious of other's attempts at connection, ironically the thing they need most.

Being surrounded by people, such as in a school setting, offers no protection against loneliness. To feel connected to others there needs to be a shared experience of something meaningful, a reciprocal exchange of cooperation (more about this in Part I, Chapter 7).

Severe disconnection can be found in many of our schools, this often presents itself as outbursts of violence.

Violence in U.K. Schools

At a time in their lives when children and young people should be learning how to connect to each other, build relationships, acquire skills to take into adulthood, disconnection and violence in schools is becoming more commonplace and accepted.

Fortunately, actual killings are rare in the U.K., but the number of knife-carrying school-aged children is on the rise.

A BBC News item from January 2018 reports on Sadiq Khan, the mayor of London, who is calling for schools to use metal detectors in all state-funded secondary schools in the capital. However, criticism about the appeal includes the fact that many of the knife crime happens on the street, not in schools.

More recent news on knife crime: On February 9th 2019, the BBC reported on knife crime statistics:

More than one thousand young people (aged ten to nineteen) made up sixty per cent of people admitted to hospital with knife wounds in 2017/18.

The NHS in England reports a fifty four per cent rise in the number of children and teenagers treated for knife injuries over the past five years. Severe injuries are now the norm, the

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numbers are probably higher as minor knife crime injuries which are treated in A&E are not recorded.

The statistics display a more complex story than most might imagine. Dr. Gayle Hann, the lead for paediatric A&E at North Middlesex Hospital, pointed to the rising numbers of girls becoming involved:

It used to be that we rarely saw girls and young women, but now we are seeing increasing numbers as both victims and aggressors. Young women are coming in who have had their mobile phones taken off them in an attack, then had their attack filmed as part of their humiliation. They are then told that if they say anything their attackers will put the video on the internet.

The headline from an Independent article from February 9th 2019 read: “Knife crime epidemic adds to over 50% rise in teen stabbings needing hospital care.”

The report cites news from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) which revealed that, in England and Wales, fatal stabbings were the highest since recording began in 1946 at 285 deaths in the year leading to March 2018.

The article also reports:

While home secretary Sajid Javid announced plans for new knife crime prevention orders that could be imposed on suspects aged 12 or over, critics have warned they risked unnecessarily criminalising young people.

Responding to the news on Thursday, Home Affairs Committee chair Yvette Cooper MP said the Home Office needed to show leadership and guarantee officers were equipped to deal with the “knife crime epidemic”.

“Teenagers are dying and families are being devastated by this appalling rise – yet the government’s response is far too weak,” she said.

In 2017 The Guardian newspaper launched a year-long project “Beyond the Blade,” which documented knife crime in the UK. The aim of the project was to build a national database of the deaths of

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children and teenagers who had been the victims of knife crime. This was in response to the lack of information available. The award-winning investigation looked to provide an account of these crimes. It was led by Gary Younge – author of *Another Day in the Death of America* – and Guardian reporter, Damien Gayle.

The project reached out to people who were affected by these crimes and also to those who were looking for solutions.

In September 2018 The Guardian produced an article entitled “The radical lessons of a year reporting on knife crime.”

As well as the increase in girls being involved in knife crime, the conclusions from the Guardian’s findings illustrated how the assumptions about knife crime are usually wrong:

The Guardian gained access to previously unavailable data on young people and knife crime from the past 40 years, and counted all the children and teens killed by knives last year. We discovered that roughly half of all teenage knife deaths, on average, take place outside of London. The overwhelming majority of those killed by knives in Britain in the last 40 years are not black. The overwhelming majority of young people caught carrying knives today are not involved with gangs.

The idea that these crimes occur in London, between primarily black males who belong to gangs, is not accurate. The article goes on to say:

This matters because it makes it more difficult to tackle the issue when you consistently and persistently misidentify it. Treating knife attacks as a criminal issue that affects black kids in London removes the majority of young people who are fatally stabbed from the equation altogether.

Every stabbing is a crime. But the most effective way to deal with “knife crime” is to treat it as a public health issue, and to tackle all the contextual elements – housing, employment, mental health, addiction, abuse, as well as crime – that make some people and communities more vulnerable to it. But that would take public spending and a coordinated and compassionate strategy that focuses on it for the long term.

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The government has the capacity to do this, but there is no evidence yet that it has the will.

In almost all of these cases, there was clearly a series of social challenges beyond the crime itself: mental health, school exclusions, poverty or unemployment that make the susceptibility to violence – either as a victim or a perpetrator – more likely. By the time the criminal justice system intervenes, it is really adjudicating a crisis that has been created elsewhere.

An important point the authors go on to say, is that to understand and solve knife crime, we must recognize it as a public health matter rather than a criminal matter. If it continues to be viewed as a criminal issue, which should be dealt with by enforcing stricter and longer sentences, we will never find a solution.

The authors also point to criminologists who agree with looking at these crimes as a public health matter, and that “tackling poverty and social exclusion would have a far greater impact.”

They say that law enforcement should be part of a “more holistic programme of intervention.”

The public health approach is supported by the current head of the Metropolitan Police, Cressida Dick. Another Guardian article from January 2018 reports:

The head of Scotland Yard has thrown her weight behind the idea that knife crime should be treated as a public health crisis rather than purely a crime.

Speaking to the London assembly, Cressida Dick argued that persistent levels of knife-related violence required a preventative program to help reduce the number of deaths and injuries from attacks.

Dick’s comments will be seen as a significant show of support from the UK’s most senior police officer for knife crime to be viewed through the “public health lens.”

If you do an internet search on “Violence in British Schools” you will find depressing news. Headlines from the Guardian include:

- Support for parents is the key to tackling pupil aggression in schools

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- Millions paid out to teachers for classroom assaults and accidents
- Almost 900 pupils suspended from school each day for violence

From The Conversation:

Violent behaviour in schools happens everyday and figures suggest bullying is on the increase, too. In a report last year, UNESCO (the United Nations Office for Educational, Scientific and Cultural Affairs) revealed that school violence affects *246million* pupils worldwide, every year.

Such violence is experienced through physical and emotional forms of harassment. And it can negatively impact pupils' educational success and later employment and health prospects. Significantly, a link between school violence and later criminal justice involvement was noted in the report. Not addressed, however, was the earliest trigger for a child using violence.

In the U.K. violent pupils are excluded from school either temporarily or permanently. 380,000 children were excluded from schools in 2016.

Another article from "The Conversation" asks what happens to kids who are kicked out of school.

Persistent disruptive behaviour is the most common reason for exclusion from school. PRU's (Pupil Referral Units) are where many of the excluded are sent. Poverty, race and gender play a big role in exclusions. If you are from a low-income family or a Black Caribbean family you are four times more likely to be excluded, if you are a boy you are three times more likely to be excluded. If you have special educational needs, you are in the group of the seven in ten permanent exclusions.

An article from the BBC writes about "forgotten children" and highlights a report from MPs which claims:

Too many pupils are being pushed out of mainstream classes in England and abandoned with an inadequate education.

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The education select committee warns of a "Wild West" approach to the education provided for pupils who have been excluded from school. There were also concerns about schools removing pupils to boost their position in league tables.

I can't actually believe this happens – children are asked to leave school because they will bring down the league tables? Surely this should be an illegal practice.

A report from NSPCC shows that throughout 2016 and 2017, there were over 24,000 Childline counseling sessions with children about bullying.

"Ditch The Label" is an anti-bullying online charity which works in the UK, USA and Mexico. It was founded by Liam Hackett, who took to the internet to talk about his experiences of being bullied for ten years and after a severe attack by kids from his school, ended up in hospital. The response was huge, overnight Liam was contacted by hundreds of people with similar experiences. Their mission is: "Promoting equality and empowering people aged 12-25 to overcome bullying".

Their website is vibrant and relatable and tells young people:

We are a leading international anti-bullying charity. We are defiant, innovative and most importantly, proud to be different. We believe in a world that is fair, equal and free from all types of bullying. Are you with us?

No more disempowerment. No more prejudice. No more bullying.

They provide an annual survey and the 2017 report is taken from over 10,000 young people aged 12-20. It gives UK statistics including the fact that 1 in 2 young people have been bullied at some point, 1 in 5 in the past year 1 in 10 in the past week. The report also includes the motivations for bullying, the frequency and impact of bullying as well as personal stories.

- 1.5 million young people (50%) have been bullied within the past year.
- 145,800 (19%) of these were bullied EVERY DAY.
- People who have been bullied are almost twice as likely to bully others.
- Twice as many boys as girls bully (66% of males vs. 31%

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females).

- 57% of female respondents have been bullied, 44% of male respondents and 59% of respondents who identified as trans have been bullied.
- 24% of those who have been bullied go on to bully.
- Based on their own definition 14% of young people admit to bullying somebody, 12% say they bully people daily.
- 20% of all young people have physically attacked somebody.
- 44% of young people who have been bullied experience depression.
- 41% of young people who have been bullied experience social anxiety.
- 33% of those being bullied have suicidal thoughts.

In the report they ask “why do you think you were bullied?” The response hurts your heart:

- 50% - Attitudes towards my appearance.
- 40% - Attitudes towards my interests or hobbies.
- 19% - Attitudes towards my high grade.
- 14% - Attitudes towards my household income
- 14% - Because a family friend is also bullied.
- 14% - Attitudes towards my low grades.
- 12% - Attitudes towards a family issue made public.
- 11% - Attitudes towards my perceived masculinity or femininity.
- 10% - Attitudes towards my race.
- 8% - Attitudes towards a disability that I have.
- 5% - Attitudes towards my cultural identity.
- 4% - Attitudes towards my religion.
- 4% - Attitudes towards my sexuality.
- 3% - Attitudes towards my gender identity or expression.

The survey then asks “what kind of impact did the bullying have on you?” The responses breaks your heart:

- 37% - Developed social anxiety.
- 36% - Developed depression.
- 24% - Had suicidal thoughts
- 23% - Self-harmed.
- 21% - Skipped class.
- 12% - Developed anti-social behaviour.
- 12% - Developed an eating disorder.

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- 10% - Ran away from home.
- 8% - Abused drugs and/or alcohol.

63% reported the bullying to a teacher, parent, friend, counsellor, helpline, or the police. 37% never told anybody. When asked why they never reported the bullying to anybody the responses were:

- 37% - It didn't affect me enough.
- 31% - I can deal with it myself.
- 27% - I'll be called a snitch.
- 25% - It won't be taken seriously.
- 23% - I'm scared of it getting worse.
- 23% - I didn't think it was serious enough.
- 21% - I'm embarrassed.
- 17% - I reported it in the past and nothing happened.
- 15% - My teachers don't care.

Statistics reprinted with permission from Ditch the Label (<https://www.ditchthelabel.org>)

A Panorama documentary "When Kids Abuse Kids" aired on October 9th, 2017 and reported on a huge increase of children sexually assaulting other children, and how some adults are failing to protect the victims of abuse.

There are 200,000 cases of child sexual abuse each year, one third of those are carried out by other children. Reports are rising, but Simon Bailey National Police Chief lead for child protection says that only 1 in 8 cases are being reported. Panorama asked all of the police forces in the UK for their figures for Child On Child Sexual Abuse – 38 forces (out of 43) across England and Wales responded. The figures show dramatic increase from 4,603 reported cases in 2012-2014 to 7,866 in 2016-2017

The majority of the abused are girls. Dr. Christine Barter from the University of Central Lancashire says the responsibility for the behaviour of abuse tends to be put on girls as though it is their fault, saying that they can't take a joke or it's 'just boys being boys' and how difficult it is for girls to respond to this.

As the documentary illustrates, sexting is now commonplace and sending intimate images of themselves to another person, sometimes to someone who they are not even in a serious relationship with, is normal.

Sarah Hannafin from the National Association of Head Teachers is interviewed and reports that it is the access to inappropriate content

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which normalizes negative attitudes and behaviours.

Some of these abusive incidents happen in the classroom, when the teacher is present. Over the last 4 years there has been 2,625 reports of sexual offences committed by school children on school premises, 225 of these offences were rapes. Teenagers interviewed say intimidating and abusive behaviour happens on a daily basis.

The documentary shows the charity 'Schools Consent Project' delivering information about what is consent and what isn't to a class of teenagers. This in-depth look into behaviour around sex is not part of the curriculum so schools don't have to include it, and many don't.

There also seems to be confusion about what a teacher or head should do when a child accuses another child of sexual assault. There are no national guidelines for schools and they are advised to follow their own protection procedures. Dr. Barter says that research undertaken shows that many schools do not report sexual violence to outside agencies and are not responding in a consistent way.

Teachers say government guidelines need to be more clear around procedures. However the Department for Education's response to Panorama was "Sexual assault is a crime and any allegation should be reported to the police."

The documentary also discovered that over the past 4 years 74% of reported child on child sexual offenses resulted in no further action and 48 boys were given a caution for committing rape.

They show teenagers expressing their anguish at having to return to the school where their abuser is still enrolled. One of the girls who had been assaulted in her art class and reported the incident to the police was then bullied by other children in the school and accused of lying about the incident. The headmaster then suggested she leave and make a fresh start somewhere else.

The impact on mental health is huge, and many report feelings of self-harm or suicide.

Primary schools are also seeing an increase in sexual assaults, over the last 4 years sexual offences committed by children under 10 and reported to the police have doubled from 204 in 2013-2014 to 456 from 2016-2017.

One family talk about their 6 year old daughter who was seriously sexually assaulted by two boys in a primary school. The boys were

under age and couldn't be charged and the parents were advised to move. Citing failure of a duty of care by the authorities, the parents are now taking legal action.

The British Educational Research Association (BERA) has core aims which are to: advance research quality, build research capacity and foster research engagement in the education field.

BERA says:

Key messages are that extreme cases of violence, including severe bullying which leads to death, are very rare in UK schools. By contrast, low-level disruption, verbal aggression (for example, between pupils and towards teachers) and cyber-bullying appear to be increasing. This insight aims to show that the problems confronting schools are indeed changing, but perhaps not in the ways often suggested by the extreme cases highlighted by the media.

BERA's website contains a lot of information, but I couldn't find an insight into the reasons for the violence.

Violence in U.S. Schools

Extreme violence in U.S. schools is more common, with far more catastrophic outcomes due to the access to guns. I wanted to look at gun violence in the U.S. because of the reasons the perpetrators give for why they committed the crime, it is almost the same language that perpetrators of knife crime use here in the U.K. So there is much to learn - especially from Katherine S. Newman, who is a sociologist and an author.

Newman was interviewed for a documentary series entitled "Killer Kids." In the episode "School Killers," Newman tells us that the media often gets it wrong when they depict the shooters as loners. Their actual stories often follow a similar path, they have a difficult social life, attempting to join groups, trying to fit in but they are repeatedly rebuffed. "Their social experience is one of exclusion and friction, not isolation...they are looking for attention and looking to change their public perception and think this is the way to go" Newman says. She also tells us they are not normal kids, they have psychological problems including depression and suicidal impulses.

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Students don't usually report a peer for aggressive behaviour, Newman says this is because the social cost is often too high, so peers hold back, which eliminates the best source of warning. In Newman's book, *Rampage – The social roots of school shootings*, haunting messages fly off the page when describing these young killers as "lonely, withdrawn, shy, rarely showing emotion, shunned by others." She writes about a 17 year old boy from Tennessee. When he is interviewed by the Los Angeles Times, he says:

I didn't fit in. I didn't see myself reaching out to any adult. I just didn't see anybody I could trust. I thought it would always be like that. I couldn't see no future whatsoever. I just had a hopeless feeling. It was a tired feeling. It was kind of an empty feeling. Although I'm locked up, probably for life, I'm still happier now than when I was free.

I'm sure many people would respond that they couldn't care less how happy or unhappy a killer is, no matter their age or circumstance. And the 'criminals as victims' plea is also lost on many. But if we can question their motives, it might help us to understand the psyche of those who display violent aggressive acts. Whether it be guns, knives or words as weapons this behaviour is damaging and destroying lives, both the victim's and the attackers.

Newman says it is often difficult to pinpoint reasons and motivations directly from school shooters as the perpetrators are either in jail or dead. But she says there are blueprints to violence which include a desire to elevate their social position, to reclaim social standing in a masculine way.

After a killing spree, one of the young boys Newman writes about says "I am not insane, I am angry."

There is also much to learn from research carried out by The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

A common perception about people who commit violent acts such as stabbings or shootings, is that they must be insane, suffering from severe mental illness or psychotic episodes. However the 2018 report from the FBI entitled "A Study of Active Shooter Incidents in the United States Between 2000 and 2013," shows this is a misperception.

The report looks at the motives which lay behind the attacks and asks

questions about the behaviour of the attackers and the reasons for the attacks. Although there were no single markers to easily identify those who would attack, there is information which should be taken into account:

- Only 25% have been diagnosed with a mental illness and less than 2% had been diagnosed with a psychotic disorder.
- 77% spend a week or longer planning their attack, which will usually occur in a familiar place.
- 94% were male with a history of physical aggression, threatening behaviour and being abusive or oppressive.
- Every attacker displayed 4 or 5 worrying behaviours that were noticed by those around them. The most common were anger issues but also impulsivity, interpersonal problems, depression, anxiety, excessive risk-taking and disclosing violent intent to a third-party.
- For attackers under the age of 18, school peers and teachers, rather than family members, were more likely to be concerned about their behaviour.
- A year leading up to the attack stressful incidents had occurred, someone had died, family problems, issues around criminality and drug abuse.

These findings back up the Newman account of attackers feeling like they are a victim, have been treated unfairly, shut out, tribe-less.

Are these attackers just bad kids who have a violent streak, or would their behaviour change in a different environment? To look into this deeper, we'll go to Dr. Zimbardo.

Bad Apples?

Dr. Philip Zimbardo is a U.S. psychologist and a professor at Stanford University. He has authored many books including *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil*.

In looking at the factors, he says, which contribute and “grease the slippery slope of evil,” Zimbardo points to seven social processes:

- Mindlessly taking the first small step
- Dehumanization of others
- De-individuation of self
- Diffusion of personal responsibility
- Blind obedience to authority

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- Uncritical conformity to group norms
- Passive tolerance of evil through inaction or indifference

In applying these processes to schools, the “blind obedience” could be to an authority outside of the teaching realm such as a peer group. Conforming to “group norms” could refer to the aggressive and bullying norms of the group who are intimidating other students.

In trying to determine if these process are just down to the actions of “bad apples” Zimbardo says that would be a bad question, and that you have to reframe it, rather than asking “who is responsible,” you should ask “what is responsible.”

Social scientists solely focus on the “who” has caused the violent action. Zimbardo thinks they miss a big aspect and says:

People are the actors on the stage, but you’ll have to be aware of the situation. Who are the cast of characters? What is the costume? Is there a stage director?

He also says that unfamiliar situations cause a breakdown in habitual response patterns, disengaging normal personality and morality. Unfamiliar situations and alien environments are what many students find themselves in at school. They have no control, and the environment often feels unsafe and threatening.

Zimbardo is interested in the external factors surrounding the individual and provides the following insight about where the control lies:

- The Bad Apples – the individual’s disposition
- The Bad Barrels – the external situation
- The Bad Barrel-Makers – the influencing system (political or economic or legal)

He argues that the control lies within the system, that the Bad Barrel-Makers have all the power which often affects and corrupts individuals

This system is often devoid of safety, trust and empathy, which we will look at in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2

Safety, Trust And Empathy

Safety

If you don't feel safe, there is plenty of scientific research to show the psychologically damaging effects this can have on a person, especially on a young person who is going through the process of building their identity. And the damage is not only psychological, damage also occurs physically.

In his book, *The Pocket Guide to the Polyvagal Theory: The Transformative Power of Feeling Safe*, Dr. Stephen Porges tells us: "The important role of "safety" in our life is so intuitive and so relevant that it is surprising that our institutions neglect it."

Porges also says that "to connect and co-regulate with others is our biological imperative," and "a quest for safety is the basis for living a successful life."

So how does this all work biologically? How do we assess for our safety?

It all starts with the vagus nerve and the polyvagal nerves which branch off from it. The fascinating vagus nerve:

- Means 'wandering nerve' in Latin.
- Is the longest nerve of the nervous system.
- Links the brain stem to the heart, lungs and stomach.
- Carries information to the brain from the body.
- The branching polyvagal nerves reach out to the neck, ears, tongue, liver, spleen gall bladder and kidneys.
- Becomes damaged due to various health issues, both physical factors including a bad diet, diabetes and infections, or psychological factors including stress and anxiety.
- Manages and processes emotions, which is why a distressing event causes anxiety in the brain, constriction in the heart and an ache in the stomach.
- Calms the body through trustful touch when receiving signals from pressure receptors under the skin, then responds by

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slowing down the nervous system which lowers the heart rate and blood pressure

Porges puts forward that evolution has designed a system to determine threat. The first is a keen attention to social signalling and behaviour, the second and third responses are active defence strategies:

1. Social Engagement System - we detect how safe we are through the facial expressions, gestures and tones of voice of those around us. We are reading cues from faces and voices and watching gestures to determine the level of threat. Our nervous system anticipates reciprocal interactions from others, if we don't get them, either through being ignored or through hostility a huge shift occurs immediately to support the two defense strategies, fight/flight or freeze.
2. Fight or Flight – once we determine there is a threat (real or perceived, physical or mental) we will deactivate the Social Engagement System and mobilise for action. It is a biochemical response which causes major changes in the body including increased heart rate and blood pressure and trembling muscles which are ready to fight or run.
3. Freeze – some animals have a primitive defence response and play dead in the face of threat. The human equivalent is to freeze and shutdown, disengage and disassociate, become immobile, conserve energy and hide.

When we think about the adults in an educational setting, how do they connect to the Social Engagement System? Do they usually convey facial expressions and vocal tones which invite trust and safety. I think they are usually conveying furrowed brows and impatient shouts to restore order. And who can blame them. One teacher who came to work at the school in the U.S. told me how relieved she was to be able to be warm and friendly with the children. Her teacher training instructor in the UK, had told her one of the teacher control methods was to make sure she didn't smile in the classroom until Christmas :(

When I think about the children who have come to our schools, the secondary students, boys and girls, are often in the “Freeze” mode

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and completely closed down. They have tried to navigate through the Social Engagement System with adults and peers and found it to be non-responsive or hostile. They have sometimes travelled through the Fight or Flight level, found trouble and have had a label stamped on them. Then, gradually they find their way to the Freeze mode as everything switches off and closes down bit by bit and the death of spirit descends. You can see the shrouded eyes and feel the empty shell of hopelessness and you wonder if you'll ever see the light switch on again.

Primary students, especially girls can also be in shut down mode. However, many younger boys are often still in the fight/flight mode, which is harder to work through, but is more hopeful as they are still brilliantly vocal, angry and not yet ready to give up, roll over and play dead. Their spirit is still salvageable. The freeze-mode kids are easier to handle as they are sitting quietly in the corner, but they are often more difficult to reach, it usually takes longer and requires a lot of patience.

It would be easier to avoid them entering the fight/flight or freeze mode in the first place. How do we do this? Building trust is the first step.

Trust

In his book *The Thin Book of Trust: An Essential Primer for Building Trust at Work*, Author Charles Feltmantells tells us:

Trust is fundamental to our sense of safety, autonomy and dignity as human beings. It is also an integral part of every relationship we have. When we trust someone we feel safe to share what is important to us including our thoughts, ideas, efforts, hopes, and concerns. Distrust is essentially the opposite of trust in that it is a choice not to make yourself vulnerable to another person's actions. It is a general assessment that; what is important to me is not safe with this person in this situation (or any situation).

Feltman illustrates how our assessments about our environment creates emotions and behaviours which in turn affect our neurophysiology:

Assessments About Self:

TRUST: I am safe, I can handle whatever happens, I can be open and forthcoming.

DISTRUST: I am not safe, I can't handle what this person might do, I need to protect myself.

Associated Emotions:

TRUST: Hope, curiosity, generosity, care.

DISTRUST: Fear, anger, resentment, resignation

Behaviours:

TRUST: Cooperating, collaborating, engaging in conversations dialog and debate of ideas, listening, communicating, freely, supporting others, sharing information, offering ideas, expecting the best willingness to examine own actions.

DISTRUST: Defending, resisting, blaming, complaining, judging, avoiding, withholding information and ideas, expecting the worst, justifying protective actions based on distrust.

Neurophysiology

TRUST: Normal to elevated levels of oxytocin. Full availability of neocortex (the thinking brain) and limbic system brain structures to make decisions and take action. Ability to intervene in and change pre-programmed neural patterns.

DISTRUST: The brain's primary defense system (i.e., the amygdala) is "warmed up" and primed for any sign of imminent danger. Present are elevated levels of adrenaline, cortisol and other "fight/flight/freeze" chemicals. Limited use of neocortex, greater reliance on defense-related, pre-programmed neural patterns for making decisions and taking action.

It would be interesting to carry out surveys in schools to determine the level of trust.

Empathy

American psychiatrist, Doctor Bruce Parry works with children and adolescents, focusing on how the biology of the brain changes after traumatic events, he also examines the long term effects of trauma on children.

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In his book *Born For Love: Why empathy is essential – and endangered*, he talks about the importance of recognising that the brain is a multi-system organ which evolved at different times. He asks us to think of the brain like an upside-down pyramid, the narrow base is the reptilian part of the brain, the most primitive part which regulates basic functions such as heart rate. Then developed the midbrain which regulates sleep, appetite and motivation. The midbrain operates unconsciously and is the location where the stress response originates. Next is the limbic system which surrounds the midbrain and includes the amygdala, hippocampus and hypothalamus. This responsible for the experience and expression of emotion, memories, and current experience. The amygdala is the hotspot for fear, anger and survival, and responds to threat or danger by sounding the fight or flight alarm. If adults are ill, tired, stressed, or overly emotional, they can regress back to these basic brain responses, bypassing the rational cortex and heading straight for the reptilian baby-brain, when there is often an uncontrollable need to cry or lash out or run for the hills - or all three. If adults are quite capable of exhibiting baby-brain tendencies, we need to have an understanding of how prevalent this can be in children.

The final and most advanced brain region to develop, is the widest top part of the pyramid, and is called the cortex. The cortex is responsible for language, abstract thought and planning, and is unique to humans.

However, when the stress response alarm is activated, the cortex, this most advanced part of the brain is hijacked. If the body is under threat (perceived or real) it is not useful to your survival to think slowly and rationally. That is why you can't think straight if you are ill/tired/stressed/emotional.

In applying this to students who sit behind desks, consuming information, they have no opportunity to challenge themselves and learn how to respond to the stress response. If you look inside a classroom you can see who is struggling, sitting frozen, waiting for the end of class. Or the kids who are self soothing, furiously tapping pencils or rocking back and forth on their chairs, or getting into trouble for being too disruptive.

Dr. Perry believes that many of our educational environments are “relationally impoverished” due to the high ratio of children to adults. He thinks that teachers can't possibly attend to the developmental needs of so many children. This can lead to a large

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number of children who lack empathy and are unable to regulate their emotions, decision making and are struggling with social interactions.

Dr. Perry's work highlights the basic human need to connect to others. In his book: *The Boy Who Was Raised As A Dog*, he tells us about one of his patients, a young boy, Peter, who had been brought up in a Russian orphanage until the age of three. The staff were only able to care for the most basic needs of feeding and changing as the babies and small children did not receive much attention. They responded to this lack of attention and affection by connecting to each other. They held hands through the bars of the cots and they created a new basic language so they could communicate with each other. When Doctor Perry started working with Peter, his adoptive parents told him that he'd had a really challenging time in kindergarten, that his odd behaviour frightened the other children and they were hesitant about having him start school. Doctor Perry advised them to let Peter start school, he then contacted the school and asked if he could come in to do a basic lesson on how the brain works. The school agreed. Soon after Peter had started school, Doctor Perry went along to his class and with the agreement of Peter and his parents, told the class about the difficult start Peter had encountered during his early years and how it had changed how his brain works. The mini lesson was a big success and the children, now understanding why Peter was different, went out of their way to befriend him and to look out for him. Peter's development then embarked on an upwards trajectory culminating in a productive and happy educational experience right through to high school.

Dr. Perry tells us: "we are not creating developmental experiences and environments to fully express (students) potential to be empathic."

Dr. Perry also tells us we can't expect to have "well developed, mature empathic engagement if (children) have had 1/24th of the relational interactions that a hunter gather tribe would provide for a young child."

He claims relationships are the agents of change:

If you don't understand these relational things, you're never going to figure out healthcare problems. You're never going to figure out mental health problems, you're never going to figure out social health problems. You're never going to figure

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out the educational system. It's all about relationships. If you don't understand about relational neurobiology, you're screwed. You will tinker around the edges of solving these problems, but you will never get to the core.

Dr. Perry believes that you cannot 'therapise' away the effects of trauma if you don't have healthy relationships around you in your family, community, schools and workplaces. He states that "current therapy models are far too relationally impoverished" and weekly sessions just scratch the surface. He says the only way to address this meaningfully is through a supportive relational social environment.

Dr. Perry's insights into relational poverty and relational health backs up every encounter I've had with a student who is struggling with low levels of trauma or who have had a major incident happen in their lives which has shaken them to the core. The relationships formed with myself, the teachers and those on the periphery of school life have helped to recognise and nurture empathy. However, those relationships need to be able to exist within a framework. It is almost impossible to create close and trusting relationships between students and teachers if there is a psychological separation.

In the next chapter, I will explain how the academic and social framework I introduced to the primary and secondary school was able to close that separation.

CHAPTER 3

Project Based Learning & Portal Projects

In both the primary and secondary schools, connection was created through specific educational models. In the primary stage the model was based on Project Based Learning (PBL). The secondary stage of education was delivered through traditional coursework for specific exams, but also included Non-Exam Subjects. These subjects are mostly explained in Part III, Chapter 5, apart from The Portal Projects (TPP) which I write about throughout the book. TPP were the key to the emotional development and maturity of the students in the secondary school.

Project Based Learning

PBL is now used in many schools throughout the U.K. The projects generally last for 6-8 weeks, and begin with an authentic and complex question such as “How Would You Create the Perfect Eco Village?”

Then begins the gathering of base-line knowledge, what are the students familiar with, have they visited an area of interest, watched a documentary, a movie, talked to a person with strong eco views. Then there is the real-world connection, for our school’s eco village project, we were able to contact a person who was working in South America, he was making sure that the building of a dam wouldn’t have adverse effects on the local village and surrounding wildlife. We had many Skype calls with this contact and were able to follow the project for a few months. This was really exciting for the students.

The Buck Institute for Education has a website dedicated to PBL stating:

PBL blends content mastery, meaningful work, and personal connection to create powerful learning experiences, in terms of both academic achievement and students’ personal growth.

PBL can be transformative for students, especially those furthest from educational opportunity. Now more than ever,

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we need young people who are ready, willing, and able to tackle the challenges of their lives and the world they will inherit - and nothing prepares them better than Project Based Learning.

Teachers often question project work, they worry that it won't provide the vast but thin layer of knowledge usually required within the prescribed curriculum. However the normal transfer of knowledge cannot be guaranteed to be beneficial.

Author Napoleon Hill wrote in 1937:

Knowledge is only potential power. It becomes power only when, and if, it is organized into definite plans of action, and directed to a definite end.

The Portal Projects (TPP)

TPP do not use drama in the traditional sense, whereby the 'actors' receive a script, learn their lines and deliver a performance. This is responsive, active and student-led drama, whereby all students are provided with the same storyline from history. They are then given the name of a character, which they research, and then have the task of interpreting the language, attitudes and behaviours of that person. They are also interacting and responding to the characters of the other students, who may be aligned or opposed to their views and actions.

The process of TPP causes all students to be more attuned to others. They observe non-verbal clues, read body language and facial expressions. They are attentive to verbal nuances and use quality questions to elicit the views of others.

The key to the huge success of TPP lies in the competitive component. The students work in two teams; they have to present their case to win a trial, or run a campaign to secure votes, or pitch their vision to secure fictitious funding. This aspect adds a game element which is exciting and brings student activity and engagement to an incomparable level.

Through the process of adopting a character, and becoming familiar with their lives, relationships and motivations (over the course of many weeks), a depth of human understanding is generated.

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Certainty, judgment and hostility towards their own character's actions, or the behaviour of other characters, is mostly replaced by empathy, tolerance and a raised awareness of how situations are often not as they seem.

The response we have to the behaviour of others stems from two sources; the first is the intricate and complex prompts from the external world, from the actions of others or from situations which are out of our control, the second source comes from our own internal mind-set, our map of the world, which is often emotive and contradictory (more about internal maps later).

Through TPP, teenage self-consciousness diminishes as the students become fascinated with their character, and eager to examine their psyche and subsequent motivations. They then can assess the challenging situation and explore the different options available, in an attempt to find answers, right the wrongs, and to bring a sense of order to the life of this person from the past.

The engagement with the material is palpable within the classroom. However the real power and magic of the projects lies within the effortless journey the students take, from the introspection of the character's toils and troubles to that of their own. A willingness to express personal feelings soon emerges into the prevailing culture. This is not such a huge shift for the majority of girls, but for most boys, it is a game-changer. Boys are able to drop the mask of male toughness, coolness and indifference, and realise that the huge emotions they often encounter within themselves *are* normal and *are* controllable. The process forges closer connections between all students, and avoids isolation and rejection which can often be seen in a traditional classroom (a research study, which I write about in Part I, Chapter 7, tells how these projects can *eliminate* isolation in a classroom).

A disregard for those feelings and emotions leads to the shut down and disconnection we see in all students who are in crisis mode.

The projects orient the students to the external world, rather than remaining locked inside their own mind listening to their ongoing, often self-sabotaging, narrative. The students also learn that their internal voice is not who they are, it a left-over remnant from long ago when we had to constantly survey our surroundings for threats. The voice, and the critical messages it sends, and therefore the fear-based emotions it creates, can be altered. It is an essential lesson for

them to take into their future (more about this in Part II, Chapter 5).

I based TPP on a very successful U.S. programme entitled “React To The Past,” (RTTP) created by Mark Carnes who is a Professor of History at Barnard College in New York. His book, *Minds On Fire - How Role Immersion Games Transform College*, is based on the program.

He tells us that RTTP came about almost by accident, not out of traditional educational theory. It organically surfaced when one of his students decided that a classroom debate wasn't being taken seriously by the other students and insisted on going into full character mode. Professor Carnes agreed to the student's request which culminated in a transformational learning experience. He then worked over the next twenty years to improve and develop RTTP which now sees many students assume roles informed by classic texts and debate fundamental issues raised during pivotal historical episodes. It is now used at over 350 institutions, including liberal arts colleges, honors programs, regional universities, and community colleges. It has also been honored with awards for pedagogical innovation and has also been featured in various magazines and newspapers including The New York Times.

Professor Carnes attributes the book's content to the ninety students from thirty colleges and universities whom he interviewed over four years. Their opinions and ideas about RTTP are the central theme of *Minds on Fire*.

Professor Carnes has very generously given me permission to refer to his book and the RTTP projects.

At our secondary school, I developed the ideas from RTTP, the main differences were in response to working with secondary school students, rather than college or university students.

TPP differentiate from RTTP in the following areas:

- The RTTP students are provided with a detailed account of their character and a file of information to research. TPP only gave the students the character's name, they have to research who they were. The historical event is provided, but not the details, this information also has to be gleaned by the students.
- The RTTP programme works from specific textbooks.

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TPP designs bespoke projects with a focus on local historical events or from student interest and choice.

- The TPP facilitators provided “Disrupters” to the storyline, these were plot twists, a complication, which saw fictitious new elements brought into the game to elevate the challenge (more information about Disrupters in Part III, Chapter 4).
- TPP have a specific assessment measurement (TPP taxonomy, listed later) and the drama is used as a tool to bring about student development and maturity.
- TPP are separated into distinct phases, Individual, Team, and Opposition (listed in chapter 6)

TPP are explained in more detail in Part I, Chapter 6: TPP In Action.

TPP are also part of the Non-Exam Projects, information outlined in Part III, Chapter 5.

The Seven Strategies and Strengths of PBL and TPP

There are examples of PBL and TPP (also referred to as ‘projects’), throughout the book, however the main strategies can be listed as:

1. *Diverse Development.*

Eliminates frustration by enabling curriculum access to all students, regardless of ability.

2. *Order & chaos.*

Places students on the threshold of challenge and engagement.

3. *Popularity and Equality.*

Identifies a student’s hierarchical classroom placement through Sociometric Groups.

4. *Mental Maps*

Applies principles to explore the relationships between how we think how we communicate and use language, and how we sequence our actions and our patterns of behaviour to achieve our goals.

5. *Perspectives and Maturity.*

Employs perspective taking to develop the pre-frontal cortex, thereby maturing and developing brain function.

6. *Tough and Tender.*

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A tough approach to discipline; and the provision of a tender and non-punitive response for those involved.

7. Connection to parents and caregivers.

The implementation of 'Personal Learning Plans,' agreed upon by parents, caregivers teachers and students. Frequently reviewed and amended.

1. Diverse Development

One of the most fundamental aspect about PBL and TPP is that they are directed by the learner. This allows the opportunity for them to veer off on a tangent and discover something that resonates with them so deeply, that it changes who they are, how they think and what they will do with their futures.

In my experience, projects are the key to social and academic success for all children and young people because they allow the student direct access to their learning from their individual ability level. Much of the anguish students face is through the misalignment of the curriculum offering, to where they are in their own personal development. If they are an excellent writer, but not so strong in maths, the problem areas are focused on by the teacher, and then successively, by the parents and the student. Unless the students are on point with the curriculum across the board, they will struggle to enjoy the experience of school. Because the system is designed that way.

Our primary school in Los Angeles, was highly heterogeneous with around twenty-five to thirty children with a range of ages (between five and ten), different ethnicities, cultures, language skills, and academic abilities. They were all developmentally diverse, but every one of them could access the project based curriculum and every child was able to progress at their own pace.

An eight year old student came to the school for two months from Japan, he did not speak one word of English, but he was able to integrate into the group and produce great work because of the projects. He would produce drawings and point to a house or a car and say what they were called in Japanese, the other students would then tell him the word in English. It was amazing to see this spontaneous transfer of information happening. His family said it

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was the first time he had enjoyed being at school.

The roles within the projects were tailor-made for each individual student. Gone was the daily attempt at coercing the students to produce work or for them to sit and listen to information. Working with projects saw the students happily produce excellent standards of work. Projects do keep the teachers busy, and probably require more energy than standing at the front of the class, but it's a different requirement, it is an absolute joy to circle around the classroom helping those who need it and leaving alone those that don't. If it gets busy, in a class of different ages, we would often turn to other students for help: "Sam worked on that last week, he found a good way of...making a video/writing an article/giving a presentation..." the other student loved being of use, of being the specialist. Also there were other adults, parents or volunteers within school who were always happy to help.

Adults are not expected to excel in all areas, we are able to specialise in an area we feel we are good at and those areas we are not so strong in, we don't go near. However when it comes to educating our young, they are expected to do well in all subjects. Striving to do your best work across the board is fine, but often the lack of success in one area obliterates the success they do have in another area.

In our primary and secondary school, it was vital to pan back and look at the whole range of skills a child or young person demonstrated and to recognise each student had their own ability level which was always taken into consideration.

The three main developmental areas we focused on were Academic, Social and Creative. For my own records, and to use in conversations with parents and teachers, I would chart where the students sat in each area. If they were very academic and struggled socially we would give lots of opportunity to gently nudge them into socially challenging situations. If their social skills were honed but they needed to advance more with reading or writing, then that would be the focus. If they lacked creativity in thinking or producing practical applications, then this is where we would focus.

Creativity played a huge part of the daily life at school, either through the projects or through puzzles, quizzes or tasks for the projects. A firm favourite tool for creative thinking in the primary school was a daily puzzle from the *Solve The Mystery* books, whereby the students had to manipulate abstractive information and build a picture with

clues to find the solution.

The objective was to provide opportunities which would allow them to gently evolve and develop in areas in which they found difficulty. There was also the opportunity for them to excel in areas they felt more comfortable. We wanted a holistic educational experience for all of the children.

In the secondary school in Scotland, assessments for the traditional classes of maths and science followed the usual processes. However, the assessment for the projects was developed to respond to the specific objective skills.

The secondary school was registered as Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) Centre, so students were able to sit National 5, Higher, and Advanced Higher exams. The exams were optional and not age-related, the students could sit the exams when they felt ready to do so, sometimes that meant a fourteen year-old sat a Higher exam, or a seventeen year-old would sit a National 5 exam.

The decision to become an SQA Exam Centre was a difficult one. I wanted the school to be a centre for learning, not an exam factory, but I didn't want to close down any options which would help a student get to where they wanted to go. Exams are useful for showing the retention of content and sadly they are still the main driver for university placements, however, they are not useful to measure the real development of a student. In the first year of exams we only offered English, maths and physics. The lessons for these subjects usually took place in the morning and left plenty of time in the afternoon to work on Non-Exam Subjects, which consisted of rich learning experiences through projects which did not culminate in a traditional exam.

(Non-Exam Subjects are outlined in Part III, Chapter 5)

These Non-Exam Subjects were the life-blood of both schools. They produced such excitement and motivation which helped the students tackle the more narrow areas of study needed for the exams, which they often found boring.

The students relished the freedom, creativity and informality of the projects, which were not constantly being measured for progress towards exams. A student could study full-time at our secondary school, and not have to take any exams but could leave with an impressive portfolio, displaying demonstrable skills, and confidence

in their ability to be in the world.

I arranged a visit with a local university. The whole admissions team attended, and I told them about our secondary school and asked them how they would view a student who applied with a strong portfolio, but less than the necessary exams. Their answer was that it depended on which course this related to, obviously medicine requires certain exams, whilst other subjects might be more flexible. It was a good meeting, and one of the admission managers said that they viewed portfolio work in a different way. Small steps.

I created a list of measurable skills, a taxonomy, to assess what the students had accomplished within each project:

SELF MANAGEMENT

<i>Self Awareness</i>	Identifying your own thoughts, emotions and behaviours.
<i>Maturity</i>	Perspective taking skills.
<i>Emotional Intelligence</i>	Reflecting on situations to identify what works well and what doesn't.
<i>Social Awareness</i>	Being aware of the feelings and views of others.
<i>Moral Judgments</i>	Understanding the ethical implications behind decisions.
<i>Intellectual Curiosity</i>	Being perceptive, asking why things are as they are.
<i>Decision Making</i>	Awareness of the consequence of our choices and how those choices impact others.
<i>Leadership Style</i>	Developing skills which encourage and inspire others.
<i>Work Ethic</i>	Working to personal highest standard.
<i>Goal Setting</i>	Prioritising tasks and setting realistic outcomes.
<i>Time Management</i>	Having an efficient system to ensure deadlines are met.
<i>Stress Tolerance</i>	Techniques to keep calm and focused.

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<i>Life Design</i>	How to plan and prototype your life.
<i>Mastery of Learning</i>	Knowing how to learn, develop ideas and manage content.
<i>Innovation/ Creativity</i>	Unafraid to try new things, accept failure and learn from it.
<i>Global Citizenship</i>	An awareness of and an interest in global situations.
<i>Adaptability</i>	Changing perspectives to include other people's ideas or needs.

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

<i>Knowledge</i>	Knowing how to manage and synthesise information.
<i>Research Skills</i>	Ensuring a balanced and objective understanding of information is in place.
<i>Logical Reasoning</i>	Knowing what is opinion and what is fact.
<i>Cause & Effect</i>	Seeing the patterns and directional outcomes of informational processes.
<i>Investigate Sources</i>	Checking sources for validity.
<i>News Literacy</i>	Being aware of what is going on in the world checking sources for accuracy.
<i>Merging/ Blending</i>	Taking a complex subject and pulling a descriptive summary together.
<i>Digital Literacy</i>	Computer skills and how to find information.
<i>Expressing Ideas</i>	Develop vocabulary and articulate ideas and opinions in a clear way.

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

<i>Teamwork</i>	Ability to quickly form working groups and find a place within a team.
<i>Networking</i>	Ability to find who you need to help you.

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<i>Emergent Leadership</i>	Putting yourself forward when you can lead a team and falling back when somebody else is more capable.
<i>Opposing Perspectives</i>	Reflecting on a view that does not align with my own.
<i>Independent Views</i>	Standing by what I feel strongly about.
<i>Communication</i>	Ensuring my message is being understood.
<i>Listening Skills</i>	Being aware of the levels of listening, and practice listening with presence
<i>Questioning Skills</i>	Asking high-level questions.
<i>Verbal Reasoning</i>	Conducting an opposing debate in a respectful way.
<i>Empathy</i>	Recognising people's emotions and perspectives.
<i>Integrity</i>	Being courageous, stand by your personal values.
<i>Reliability</i>	Sticking to commitments.
<i>Sense of Humour</i>	Ability to see the funny or ironic issues in a situation.

After each project, we would sit down with the students and talk about each point and ask them to give examples of where they thought they had done well, or where they could improve.

Often parents would attend these meetings, especially if the student was facing difficulties, either academically, socially or emotionally.

Parents were often surprised when I showed them the list. Some asked, worryingly, if all of them need to be met, but the list is not a checklist, it is a guide for the students, teachers and parents, something on which to base a conversation. If I had to pick the most important skill on the list, I would say working towards maturity, the ability to detach from peers, to seek the guidance and advice from older more mature role models and make good decisions. Children and young people don't mature by hanging around with children and young people. They have fun, but they don't mature, the more time kids spend with other kids, the more they will stay in kid-mode and healthy development to adulthood is

delayed.

The maturation process doesn't happen by accident. Careful planning has to be put in place to help the students develop the parts of the brain which don't come "on-line" until mid twenties.

TPP are the answer to assist this process, but first you have to throw them into chaos.

2. ORDER & CHAOS

I believe the secret to projects is the freedom to be able to meet the need for certainty, structure and familiarity, whilst also meeting the desire for uncertainty, adventure and potential. The balance of order and chaos:

Order

Contribution -Prior, tested knowledge to share with your team.

Responsibility -Creating a plan which relies on you alone.

Accomplishment-Relying on developed skills to use to move forward.

Meaning-Creating something which has relevance in the world.

Chaos

Adventure -Potential for future spirited action and creativity. Open to new ideas and experiences.

Persuasion -Bringing people onboard with your ideas, negotiation.

Excitement – Directing your work. Being challenged.

Engagement- Connecting to the new and novel.

Leaving the familiar- Overcoming trepidation about the unknown.

Too much order and the students are comfortable and bored, too much chaos and the students are uncomfortable and overwhelmed. An attachment to too much order stifles creativity, an attachment to too much chaos is unproductive.

The design of the projects incorporates and provides the foundation for the interplay back and forth between the delicate balance of order and chaos. The sweet spot of engagement.

The student travels in the orderly direction they think best to produce

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the piece of work, but then chaos strikes and things go wrong; the amazing eco house collapses just before the presentation, your teammates have just vetoed your proposal, you've ran out of time to finish your model before the meeting.

The chaos parallels real world problems which arise all of the time for adults. Whilst being fairly stressful, frustrating and challenging, the chaotic situations are when the students go into top gear and stretch themselves to find solutions, elicit support and keep going. It's viewed as an exciting adventure in which anything can happen. The school ethos stipulates that failing is inevitable, it's how you respond when things don't go to plan, that's where the work lies. Fearing failure is a sure way to fear everything.

The stoics were well-versed in facing challenges and seeing them as an opportunity to expand our skills. The Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius, called "The Philosopher," said:

Our actions may be impeded, but there can be no impeding our intentions or dispositions. Because we can accommodate and adapt. The mind adapts and converts to its own purposes the obstacle to our acting. The impediment to action advances action. What stands in the way becomes the way.

Manipulating order and chaos and reconciling what we can control and what we cannot through the projects, is an excellent opportunity to learn to manage the stress response and to look at things in a new perspective. A problem occurs, either relational or practical, the student might respond with stress, upset or anger, or all three. This is when you lead them back to the action based "Project Plan:"

The plan is the overarching guidelines for the projects, and are taken from NLP (more info on NLP later):

1. What are the on-going action steps? - Who is doing what, when, how?
2. What are we moving towards? - Desired state or outcome.
3. Why are we moving? - Examine choices/values.
4. How will we get there? - Strategies/ideas.
5. What are the resources? - Materials/skills/timeframes.
6. How will we measure it? - What will we see, hear, feel?

7. What if something goes wrong? - Contingency planning.

Hopefully, a solution can be found by going through the plan. Maybe they have already thought about this in their risk management section? Maybe the person who they've argued with has interpreted the plan in a different way, has a different perspective? (More about perspectives later).

Maybe there just isn't a solution. Obstacles then have to be examined to determine if something can be affected by action or not. What is outside of our control must be accepted and worked with, otherwise time spent wishing it were different is time wasted.

In Latin, "amor fati" translates to "a love of one's fate."

Accepting reality, how things are is of paramount importance. This acceptance shows where the students are in their development.

3. Popularity and Equality

As soon as children start school, and even before that, their social lives play a huge role in how they take stock of their day. At pick up, parents are so much more likely to hear about lunch times interactions, than the actual school work. How someone has been mean and wouldn't let them sit at their table, to or how they had a nice chat with their friend.

Along with the experiences comes the emotions. Happy because they've had a socially successful day or miserable and tired because the social exchanges have been confusing and exhausting. If they've had a difficult day, then their learning and development have definitely suffered.

Then follows a shift in their personality as they quickly learn about what behaviours will bring them the most socially successful experiences. This often becomes more important to them than the learning. Pushing themselves forward in a bid to be liked and noticed and popular or pulling themselves away to hide and try to become invisible.

The long-term effects of this persona-altering behaviour on our individual psychology are brought to light in a book by Mitch Prinstein, Director of Clinical Psychology at the University of North Carolina: *Popular: Why Being Liked is the Secret to Greater Success and Happiness*.

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In the book *Prinstein* tells us that we are ‘hard-wired’ to crave popularity, which has a long-lasting effect on the decisions we make, how we handle relationships, and our parenting skills. He says:

Popularity affects us throughout our lives, often in ways we don’t realize. At some level, you may already perceive that to be true. Isn’t it interesting that when we remember who was most or least popular back in high school, it brings up some of the same emotions today as it did back then? The mere mention of the word “popular” has the power to transport us back to our teenage years. We graduate high school, make new friends, find stable romantic relationships, and get settled in our careers, but somewhere deep inside, we know that some part of who we are today— our self-esteem, our insecurities, our career successes or failures, and perhaps even our happiness— is still linked to how popular we were back then. There’s something about our popularity in youth that seems to remain a part of who we are, as if it’s become deeply embedded in our souls forever.

When our children first attend school, it seems all we can do is watch them try to navigate their way around the popularity game. The exposure to all types of interactions and social exchanges happens frequently throughout the day. If you get really lucky, your child could be mixing with other children who become trusted peers, respectful and encouraging and it can be a wonderful nurturing and healthy place in which to learn and grow.

Can teachers observe and even measure those all-important peer relationships? It turns out, they can.

Sociometric is Latin for *socius* which means companion and *metrum* which means measure. The OED cites the definition of Sociometry as: “The study of relationships within a group of people.”

It is also described as “The measurement of attitudes of social acceptance or rejection through expressed preferences among members of a social grouping.

Sociometry was developed by Romanian-American psychiatrist, Jacob L. Moreno (1889-1974), and Helen Hall Jennings (1905-1966) a social psychologist who specialised in empirical research design.

They both studied how psychological wellbeing was affected by social

relations and also the structure of groups and the positions of individuals within those groups.

In Moreno's 1934 book, *Who Shall Survive? A New Approach to the Problem of Human Interrelations*, he says:

Who Shall Survive? Is a question which has been asked thus far from the point of view of the biologist. We are raising this question again, but it is from the point of view of the sociologist, more precisely, that of the sociometrist. Which are the "social" laws of natural selection? Who shall survive? The questions could be asked only in a society which is, as sociometry has proven with overwhelming evidence, satisfied with wasting a very considerable part of its human element. In contrast, it would lose meaning in a sociometric society where no one would be cast out and all be given an opportunity to participate to the best of their abilities, in other words, to survive.

Before moving to New York, Moreno studied philosophy, medicine, and mathematics at the University of Vienna. In his autobiography, Moreno writes about his meeting with Sigmund Freud in 1912:

I attended one of Freud's lectures. He had just finished an analysis of a telepathic dream. As the students filed out, he singled me out from the crowd and asked me what I was doing. I responded, "Well, Dr. Freud, I start where you leave off. You meet people in the artificial setting of your office. I meet them on the street and in their homes, in their natural surroundings. You analyze their dreams. I give them the courage to dream again. You analyze and tear them apart. I let them act out their conflicting roles and help them to put the parts back together again."

In Anthony Williams book, *Forbidden Agendas – Strategic Action in Groups*, he tells us:

Sociometric explorations reveal the hidden structures that give a group its form: the alliances, the subgroups, the hidden beliefs, the forbidden agendas, the ideological agreements, the 'stars' of the show.

A Sociometric System was developed by John D. Coie & Kenneth A. Dodge in the 1980's.

In their report entitled "Continuities and Changes in Children's Social Status: A Five-Year Longitudinal Study," they write about a study with ninety six third graders, and one hundred and twelve fifth graders (age 8-9 and 10-11), across a five-year period. The children are provided with a confidential survey in which they are asked to assess their classmates.

The Surveys identified character traits such as:

- Cooperative – Good to have in your group, they are agreeable, pitch in, shares and gives everyone a turn.
- Disruptive – Upsets everything within a group, doesn't share, and wants everyone to do what they want to do.
- Acts Shy – plays and works by themselves. It is difficult to get to know them.
- Starts Fights – says mean things, pushes them around, or hits them.
- Leader – Other kids choose this person to be in charge.

The participants were then asked to provide the names of three classmates and insert them into their category. The selections were calculated and transferred to scores for "Liked Most" and "Liked Least." The responses then were classified into five groups:

1. Average Group:

These are the children in the middle, who don't strongly fit into the following four categories.

2. Rejected Group:

These children are liked by few and disliked by many. This is the group most studied by clinical psychologists. Coie's report states:

An empirical connection between social maladjustment in childhood, and maladjustment in later life carries with it the implication that childhood maladjustment is itself a fairly stable and consistent phenomenon. Those children rejected by their peers in early school years are also rejected by peers in later years.

Coie also tells us that two types of characters reflect the rejected category, A- Aggressive, they are rude, angry, violent, cruel, and display inappropriate behaviour, they lack empathy. B- Non-aggressive, non-hostile, rejected because of how they look or act, they are immature, annoying, or too smart (“too smart” doesn’t apply to primary students whose high achieving status earn them popularity, however this wanes by the end of primary).

Children don’t have to be rejected to be aggressive and only half of those rejected are aggressive. The children who are rejected and aggressive fare the worst later on. Many sociologists have now linked earlier social isolation and rejection to poorer health and the inability to forge healthy relationships.

Naomi Eisenberger from UCLA writes about the neural bases of social pain and says exclusion and social rejection experiences activate the same areas in the brain as physical pain.

The rejection does not need to be overt; subtle social rejection or even imagining being rejected causes physiological changes in the structure of our DNA.

George Slavich and Steve Cole, from the University of California are experts in the field of human social genomics. They say our genes are exquisitely “sensitive to social rejection.” They have found that very soon, under an hour, after a social rejection experience, our genes have decided which parts of our DNA to turn on or off. This process is called “epigenetics,” changes which affect gene activity and expression. Those changes could be from external factors, like fear of being alone, cast out from the tribe, at which time our bodies still have the survival instincts from thousands of years ago.

Slavich and Cole have found that when we are rejected, there is a cellular-level effect - which alters our immune system and our inflammation response!

In his book, *Popular*, Prinstein provides a really clear account of Coie’s categories and says:

In the United States, suicide is the second leading cause of death in adolescence and young adulthood...One of the most common risk factors for suicide attempts is feeling lonely, like a burden to others or like one doesn’t belong. Among adolescents in particular, ostracism from a peer group

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is an especially strong predictor of suicidal behaviour.

A report by Julianne Holt-Lunstad, a psychologist at Brigham Young University, reveals:

Humans are naturally social, yet, the modern way of life in industrialized countries is greatly reducing the quantity and quality of social relationships.

People with stronger social relationships had a 50% increased likelihood of survival than those with weaker social relationships...Although further research is needed to determine exactly how social relationships can be used to reduce mortality risk, physicians, health professionals, educators, and the media should now acknowledge that social relationships influence the health outcomes of adults and should take social relationships as seriously as other risk factors that affect mortality.

(More information in Part I, Chapter 7, Sociality and Loneliness).

3. Accepted Group:

These children have type 1 popularity based on likability. They are highly liked by most other children. You can see them in the classrooms, or the school yards, they are surrounded by other children, all wanting to be in their company. They are nice kids, they are not full of their own importance, they are kind and helpful, they listen to others, making them feel comfortable and liked. They are easy to be with: there is no disruption or drama.

Prinstein tells us:

There is one factor that has remarkable power to predict life trajectories. It predicts which children thrive. It predicts which employees succeed. It even predicts who enjoys more rewarding romantic relationships and better physical health... That factor is likability.

...Likeable people live in a different world from the one inhabited by their unlikable peers. It is a world of their own making, and it produces a chain reaction of experiences that molds their lives in dramatic ways.

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Prinstein also points to the fact that “likeability seems to be more important than intelligence and the power of likeability is not only found in the primary classroom, the presence or lack of this powerful characteristic follows us around all of our lives into old age.”

He introduces us to research which shows that accepted children are far less likely to drop out of school, commit crimes or experience mental illness as an adult. Children picked as the most likeable kids have better jobs, more promotions, good relationships with friends and partners. These findings were reproduced through similar studies in China.

Prinstein says being accepted and likeable are not related to being introverted or extroverted. The likeable kids:

- Picks up on social cues.
- Are socially creative, can solve problems.
- Do not disrupt the group.
- Senses conflict or consensus.
- Are usually well adjusted.
- Are smart, but not too much.
- Are often in a good mood.
- Are good conversationalists.
- Usually defers to others, listening to their opinions.

4. Neglected Group:

These children are not nominated as liked or disliked; they are invisible and friendless. They can be found in the corner, out of the way working on solo tasks. Later on they tend to choose jobs which don't involve too much contact with other people. However, depending on how they feel about being alone, these children often don't suffer as much as the rejected children do. They *can* move from the neglected status into the popular or average categories. They are not likely to find themselves in the rejected or controversial categories.

5. Controversial Group:

These children are liked by some and have type 2 popularity based on status. However they are also disliked. They are loud and confident, the “stars of the show.” They are socially suave, strategic and manipulative. They can be aggressive and dominant. They love attention and want to be admired, even envied by others. They are vain and boastful and brag of their accomplishments. They are often

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immature. Later on they can become rejected or popular, they are not likely to become average.

Pursuers of high status often seem like they have the world at their feet in the short term, but this sours over time.

Prinstein writes about a study, which included high status celebrity participants, from the world of film, music, journalism and sports. They all reported experiencing the following stages:

- Stage 1: Elation. Loves to receive attention and adoration.
- Stage 2: Overwhelmed. The attention becomes too much to bear.
- Stage 3: Resentment. The attention is ruining their lives.
- Stage 4: Addiction. Hate the attention but are addicted to it.
- Stage 5: Splitting. Separate the self into the adored and the authentic.
- Stage 6: Loneliness and Depression. Others feel inferior, so leave.
- Stage 7: Wishing for something else. Try to create human connection through other means such as humanitarian work.

In a 2014 study, Joseph P. Allen, professor of psychology at the University of Virginia, wanted to know what would happen to the cool kids who were in search of school fame, but in all probability would not hit the heady heights of real fame and celebrity status. So, for ten years, he followed the behavioural habits of eighty six boys and ninety eight girls.

In his report he writes:

Pseudomature behavior — ranging from minor delinquency to precocious romantic involvement — is widely viewed as a nearly normative feature of adolescence. When such behavior occurs early in adolescence, however, it was hypothesized to reflect a misguided overemphasis upon impressing peers and was considered likely to predict long-term adjustment problems.

At the beginning of the study around twenty percent of the students were thought of as the “cool kids,” those who you would “most like to spend time on a Saturday night.” However, this thinking changed over the following years, as the cool kids were looking for more extreme ways of retaining their coolness and impressing their friends,

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they were losing their fans and their initial hard won status. Some of the pseudomature adolescents were experiencing life at full speed, staying out late at parties, smoking, drinking, skipping school, and having intimate relationships. They were running into major problems by the end of the study.

Many of them were dealing with alcohol and drug abuse, or they were facing legal issues, or were not able to maintain healthy relationships.

They had bypassed the development of healthy mature behaviour like behaving responsibly and all of the traits the likable kids display, and tried to short-cut their way to maturity and adulthood and it hadn't worked.

In an article in the New York times, Jan Hoffman writes:

Dr. Allen suggested that while they were chasing popularity, they were missing a critical developmental period. At the same time, other young teenagers were learning about soldering same-gender friendships while engaged in drama-free activities like watching a movie at home together on a Friday night, eating ice cream. Parents should support that behavior and not fret that their young teenagers aren't "popular," he said.

The conclusion of the report makes for uncomfortable reading:

The findings support the proposition that early adolescent attempts to gain status via pseudomature behavior, are not simply passing annoyances of this developmental stage, but rather may signal movement down a problematic pathway and away from progress toward real psychosocial competence.

However, the stress is on the "*may* signal movement" and Dr. Allen points out that pseudomature behavior is not a firm predictor of future problems, but a predilection and many - over half - of the cool kids manage to mature and develop successfully.

In the first year of the Coie study, the categories were as follows:

3rd Grade

Popular - 22%, Rejected - 22%, Neglected - 20%, Controversial - 5%

5th Grade

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Popular - 24%, Rejected - 20%, Neglected - 19%, Controversial - 8%

These four categories made up around two thirds of the participants, the remaining fell into the 'Average' group.

The report says that, in primary school, it is rare to not be nominated by somebody. But by age eleven it is not rare at all, and many children have zero nominations.

Prinstein tells us about one of his studies which showed how children, placed into new peer groups, soon fall into their old categories. In less than an hour the previously categorised accepted child was leading a game and the previously categorised rejected child was excluded. Over half of children remain in their early categories through secondary school.

Seeing as how important the social interactions children have in school are to the rest of their lives, it is negligent to ignore mechanisms which could improve the situation?

In our schools, we didn't provide the students with a survey, but we knew, through observation, which students were being neglected or rejected or controversial.

Our primary objective was for the children to connect to each other - for each and every one of them to be accepted and liked. We believed, as did Moreno that we should strive for a society: "where no one would be cast out and all be given an opportunity to participate to the best of their abilities, in other words, to survive."

4. Mental Maps

I was on a steep learning curve when I first opened the primary school. Apart from working as an educational consultant, I had never managed a whole school, never mind a school which was trying to move away from the traditional provision. There were a few things which really helped. Firstly we started small, just a handful of students. Secondly, the parents who brought their children to the school wanted something different than what they'd found in other schools, so were willing to be open to new ideas. And thirdly, my prior experience in communications training.

I had always been interested in sociology and psychology and began

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studying the subjects when I left school. I soon realised the subjects didn't relate to what I was interested in and I didn't find Social Psychology, the understanding of individual behaviour in a social context, until many years later, or that is what I would have chosen to study. Psychology seemed to be based on the study of how people's mental state affects their behaviours in a negative way. I wanted to study what makes people become more motivated and how successful people managed their mental state.

I lived in Washington D.C. for many years during my twenties. The 'American Psychological Association' (APA) was based close to the company I worked for and we did business with them. When Martin Seligman was inaugurated as the president of APA in 1998, he said that psychologists need to study what makes happy people happy and started to study Positive Psychology. He gave the following speech:

The most important thing, the most general thing I learned, was that psychology was half-baked, literally half-baked. We had baked the part about mental illness. The other side's unbaked, the side of strength, the side of what we're good at.

I found Positive Psychology to be a fascinating area of study and read everything I could find about the subject. I attended lectures and workshops throughout the U.S. and I incorporated what I was learning into my role within a corporate sales team.

A few years later, I moved back to the U.K. and couldn't find anywhere to continue my studies. The closest I could find, led me to a course in London and certification as a therapist in Neuro Linguistic Programming. The course was led by one of NLP's founders, Richard Bandler. NLP explores the relationships between how we think (neuro), how we communicate and use language (linguistic) and how we sequence our actions and our patterns of behaviour to achieve our goals (programming).

Bandler's definition of NLP is the study of the structure of subjectivity. We often create stories in our mind, which produces feelings of anxiety in our body and our internal negative voices alter our emotional states. NLP's techniques can shift those images, voices and feelings to elevate our emotional state to one which is more useful to us.

The principles and presuppositions of NLP:

The Principles:

1. You - Your emotional state and level of skill.
2. Rapport - The quality of your relationships.
3. Outcome - Knowing where you want to go.
4. Feedback - How will you know you are there?
5. Flexibility - If something is not working, do something else.
6. Presuppositions - Guiding philosophy of NLP.

The Presuppositions:

1. People respond to their experience, not to reality itself – we do not know what reality is. Our senses, beliefs and past experience give us a map of the world from which to operate, but a map can never be completely accurate, it is just a representation of reality.
2. People make the best choice they can at the time – given their map of the world. It may be self-defeating, bizarre, difficult for others to understand, but for them it is their map. The work lays in developing and improving our personal map, and remaining open to the maps of others.
3. All actions have a purpose, and every behaviour has a positive intention – to achieve something that we value and that benefits us. NLP separates the intention behind an action from the action itself. A person is not their behaviour. When a better choice of behaviour is available, they will take it.
4. The meaning of communication is not simply what you intend to convey, but also the response you get – this may be different from the one you wanted, but there are no failures in communication, only responses and feedback. Take responsibility for the communication. Practice ‘Perspective Positions’ (more information later).
5. We already have all the resources we need or we can create them – there are no unresourceful people, only unresourceful states of mind.
6. Mind and body form a system – they interact and influence each other. When we think differently, our bodies change. When we act differently, our thoughts and feelings change.
7. We process all information through our senses – developing those senses gives more information and clarity. Modeling successful performance leads to excellence – if one person

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can do something, it is possible to model it and teach it to others (within reason).

8. If you want to understand: act – the learning is in the doing.

I have found the maps to be the most important element in learning about communication. I often used the following exercise with parents and students, which helped to illustrate how we have different information on our maps:

Going For A Walk Exercise:

Imagine you are going for a walk. You soon pass a house. You stop and walk up to the house and knock on the door. A person opens the door and tells you that they have people over for a party, and asks if you would you like to come in and join them. You go into the house and stay for a little while. Then you have to leave, so you say goodbye. You let yourself out of the door and walk back down the road.

I then ask: “What did the house look like?” The answers range from a cottage to a mansion and everything in between. I then ask, “What was the design and colour of the door?” Again, the answers varied from, blue, red, white, wooden, glass etc. If I asked: “What type of party was it?” The answers ranged from a small dinner party, to a huge formal banquet with a band. If you ask questions like: “How was the weather, did it feel warm or cold, did you hear any sounds?” Many will give detailed responses. Some even describe what the person who answered the door looked like, or what food was being served at the party. The imagination is an amazing thing.

Why does everyone have a different image of what constitutes a house, a door, a party? How does their neural network immediately offer up an imaginative map showing a cottage with a white door and a small dinner party with chicken for dinner?

The maps are created over years of experience and opinions, from family, friends or from popular culture. Who knows how our maps are put together? No map is true, they are like a static photo, a snapshot of a period in time when you felt a certain way, or saw things in a certain light. They can become outdated. How many people still live in another timeframe, when something bad happened? They can still retain a map of misery, an internal negative

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state, which they sadly experience every day. Or a person still has the same map from when they were eighteen and feel they can still act that way even though they are decades older. Actual reality is much more fluid and dynamic and is constantly changing.

The ‘Going For A Walk’ exercise shows how language can be a poor conveyor of communicating meaning. If simple words like house, door, party can evoke completely different meanings, imagine how it is when communication has layers of language attempting to transfer complex ideas. The exercise illustrates how each person has a completely different viewpoint, which is often vastly different from yours. When you take into account different languages and cultures, it can turn into a minefield of misunderstandings. When people believe that everyone sees the world as they do, they are constantly bewildered. You see it all the time, on televised debates, the person keeps hammering home the same message, thinking the louder and more dogmatic they are, the more the other person will relinquish their viewpoint and agree, and they will ‘win’. It seldom happens, even if the ‘winner’ gets in the last word and the recipient is defeated, it has done nothing to improve the overall argument, you just have a revengeful defeated antagonist on your hands. In our personal relationships we often walk away in frustration from a disagreement, disappointed that the other person doesn’t seem to “get it.” Or, walking away in confusion, wondering what on earth the other person is talking about.

NLP takes the maps analogy from Polish/American scientist and philosopher, Alfred Korzybski. In his book *Science and Sanity* (1933) he proposes that “The Map Is Not The Territory.” He tells us that a description of a thing is not the thing itself, the model is not the reality. This change in thinking was different from the traditional Aristotelian way which believed you can describe matters in a definite, specific way and that ideas are right or wrong. Korzybski claimed that this isn’t the way the world works, that we can talk about how things work but we will only get close to the way things really are because our language is full of abstractions, which simplifies, condenses or symbolizes what is actually going on. He attributes most disagreements, fights and wars to a determination to stick to our own maps and a failure to take into account everyone else’s maps. If we can suspend judgment, compare the details of the maps in the form of discussion, it is likely we will spot where we need to adjust the details. This could even lead to owning a new and updated map, a

new perspective. This is the way to make conflict disappear.

5. Perspectives and Maturity

Many years ago, I worked in London as a training instructor for the Dale Carnegie company. Dale Carnegie was an American writer and lecturer. He developed courses including leadership, presentations and people skills training. Between my Carnegie and NLP experience, I was able to design and deliver a whole-school communications programme through 'Education Action Zones.' The Zones were introduced to raise educational standards in challenging areas. The school I worked in was a primary in Clacton-on-Sea, Essex.

I led separate groups: students, parents, teachers and teaching assistants, the head and deputy head, and lunch/playground staff. The groups received the same information, adjusted to meet the specific needs of each group.

We created a new language in the school called "Magic Me" and began the workshops with Perspective Positioning.

If we all have different maps, other than through discussion, how can we step back and view the situation anew?

NLP states that there is no "right" perspective in any situation, that you need to move into positions of perspective to gain a complete picture. This is achieved through the Three Positioning Perspectives:

- *First position* – this is your own reality, your own view of the situation. Personal mastery comes from a strong first position. You need to know yourself and your values to be an effective role model and influence others by example.
- *Second position* – this is taking a creative leap of your imagination to understand the world from another person's perspective. It is the basis of empathy and rapport in an emotional capacity; and the basis of understanding ideas and opinions in an intellectual capacity. It gives us the ability to read another person's map.
- *Third position* – this is a step outside first and second view and a move towards a detached perspective to see the bigger picture.

The parents at the school in Essex started to look at the challenges of the head and the teachers. The head and the teachers looked at the challenges of the parents. The teachers sat in the chairs of the children and looked at the world through their eyes and this resulted

in them making changes.

Then the third, detached perspective was attained by looking at the inner-workings of the school from an outsider's point of view, which was my point of view, I was able to describe how things looked from the outside. It was a powerful way to see things anew.

Another part of the Magic Me programme looked at how we can change how we feel about situations and how we can create a Positive Perspective. In working with the children, I asked them to create a magic circle on the floor, all of their best feelings were contained in the circle. They had to think of a time when they were most happy and most confident. By stepping into the circle, those same feelings would happen again. Anytime they felt unhappy, sad or frightened, they could step into the circle and the happy, joyful feelings would take over. It worked really well, the children were amazing. One day, as the program was coming to an end, the head quickly followed me into an empty classroom saying she had a lovely story to tell me. A six year-old student, had just recounted a story about her magic circle, and how she was frightened when she was in bed and couldn't sleep. She then thought about her magic circle but realised it was too big to fit into her bed so she made it into a bracelet and put it on her arm and felt all of her "good" feelings, which made her feel safe. The head teacher was emotional, tearful, while relaying the story.

I also led all-school workshops on communication styles which helped the head and deputy head see where their communication styles clashed. Levels of listening was a really good session and stress reduction techniques helped the teachers.

It was a successful program and the feedback from all of the groups was really positive. I had lunch with the head teacher a couple of years later, she told me they were still using the language of Magic Me.

From there I went on to give presentations to groups of heads and deputy heads and delivered evening classes to groups of teachers.

Perspective training turns out to be more powerful than I realised at the time. The science behind perspective-taking and the role it has in developing part of the brain, the pre-frontal cortex, is explored in Part II, Chapter 5.

6. Tough and Tender

Before I write about responding to immature, irresponsible and even illegal behaviour in a restorative way, I would like to point out that I believe this approach should be both tender and tough. I think many of our schools are in a meltdown mode of bad behaviour, affecting children, young people, their families and teachers.

The Tough Response

Naming abusive behaviour in schools 'bullying' leaves it open to interpretation, from mild name calling and gentle teasing to mocking, malicious gossip, threats, isolation from the group and extreme physical violence.

Dependent on the views of the head, or the school culture there might be a zero tolerance approach towards uncivil behaviour, or there might be an unsympathetic response to complaints, deeming the complainer as "too sensitive".

The Oxford dictionary has some interesting information about the word "bully." It sounds like it should come from "bullish," but it doesn't. Bully originally evolved from the 16th century Dutch word 'boele' meaning 'lover', a term of endearment applied towards a male or female. It then evolved to refer to a male lover, along with a "gallant" connotation, this then swiftly transitioned into a name for someone with bravado, a sort of swashbuckling character. It also meant admirable, which is still used today, in some circles, to show admiration or approval such as: "He secured the position, bully for him."

Today, the Oxford dictionary states a bully is "a person who uses strength or influence to harm or intimidate those who are weaker."

I think the label "bully" or the term "bullying" has seen its day. Maybe there could be a call for a change in the terminology for abusive behaviour, maybe enact a "Civil Rights Action for the Young" (it even has a good acronym – The CRAY Act), and begin to call any abusive incident an Uncivil Act of (fill in the blank) - verbal abuse, cyber abuse, physical abuse. This could then be measured and categorised. A Minimal, Moderate or Extensive abuse of a direct (physical or verbal attack) or indirect (exclusion, social isolation and rejection).

Students could be part of setting up the act, and could offer ideas of how to improve. They could sign an agreement and complete a self-

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survey about their personal experiences at school and how they treat their peers and teachers. A board of representatives, including students, could be in place to oversee the Civil Rights Action, which would include the design of an adequate response plan. Conferences could be arranged to bring together representatives, including students, from other local schools to develop a standardised program of measurement and response.

Sometimes it can be difficult to weed out those displaying uncivil behaviour; sometimes they are not swaggeringly bullish, but are covert and quietly intimidating. They might engage in negative comments or tell hurtful jokes, they could be sarcastic or exclude people. Even facial expressions gestures or eye-rolling can be intimidating. The cutoff point has to be any deliberate attempt to undermine an other person's right to be treated in a civil manner, removing their right to learn within a comfortable environment, enabling them to develop in a successful way.

This would not include disallowing people with different viewpoints to express their ideas (see Snowflakes in Part I, Chapter 10).

The Tender Response

The consequences for those found abusing the Act, would not be based on a punitive response, but based on a restorative one. The instigator of a serious misdemeanor could be removed from the school community and every attempt could be made to heal and restore them to good mental health. They could be part of designing their own restorative response plan, which could include therapy, immersive art, gardening or music programmes. They could work with trained young people aged eighteen and over, who would help them to establish a sense of self efficacy and emotional control over their behaviour.

TPP would allow them to develop their perspective training, improve their judgment and regulate their emotions.

The objective would be to reintegrate them into the school community.

Young people who feel good about themselves rarely feel the need to lash out, those that do are driven by insecurities and frustrations, which are not addressed. The objective would be to restore the young person to civility.

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The word “civil” comes from the Latin “civilis” – relating to good citizenship, displaying orderly behaviour. To be civilized is from the old French “civilizer” - to bring out of barbarism.

The only way we can have a civilised society of adults, and to end barbaric behaviour in schools, is to ensure that young people are protected from uncivil behaviour and are taught in the ways of good citizenship.

The most severe challenge facing education is the protection of a person’s civil rights, regardless of age. Any person has the right to protection in any environment - schools, prisons, places of work. If someone is bullied in the workplace, we call it harassment and usually lodge a formal complain. Physical abuse is not tolerated, and is usually a matter for the police.

If the restorative plan was not successful, further investigation should follow, in partnership with a therapist or social worker. A brain scan would show if there was any physical impediment to civil behaviour.

Being able to connect with students where they are, keeping them engaged and on the edge of challenge and accomplishment, ensuring they have the opportunity to be an accepted member of their community, providing the projects that will enable them to hone their perspective skills, respond with resilience and enjoy the power of play and face a tough and tender approach to discipline – this is providing a holistic and healthy education.

7. Connection To Parents and Caregivers

The final all-important component is the connection to the parents.

The primary school in Los Angeles contained families from all over the world, they brought with them diverse ideas and opinions about what was best for their child.

The parents mainly fell into two categories, the traditionally minded, conservative parents, who generally had high academic expectations for their child, which the child often rebelled against resulting in losing their place at their previous high-achieving school. At the other end of the spectrum were the liberally-minded, open and creative parents who did not put pressure on their children to achieve academically, but who also often had low expectations of good behaviour, or were fearful of building resiliency within their children.

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They didn't want their children's creativity crushed by authority, and wanted to shield them from anything uncomfortable. Obviously there were also parents in the middle of these extremes, but many sat on one side or the other.

I look back on this time and wonder how I managed the parent's expectations and demands, it was my biggest challenge. Leading such a diverse community required me to stand strong in the middle. I found the best approach was to keep focused on the academic, social and emotional development of the children and young people, this always diffused any differences, everyone wants the best for their children.

To reach a common understanding of that development was crucial. The parent's child-rearing approach had a big impact on how the children connected and communicated with each other within the classroom. Fortunately we had our projects which gave the flexibility to respond to the student's individual needs.

Because the school was new and democratic I welcomed input from parents, they were invited in to give classes, to be a part of the daily life of the school. But I had to tread carefully, there were some very strong personalities amongst the parents, and I was hesitant to have lots of parent groups giving opinions about how they thought the school should be run. I had witnessed this before and it takes on a life of its own and needs a level of management I didn't have time for. However, I believed in everyone feeling they have a voice, and we were trying to model a democratic process for the children to observe and be a part of. So, instead of setting up parent groups, I made sure that parents had individual frequent access to myself and the teachers and we worked with them on issues pertaining to their child only, and not school policy.

I would not let the students display behaviour, which would not benefit them in their current situation or in their future. If they were socially awkward, we would work on that, if they were intolerant of something specific, we would keep putting them in the same situation, if they acted entitled, we would do our best to ensure they dropped that attitude. I couldn't understand parents who were content with their children exhibiting behaviour which would inhibit their ability to get along with others, or would leave them ultimately unable to deal with the world in any responsible way. The children

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were young, but modeling good behaviour and insisting on respectful behaviour is not something to be delayed. This often put me at odds with many parents who felt it wasn't my place to try to improve their children's attitudes. These parents would usually leave the school thus sending a strong and non-retractable message to their offspring.

However, fortunately, these situations were infrequent, and for the most part, I was able to have good discussions with parents, initially by sharing how difficult parenting decisions are for most of us, and how I had made mistakes and often doubted my own parenting decisions. We currently have a hodgepodge of parenting styles and many of us have to raise our children without the traditions and support of family. It's a clean slate, but a slippery slate where we are unsure and unsteady on our feet.

My willingness to share my own experiences, to show vulnerability, would generally lead to really meaningful and open discussions with the parents. They would sometimes talk about how they had been parented, and confusion about their own parenting style. This usually culminated in an authentic discussion about what they wanted for their children, and a plan for how we could work on it together. It was something I would have embraced with open arms when I was struggling with the many schools my sons had attended.

There was an open-door policy at both schools. Obviously teenagers aren't too keen on their parents being in school too often, but the parents at the primary school definitely felt they could come into school at any time, and did so quite often. They joined us for lunch, or helped make lunch. If there were any skills the parents were willing to share, the projects were an excellent way to incorporate those skills.

Parents also gave classes in art, yoga, cooking, architecture, science. There were mum's nights out and dad's nights out. There were movie nights held at the school, It was an opportunity for students, parents and teachers to learn together.

In the book: *A Guide To The Good Life*, author William B. Irvine tells us that in Ancient Greece fathers would sometimes study alongside their children. They might be interested in "continuing education" or they might attend school lectures on philosophy to be "enlightened or entertained." Irvine bemoans the lack of philosophical education

in general and says: “People are in as much need of a philosophy of life as they ever were. The question is, Where can they go to obtain one?”

In the primary school, once a week, we had two science teachers come into school (Jon and Ellen), they were a married couple, retired teachers and one of the best things to happen to the school. We had an experiment morning when they would bring in tons of equipment for all sorts of experiments, the students absolutely loved it. The whole morning was a hive of activity. The students would bring a pack lunch as we would leave midday to go on a hike, which Jon and Ellen would lead. Each week the parents who could manage it would arrive at lunch time and help with the driving. We would go to different state parks and the students would hike for the whole afternoon. Jon and Ellen knew about every tree and insect, which was such an enjoyable way for the students to learn so much information about the natural world.

The hikes gave the parents a chance to get to know each other, and to get to know the staff, and the children would enjoy having their parents involved in their school life. It was a magical day every week, which everyone really looked forward to.

We sent out a newsletter every Friday afternoon. The newsletter contained information about what had happened in the school that week. News about the hike, where we had gone, what we had seen. News about the project’s progress kept all the parents up to date and informed about their child’s week. The parents told us it gave them a lot to talk to their kids about over the weekend. Many parents would help their children with research for the projects over the weekend, ready for the following week.

When you foster this open door policy, parents will come to you to talk about parental issues they are facing. As the old saying goes, children don’t come with an instruction manual, and parenting is becoming more complex as we move away from traditional ararchical parenting styles toward a more fluid, flexible democratic style. It’s not easy for us as parents and it’s not easy for the children who often receive conflicting messages from school and home.

To look back in history at how children used to be firmly attached to their parents and extended family is to realise just how much things have changed. Teenagers are now a tribe, with a culture all of its

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own. However, to belong to a tribe also comes with all of the fears and insecurities of the possibility of being thrown out of the tribe. The main problem with teenage tribes is that the young people don't have the skills to look after each other's emotional wellbeing.

There are those that have put forward the notion that children bringing up children is a natural part of development, that we should just accept this as the most normal route of progression for our children. Their opinion says: "leave the kids to it, they'll sort it out amongst themselves." But do they?

Two of those opinions come from Steven Pinker and Judith Harris.

In Pinker's book *The Blank Slate - The Modern Denial of Human Nature*, he writes:

Children have cultures, too, which absorb parts of the adult culture and also develop values and norms of their own. Children do not spend their waking hours trying to become better and better approximations of adults. They strive to be better and better children, ones that function well in their own society. It is in this crucible that our personalities are formed.

Quite sobering to realise that the environment that your child is immersed in for most of their waking hours, is where they will shape their personalities. This can be worrying, especially if you are aware that the environment is harmful to your child. Who are they learning to be better and better approximations of adults from? Other children? How does that happen?

Pinker wrote a foreword to a controversial book written by Judith Harris in 1998 titled: *The Nurture Assumption: Why Children Turn Out the Way They Do*. In his foreword Pinker tells us that it makes sense for children to be protected and fed by their parents, usually we are best placed to do that, but when it comes to information, they will look outside for the best sources they can find, which might not be their own parents.

Judith Harris' book puts forward that, contrary to our instincts, it is other children that are the most important models in our child's life, that other children socialise and transfer values and meaning to our

child. Parents have little or no power in the development of their own children.

Harris opens her book with:

This book has two purposes: first, to dissuade you of the notion that a child's personality-what used to be called "character" – is shaped or modified by the child's parents; and second to give you an alternative view of how the child's personality is shaped.

It might feel like a slap in the face to hear that all the hard work you have put into ensuring your children are decent, caring and well-mannered could all be thrown out of the window if their adolescent friendships require them to display different character traits, different values. I know we have all heard parents complain that they don't know who their child is anymore, that they have lost touch with their child.

As a species, we have been parenting for quite a while now, we should have this down, it shouldn't be this difficult. When did this turnaround in parenting happen? Something fairly recent has been introduced, which has rattled and shaken those parental bonds.

Industrial schooling maybe?

The books by Pinker and Harris point to the power of peer influence on our young, making it seem inevitable and a given that because peer groups gravitate towards each other for most of their needs, it is natural evolutionary developmental behaviour.

However, Gordon Neufeld, developmental psychologist and author, has a different view, which he explains in one of his lectures:

The basic thesis of the developmental approach, is the realization that human potential is spontaneous, it is not inevitable.

Peer orientation sabotages the context for raising children. We can't know what is wrong unless we know what is meant to happen. When Judith Harris wrote her book the Nurture Assumption, she didn't come at it from a developmental point of view, she came at it from a very superficial point of view that we study 'what is' - and assume it is 'what should be'. It didn't

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come from an understanding of how it is that children develop. What are the conditions that are conducive for it? What is it that they need?

A book written by Gordon Neufeld and Gabor Maté is entitled, *Hold On to Your Kids – Why Parents Need To Matter More Than Peers*. They tell us exactly what children need and write about the breakdown of parental influence and how to reawaken parenting instincts. This is the book that had the most impact on me when deciding how much exposure to other children my own children should have. It gave me the answers I needed when feeling totally overwhelmed.

From the book's back cover:

International authority on child development Gordon Neufeld, Ph.D, joins forces with bestselling author Gabor Maté to tackle one of the most disturbing trends of our time: Children today increasingly look to their peers for direction – their values, identity, and codes of behaviour. This “peer orientation” undermines family cohesion, interferes with healthy development, and fosters a hostile and sexualized youth culture. Children end up becoming overly conformist, desensitized, and alienated, and being “cool” matters more than anything else.

As children get older ‘cool’ becomes the desired front. All sorts of emotional anguish can be going on behind the curtain of cool, but as long as nobody sees it doesn't count.

Neufeld and Maté have this to say about the lure of cool:

No wonder, then that cool is the governing ethic in peer culture, the ultimate virtue. Although the word cool has many meanings, it predominately connotes an air of invulnerability. Where peer orientation is intense, there is no sign of vulnerability in the talk, in the walk, in the dress, or in the attitudes.

The cool ethic allows students to become marbled, shielded by an air of impenetrable indifference. They have no desire to show individuality, to show emotion. But feelings and expressing our

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emotions are what we need to navigate through life, to share and understand our emotions is the main aspect of healthy development. It is only through feeling a sense of belonging and trust are we able to melt the marble and share who we really are.

Although Neufeld and Maté urge parents to retain attachments to their children, social life at school plays a huge role in their lives.

Is there a way to create classroom environments, a whole school culture, which enables parents to retain attachments to their children? Can we disassemble unhealthy strong ties, cliques and social exclusions which drive our children to obsess about how to improve their social standing?

The answer is, yes, there is a way and we can, by introducing PBL and TPP. The research which proves this can be found in Part I, Chapter 7, *Sociality and Loneliness*, with the subtitle of: *Eliminating Student Isolation and Guarding Against Groupthink*.

The following stories are about students from our primary school in Los Angeles, (stories about students from the secondary school will follow later). The stories will hopefully illustrate how we fostered connection between students and implemented The Seven Strategies of Project Based Learning.

Note: All the names of the students have been changed.

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CHAPTER 4
Student Stories

The Story of Emily

Emily is five and an only child. We don't have a school uniform and the students usually wear casual and comfortable non-branded clothes. However, Emily's mum is a designer and Emily comes to school dressed like a Disney princess attending a tea party at the White House. Emily would always stop at the door and ask everyone how they thought she looked, did they like her dress? Shoes? Hair? She talks to everyone in a cool and detached way, as if she is peering out of an ivory tower, talking to the commoners milling around below.

Emily is alienating herself from the other children and is soon starting to be rejected by students within her own age group and also by the older students.

I talk to her parents and ask for her to come in jeans or leggings and t-shirts, plain clothes she could forget about. Mum isn't too happy, but dad steps in and agrees that the dressing up is keeping Emily obsessed by her appearance. The next day Emily comes in wearing jeans and a t-shirt. She is self-conscious and doesn't know what to say, gone are even the superficial exchanges. She retreats into herself even more.

Emily has no interest in holding a pencil, even to draw. She has very little recollection of letters to write or read. I try to reassure her parents, who are getting pressure from Emily's grandparents about her lack of reading and writing ability. "Just give her time," I keep saying.

She is very quiet, and refuses to look at a book, or even play games which involve letters or numbers. I drop all attempts at teaching her any school-like work and instead teach her to crochet, which she becomes obsessed with. She isn't interested in crocheting a table-mat, or anything specific, she just leaves a line of links which snake along the floor, following her around the classroom as she walks past other students and peers over their shoulder to see what they are doing.

She is lost in her own world, singing in a low voice as she crochets. If you quietly walk behind her and lean in, a voice like an old country

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crooner greets you, hitting your heart. I tell people to quietly stand close to her to listen and when their ear picks up the sound of her singing, their eyes widen in surprise.

Emily is an old soul, and soon begins talking to me and the other teachers. She is an observer and sees everything that happens in the classroom. She talks about people's feelings and is already more adept at reading social situations than most adults. She is also very empathetic, if someone is hurt or ill, she is the first one there to sooth and fetch water, which you would think would create bonds with the other children, but it doesn't. Emily has difficulty fitting in, she is not able to get friendships going with the girls, not able to join in with their conversations. She tries, but after a few minutes she rolls her eyes at them and tells them they are talking about stupid stuff. She then moves to where the boys are hanging out, but ends up giving them a hard time so they get annoyed and tell her to leave. When this happens she becomes upset by her inability to navigate through the sea of social situations. When she feels left out or misunderstood she disconnects, growing cold and angry, distain flows from her sideways looks and she can wound deeply with her mean comments. The teachers, or I, try to talk to her, but our words fall on deaf ears. She looks at you, head tilted to the side, looking at you as if you know nothing, you are not in kid world so you don't get it.

The primary school is based in a large church complex, on the same floor is a baby class. Famous faces of actresses float by as they bring their tiny babies to class. The woman who runs the classes shows them how to hold the baby, bath the baby, and what to do when the baby cries. The women who clean the room after each session and who fetch water and snacks from the kitchen are Mexican, a mum and her two daughters and they are really warm and friendly. The mum is very maternal and loves to say hello to the children in the school. We share a kitchen so get to know the Mexican women well, they have a huge family and tell us about their family parties and give us delicious recipe tips. They seem perplexed about the mothers in the baby group who come to the classes to hear the 'specialist' talk about taking care of a baby. I ask them how it works in their family, they tell me they have so many aunts and cousins and friends who all help when someone has a baby, they don't need to go a class for advice they say with raised eyebrows.

Emily spends a lot of time in the kitchen with me and she strikes up a friendship with the Mexican mum, running to hug her every time

she sees her. The mum fusses over her and Emily tells her about her crocheting.

Although Emily is opening up and talking to the adults a little bit more, her confidence is still low due to her lack of ability in lessons and we don't seem to be able to pull her into the project work. The other kids are really excited about the current project, which is based on the Amazon rainforest. They are at the research stage finding out about the unique plant and animal species in the surrounding ecosystem. Each student has selected an animal from the rainforest, studied their lifestyle and habitat, and is working on an information board. We decide to build a replica rainforest in the corner of the classroom to house the animals, complete with six foot plants, which creates a dense live canopy. The children go inside to sit quietly or wear headphones and listen to the sound of the rainforest. Emily picks an animal for the rainforest and half-heartedly sits quietly adding pictures to her board, but soon leaves it to resume her crocheting. I go and sit next to her and pick up a strand of the links. "You know something Emily, if these were green, they would look like vines from the rainforest." She says nothing. I do a walk around the classroom to check on the other kids and leave her to think. When I return to Emily I say "It certainly is a shame we don't have a doorway to the rainforest, we can't use plants because they would get damaged." Again I leave her to think. Emily looks at me "Well...if you could find some green vine-like string, I could make vines for the doorway." "Brilliant idea!" I say. I call a meeting with the other kids and tell them about Emily's suggestion, they all think it is a good idea. I go to the local store at lunch time and find various wools and strings in different shades of green. Emily works hard between lessons and at lunch time on the vines. She works on them at home and has pulled in her mum to help. When the crocheted door is made and installed, everyone really likes it and give her lots of complimentary feedback. Her confidence begins to build and she slowly starts to connect with the group.

It is a slow process, but during the next two years, Emily comes to use a pencil and learn her letters, she becomes really good at maths, running up to the blackboard to add lists of numbers together. She starts to write simple songs, which she still sings softly under her breath. Her voice is now incredible, so full of emotion. She has become so much more confident and outgoing, talking all of the time. I tell her I look forward to the day when I will be listening to

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her on the radio, she smiles, eyes dancing with the idea of being a singer. Because her confidence has improved, she is nicer to be around, and has moved from her “rejected” status to the accepted and liked category. All is going really well. However things are about to change.

Emily’s parents have talked about moving to Nashville for a year or so, but the move is dependent on selling their house. After a couple of false alarms, a serious offer sends Emily’s parents into a flurry of planning and flying to Nashville to scope out bigger and better houses.

I search the internet for alternative schools in Nashville, there are a couple that look like they might suit Emily and I forward their websites to her parents, urging them to look outside mainstream schools.

The day for Emily to leave is here. We have a leaving party, all of the children are sad, even the ones who frequently squabble with her. I am doing my best to stay upbeat, telling Emily it is so exciting, a new city, new friends. The perfect place to start a music career, it being home to the Grand Ole Opry and the Country Music Hall of Fame. Nashville’s nickname is ‘Music City’, it’s perfect I tell her.

Emily is enjoying the attention on her last day, reminiscing about her days at the school. Though when she thinks nobody is looking a sad and world-weary look creeps over her face. When it comes time to say goodbye, she clings to me tightly. My eyes well up, I will miss her. Emily looks up at me, “I’ll be ok” she whispers.

With promises of future visits, off they all go.

A few months later they are back for a Thanksgiving visit. Emily’s mum calls to ask if they can come in, and we all excitedly wait for the visit. They arrive early and I spot Emily from the end of the long corridor. I stop and wait for her to come running as she always did, almost starting to crouch anticipating a running lunge up to me. But there are no noisy squeals of excitement erupting, she doesn’t tear away from her mum. Instead a quieter, meeker, thinner Emily slowly walks up the hall beside her mum. When close enough, Emily won’t meet my eyes, but turns slowly and goes to sit down in the office.

“I’ll go and drop off these cakes in the kitchen,” Emily’s mum trills.

I follow Emily into the office and sit down next to her.

“So tell me everything,” I say.

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When she finally turns her eyes to me, I feel myself pull backwards in shock. There are no dancing lights in her eyes, no hint of mischievousness, just dullness and emptiness. Usually you'd be fighting to get a word in edgeways, but now a resigned quietness fills the room.

"How's your new house?" I ask.

She speaks slowly and deliberately.

"Well, it's really big, at first I was getting lost all the time," she says, eyes returning to her feet.

"What about your new school? I ask.

"It's ok. The class has thirty students, my teacher is quite nice, he helps me with math."

"Are you still enjoying your number work?"

"He says I'm behind, so he's helping me, it's really hard now."

"Have you made friends yet?"

"Not really....nobody seems to like me."

Oh noooo...Emily has slid back into her original rejected status category. My heart starts to ache.

"How about your singing? Ahh, I miss hearing you sing."

"No... I don't really do that anymore."

I stop, not wanting to quiz her anymore. I wait a while to see if she will initiate a conversation. This was Emily after all, how could she not?

She doesn't. Her head lowers and she fiddles with a piece of loose cotton on her skirt.

When the awareness of what is going on hits me, I am filled with emotion but can't quite work out what it is. Sadness? Anger? I feel like the Emily I knew has evaporated, replaced by an imposter.

Mixed in with the sadness and anger is a growing sense of outrage. Selfishly, I feel cheated of the hours of work we've all put in to have Emily feel comfortable in her own skin.

Emily who could talk entertainingly for hours now doesn't seem able to string a couple of sentences together.

We leave the office and one of the teachers comes to the doorway of the classroom and beckons Emily in.

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Her mum is chatting to someone outside the kitchen, she's avoiding looking at me, but I look at her until she has to acknowledge me. She finishes her conversation and reluctantly walks over.

"What's wrong with Emily?" I ask gently.

Her mum looks tired and troubled and my heart aches even more as I listen to her.

"The new school insisted she be put on medication as soon as she started there. I know she seems different, but it is helping her to fit into the classroom. It does affect her appetite, I know she looks thin..." She is talking quickly, matter-of-factly, without looking at me. Finally her words run out and she slowly turns and looks me in the eye.

"I know," she says, "it's awful, but what am I supposed to do?"

"Take her out of that school, find another one, or homeschool her or come back here where she was happy." Her mum says nothing. Then I feel angry and I feel the concern in my eyes flatten as I move to another tactic. "You know, it's not fair on her, or you, or us. Between us, we put years of effort and energy into getting her to a good place, I feel like it's all gone." I'm not proud of my outburst, it's not the professional stance, which should be portrayed at all times.

The family stays in Nashville, and I hear that Emily is still at the same school, still on the meds. My disappointment eventually settles, leaving a sense of sadness.

There was a solution for Emily and it was our school, how could her parents turn away from that?

The Story Of Olin

We have a forty five minute unstructured start to the day which the children use for various activities. The time is not about the children running around in the playground, building up high levels of energy, having fall-outs and then handing them over to the teachers to settle them down for lessons. The time is not highly active, but it is definitely interactive and creates an orderly social space for problems to arise and for solutions to be sought. It is a good opportunity for the fighters to fight, the fleers to flee and the freezers to freeze. The

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big classroom easily holds the twenty five students aged between five and ten. There is an art table in one corner and some of the children like to tinker away on something they are working on, a model, or a painting. Another area has a couple of tables set up with chess sets. There is a quiet reading area in the break-out room. In another corner of the big classroom, stacked boxes hold either Lego or dominos, thousands of dominos. Many of the boys, and maybe one or two of the girls, make a beeline for the domino boxes each morning and spill out hundreds of multi-coloured tiles onto the floor. They then begin building the morning domino show. At first the shows consist of simple lines of tiles, but after a few months the tiles are elaborately climbing over books and swirling around in circles. When they have finished, show-time is announced, which brings everyone around to watch the dominos fall onto each other causing an impressive cascade of tiles. If successful, the cheers are loud and encouraging, if there's a fail, the crowd are kind and disperse quietly as the builders and designers rush to figure out what went wrong. It's a risky endeavor, sometimes the students will start to build the display the day before during lunch or at home time so a crashing means losing all of their hard work. Soon they learn to install firebreaks, blockages at certain points, which will save the rest of the tiles if a section crashes.

If you imagine that all of this goes off without a hitch, you'd be wrong. There are arguments and upsets and frustrations. We have children from many different countries and the diversity of culture is something I most love about the school, but it comes with its challenges. We also have children from all socio-economic situations, from extremely wealthy parents working in the entertainment industry to struggling families who aren't able to pay fees. We also have children who join us temporarily who speak little or no English. Miscommunication and misunderstandings are ever-present.

There are usually two teachers in the classroom along with myself. We sit in the background, usually working on some paperwork, letting the children get on with their activities and we sometimes step in to help sort out a disagreement. Usually order can be restored fairly easily, having a quiet chat with the antagonist along with a threat of not being able to take part in building the domino show is usually enough to keep things on track. However there are times when frustrations escalate and there is a full-blown situation which calls for a sort-out meeting to discuss what has happened and to help the students rectify the situation.

Olin is seven and he has a ‘controversial’ status. Half of the kids like him, mostly the boys, he is confident and loud and has the goriest stories. However the girls stay out of his way. He’s the sweetest looking kid you can imagine with big dreamy eyes full of fun and mischief, and he’s a fighter. When he gets angry, his eyes disappear and it feels like the ceiling in the classroom will blow off. It’s hard to imagine how such negative emotion can build so quickly and then needs to be released by shouting, throwing things and generally making a huge scene.

The kids have made an amazing domino show, but Olin disagrees with something about the design and he is trying to put forward his ideas. He is very charming and very tactical at first and has really good ideas, but he wants them implemented right away, and if the others don’t agree, he starts to increase the demands. Many of the kids who have gone along with Olin’s requests several times before, his followers, are standing their ground this morning and not giving in to his demands. Quick as lightning and with all of the accompanying ferocity, Olin drops into a rage and runs through the tiles, kicking them into the air as he goes. The other kids look on in horror, one of them starts to cry. I go to get hold of Olin, to remove him from the class before he runs into someone and hurts them or himself. He starts fighting me, I go behind him and I get hold of his arms and cross them across his chest. He is strong and gets in a few back kicks which land on my shin, but I am stronger and manage to march him out of the classroom. Once in the office he is still shouting. He eventually goes quiet and flops onto the sofa in an exhausted heap.

Having been penned in behind a desk at other schools, it is difficult for some of the students to self-regulate in this open environment. Often they push to see where the boundary is and it is important for them to realise that if they push hard enough they’ll find it, the boundary wall, which they cannot kick through or climb over or under. The wall is there to keep them safe, sometimes from themselves. It’s also important for the other kids to see someone run into the wall so they know that the adults do have control, if it is required. The big emotions they feel are scary, even with older children, the wall is safety.

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We have implemented 'Choice Theory' in the school, designed to implement student self-control rather than external control. This usually works well with other students – but Olin has a way of manipulating those choices, so the results are not quite so effective.

We have meetings with his parents, but nothing seems to get through to him, he doesn't seem to care. His anger does not seem to diminish. This is a sensitive area to discuss. I have a feeling Olin's dad is really stern, he has been stern with me on a couple of occasions. I think Olin tries to assert himself and dad is having none of it. We've exhausted every tactic within school and the other kids are getting really fed up of his outbursts, the destruction of the domino show was the last straw for them. I realise we have to try something different.

In the sort-out meetings any student can call for a meeting and invite anybody from the class, including teachers. The aggrieved person puts forward their issue and everyone talks about it until it is sorted out. At first, sort-out meetings were called for the smallest indiscretions, someone had missed the bin and their apple core was on the floor, or someone had stood on a crayon and had broken it. But now the students only use the meetings for issues which are important and for which they can't find a solution. If there is someone who is not confident enough to call a meeting for themselves, an observer meeting can be called, whereby somebody has seen something they think warrants a meeting.

Without Olin present, I call an observer meeting and talk to the students about his behaviour. They say how much they like him when he is in a good mood, but are scared of him when he is having one of his angry tantrums. I ask them if they would like him to know how they feel? After a few minutes and a bit of thinking, they say they think it would be a good idea.

I talk to Olin's parents to get their agreement and then I have another meeting with the students, it is to discretely prime them for the upcoming meeting with Olin.

In the pre-meeting I remind them about a previous lesson about the flight/fight/freeze response and how Olin must have been feeling unsafe, otherwise he wouldn't be having such difficulties. I also talk to them about how it might not have anything to do with his current classmates or current situation, he could be feeling this way due to things that had happened in his last school. In a previous lesson we'd talked about how we respond to threats like how a bite from a dog when you are a toddler can make you scared and ready to run or fight

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if you hear a small growl from another dog years later. I also talk about how we all have things we'd like to change about ourselves. I tell them I would like to be more organised and give them an example of not being able to find a book at home because I had let the bookshelf get really messy. I ask them to think for a minute about something they might like to change about themselves, they don't have to say it out loud of course, just think about it. Then we discuss the fact that people can change themselves, we do it all the time. Finally, I ask them if Olin has the right to know how people feel, so he has the opportunity to change if he wants to. Yes, they say, of course he does.

The next day I have a chat with Olin and tell him that we will be having a meeting and that the other children are concerned about him and feel like they want to talk to him. He looks wary, but not upset. So we all meet just before home time. The meeting begins and I immediately wish I was recording it, the wisdom and care and compassion these children have for their fellow classmate brings a huge lump to my throat and I work hard to not collapse into a heap of emotion. Even though they couldn't have been kinder, the words make Olin emotional. They are saying things like how fun he is but how sad it makes them when he is angry, a few of the girls tell him he scares them when he throws things around. He sits and listens to all of their comments and his face loses composure by the minute. After the last student has finished speaking, he jumps up and runs out to the break-out room and stays there until it is time to go home. Nobody bothers him for a while, then I go in and focus on the good points his peers have said about him. I ask him if he wants the chance to change the things within himself that the other children find difficult? Yes, he says, he wants to try.

Whilst Olin had been in the office, the other students wonder what the next step should be. Then someone has an idea.

The current project the students are working on is called "The Eco Village," and a 6'x 3' board sits on top of a table, holding a miniature village. The village contains various buildings, designed and built by the students. The function of each building is imagined by a student. Mini houses are made from natural materials and run on alternative energy. There's a farm, which produces organic food for local consumption, and a medical center, which offers integrated holistic treatments, and a school, which places eco-education at the centre of

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the curriculum, and a work centre, which includes a nursery and houses various companies built around ethical work practices. To complete the village, a model river runs through the middle and is used for local transport and sustainable fishing.

Daily news about the project is posted on the notice board. Maybe there has been a oil spill out at sea and the water coming to the village is becoming contaminated, or there is an outbreak of a flu, or the farm has become flooded. The students have to find solutions for the various things that go wrong in the village.

All of the ideas for the production and development of the village comes from the children, they have complete ownership. Many of them bound into school in the morning way before the start of class, checking the notice board, making adjustments or adding more information to their planning document. The village becomes a permanent exhibition for the whole year. The students are so engaged with the project that it often spills over into lunch and break-times discussions, just as it would in a place of work.

This project is Olin's favourite thing to do in school, we have to prize the glue gun away from him as he can spend hours designing and putting together new buildings and boats for the river. One of the girls has been the village manager for a while now, checking in with everybody about how their area is going or gathering news for the notice board. Olin has been asking about the position and wants to have a go at being the village manager, but so far has not been voted in by the rest of the class. Although he is popular, it seems the other kids don't want him in a role of leadership.

As we sit in the classroom, waiting for home time, the current village manager is the one to come up with the idea. She says that Olin will feel bad for a while, so she thinks it would be a good idea to ask him to be the assistant village manager, he could help with the tasks, but not be too overwhelmed with the responsibility. The village manager looks around for agreement from the rest of the class and finds it in their nodding support.

When Olin quietly comes into the classroom the next morning, some of the other students run up to him excitedly giving him the news, he looks surprised and happy and accepts the position of assistant manager. He works hard at his new responsibilities, which involves a lot of talking to students from different areas of the village, he has to mediate when there are disagreements and handles it well. It turns

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out, he has lots of empathy with someone if they become frustrated, telling them he knows how they feel. He takes his new role very seriously and becomes knowledgeable of the different viewpoints of each student, and how it affects the way they work and communicate. His demeanor becomes more tolerant and respectful of other's opinions, he relishes the positive feedback he receives from teachers and his peers about daily accomplishments. His anger outbursts literally disappear. He gradually moves away from his controversial status into the accepted and liked category.

Some prospective parents who come to visit the school are really taken aback when I tell them about the meetings and the peer pressure discipline. I agree with them, in theory it does seem harsh, but it does work. I would rather give the alienated student a chance to know how their peers feel and the opportunity to change, rather than leave them to try to sort it out for themselves, or to have the teachers try to discipline through humiliation or punitive directives like expulsions to the base or detentions. If the discipline is left to the teachers, it will break the connection and the student will think that everyone in the classroom is okay with their behaviour, apart from the adult in the room.

In Olin's situation, we were able to help him see how his behaviour was affecting those around him - whilst leaving the relationships with the teachers intact.

The Story of Max

Max is ten and struggling in his present school. "He has emotional problems," his mum says, when she comes in to meet with me. In the school he is now attending, Max is an accepted and well liked peer within his group, but his lateness with reading and writing is negating the positive social effects with negative feedback from his teachers and his mother, which leaves him feeling disengaged and demotivated.

Max is actually a "school refuser," he simply will not to go to school every morning claiming he is too tired. One of his parents literally drags him out of bed, which he physically fights against.

Max's mum is a journalist and his father a doctor, "accomplished" is

mum's description of the rest of the family.

More information from Max's mum is delivered bullet-speed with a level of frantic energy and force that can be draining. She obviously loves her son, and wants the best for him but she is still caught up in the world of "he's not what we expected," and cannot understand where Max has come from, literally telling me she doesn't know where he came from, in front of him. She is totally flummoxed by this boy who isn't the smartest, fastest and most accomplished kid in his class.

A visit day for Max is arranged for the following week, accompanied by his mum.

Max comes in wearing body language that isn't hard to read, shoulders hunched, head hanging down, eyes on the floor. He isn't canny enough to have developed a protective layer of armour, he isn't wearing a mask of indifference. His only option left is to close in and shut down, trying to disappear, become invisible. His whole presence sends out a beacon of non-engagement, and the signal being transmitted is "please leave me alone." It is painful to watch him try to be in the world.

I guide mum over to the art table and Max follows. I silently put out three pieces of paper and offer mum the lovely thick, coloured pencils, take a few myself and start to draw. Mum takes the cue and is soon sketching flowers. Max's eyes move from the floor to the table as he watches us drawing. I move the pencils closer to him, and soon he joins in and becomes focused on filling in a blue sky around soft fluffy clouds.

As he is finishing his drawing I look across. "I like the clouds," I say to him quietly.

"Thanks" I just about hear him whisper.

Mum starts talking to me about timetables and parking, then talking to Max about how they should be going soon.

Max begins to show signs of frustration. Something in his drawing has gone wrong and he is trying to correct it. It isn't working and he becomes upset and starts to cry angrily.

Mum busily starts picking up bags and hurries Max, still crying softly, out of the room.

After they leave, I go into my office to think about Max. He was upset by failure, which showed itself in trying to correct his drawing

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mistake. He is wounded by his on-going experiences at school. I also feel his well-meaning mum is too much for him, I could feel her frustration and disappointment, and I'm sure Max could too. I think we can help him.

His drawing is still lying on the table in the classroom. I pick it up and put it in an envelope with a note saying, "Max, thank you for coming to visit us. I still like the clouds." I address the envelope to him, and put it in the post.

A week later Max's mum calls. Max would like to try the school. We are breaking up for the Christmas holidays so Max will start in the new term.

It is Max's dad who brings him into school on the first morning. Max's dad is very different from Max's mum, displaying a very calm and quiet demeanor.

Max won't go into the classroom, he sits in a corner of my office, on the floor, softly crying like a wounded animal. He clutches his t-shirt with one hand and chews on it, a soaked area of material spreads half-way down the front of his t-shirt.

His dad looks at me, "Shall I take him home? I am off today so I could easily take him home," he says, eyes full of sadness.

"No, it's fine," I give him a reassuring look. "Why don't we see how he does this morning, you could come back for him at lunch-time?" Dad agrees but leaves looking worried and sad. Then it is just me and Max sitting in the office

Max spends the next hour, still in the corner, still chewing on his t-shirt. The crying eases off and I am sitting at my desk getting on with some work. I have put a small box of Legos in front of him and he eventually starts clicking pieces together.

After a while, I coax him out of the office by saying he could take the box of Legos and sit in the corner of the classroom and just watch. So this he does. I had talked to the other children about Max, and asked them not to talk to him, or even look at him. I made him invisible.

For the next few days, Max spends most of his time watching the class from the corner of the room. Occasionally he wanders over to the art table and draws or glues things together. Gradually the other children include him in their games, he loves chess and this is a huge ice-breaker. I start to ask him for help in teaching younger children

the first moves of chess, he loves this responsibility and he is so good with the younger kids.

We watch Max unfold, just going along with what he seemed to need. Sometimes he needs a nap on the office couch, he slips out of class and can be found snoozing away in a deep sleep. He is exhausted from his traumatic school experiences, and needs all the rest he can get.

His parents are thrilled that he agrees to come into school each morning and even seems to be enjoying his day. It is still usually dad who drops him off. As they walk down the hallway towards the classroom, I come out of the kitchen, grip Max's chin and tell him I couldn't start my day off until I see his smile and his eyes flicker towards me with a shy crumpled grin. If I see him start to chew his t-shirt, I gently move his hand away. "No chewing Max," I say. He grins back at me.

After a month he has full eye-contact with everyone, does not take naps and his t-shirts are dry as a bone. After two months he is willing to sit and read with me and to work with magnetic letters on a board to spell out words he's had difficulty reading. He then joins the reading and writing group, which is four other boys who all have difficulty reading and writing. I make the learning fun by using lots of games, and they love just moving the letters about on the big magnetic board, there's lots of laughing as they play the word games. After a few months it becomes evident that Max has a really sunny personality. Now that he is not traumatised by feelings of failure, his full personality emerges. He is funny, bright and extremely well-liked and accepted by everyone in the school. He still has the occasional leftover angry outburst if he runs into something he can't do, but we have all found a way to communicate with him, which takes the fire out of his anger.

It also turns out that Max is really talented when working with numbers. We have a parents evening, and the teacher has given out a math's challenge, it has something to do with shapes and numbers (I wish I had copied it down). All of the parents struggle, one of the dads is a former NASA scientist, he doesn't get the right answer. The teacher says that he'd done the challenge with the older students that day, and only one had got it right - Max.

Max returns back to himself and life is good for him again. His parents are initially ecstatic, talking about the change in Max, how he

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is now so emotionally stable and happy and how grateful they are. After a while that fades and they get used to Max being happy and then shift their attention to what Max is accomplishing, or to be more accurate, not accomplishing.

I assure them, his progress is steady, he is reading every day, willingly. He is writing up to half a page a day, a real triumph. He is only ten, no need to put the pressure on.

His mum insists on speeding up his reading and brings in a reading expert. This teacher comes into school every morning to spend an hour of intensive reading and writing with Max. He hates it and gives her a terrible time, laying on the floor refusing to do anything. Then he comes back to class in a foul mood and it takes a lot of coaxing for him to come around. He starts to feel the failure stamp again, as this teacher focuses on what he can't do, whereas his time in class focuses on what he can do, and gently expands and overlaps into learning new skills.

I talk to his mum to tell her it isn't working and I can't agree to it continuing as it is undoing the work we are putting in. She is adamant and says she will take Max out of the school if he is not able to continue with the intensive classes. So, of course, I relent.

Things have shifted, the whole focus of Max's parents is on what he isn't achieving in the school. They know he has healed emotionally, and feel now he is ready to rejoin 'real' school and jump back into the race. They are worried about him being able to do exams, exams which are years away. I can't make them see if Max continues to do well with us, he will feel able to tackle anything later on. I tell them I am worried about him going back to square one if he does to go back to the same school.

They don't have those same concerns and move Max back to the school where he'd been so damaged.

The Story of Mason

Mason is seven. His mum brings him for a visit day and asks if she can sit in on a maths lesson as maths is very important to their family and she wants to ensure that Mason will be challenged in this subject. However, it is difficult to interact with Mason, he looks shell shocked. He doesn't speak or smile or have any facial expressions at all. His doctor has said he needs to start anti-anxiety medication. I tell his mum that I only believe in medicating a child as a last resort and let

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her know that if she decides to send her son to our school, I would encourage her to refrain from medicating until we see how he does. She takes a long time to decide to come to the school, but eventually acknowledges that Mason's mental health is deteriorating at his current school so she wants him to try our school. However she is very skeptical, and seems to not trust me. When Mason arrives his group of peers initially try to interact with him, but he just stares blankly at them, so eventually they leave him to himself. He is very smart and has no problem with his studies. He is an avid reader and always sits alone with his head in a book. Encouragement from staff to join in with games makes him uncomfortable so we let him be. He becomes neglected. At our staff meeting, we are all concerned, we know that trying to rush Mason to open up would be a mistake, we realise it could take some time for him to move out of his neglected status.

Tom, a nine year old boy also liked to read. I bought a copy of the same book about dinosaurs for him and for Mason and asked Tom if he could sit quietly next to Mason to read, he was happy to help. Tom was a talker and extremely knowledgeable about dinosaurs and would just endlessly chat to Mason about his obsession. Mason was happy to sit silently and listen to Tom. After a while, other boys became interested in the dinosaur book and moved into the circle. They would start to ask questions and Tom would refer to Mason, asking him to answer. Mason would point to the picture or the text in the book, which pertained to their questions and would answer other queries with a nod or a shake of his head. After a couple of weeks he was interacting with two verbal words "yes" and "no." We were delighted. The first time we heard Mason crack up laughing was magical.

Over the coming months, Mason did come out of his shell, he was never outgoing, but he was talking and he was a smart little cookie *and* he wasn't taking medication. He was pleased to leave his neglected status and move into being liked and accepted.

There was also a boy at the primary school, Leo, who was also very smart, he could talk about anything at great length and felt in his comfort zone during discussions, though he often had to be reigned in to give the other students a chance to contribute. He was definitely accepted due to his smartness. However during play time he was neglected. He couldn't throw a ball and had little coordination

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when running. Initially he sat by us on a bench, watching the other children. We had brought a rope into the play area and tied one end to a post. A teacher or one of the older children would turn the rope and the children would run in, skip a few times and run out. It was a feature of every play time. Soon a competition started to see who could jump the longest. We invited Leo to join in, but he wouldn't. We started beginner jump-rope classes and invited Leo to practise during discussion time, giving him a chance to jump without everyone looking, and it gave the others, in the discussion group, a chance to get a word in edgeways. It took a while, but eventually he could jump enough times to join in at play time. Soon the older children were practicing throwing a ball back and forth with him. After a few months Leo was running around at playtime with just as much skill and joy as the other students.

It made me wonder, with all of these children coming to our school, many of whom had severe issues, what on earth was going on in other schools? How have we arrived at a point when what should be a joyful and natural activity - learning - causes so many of them to feel anguish and anxiety?

This anxious mind-set can follow the children into their secondary school. The next chapter is about the secondary school I founded in Scotland.

Finding Their Voice

When I opened the secondary school, many of the students came from a Steiner school which had recently closed down. It soon became apparent that the students were not used to speaking aloud in class. They were also not used to forming groups and having discussions. They were most comfortable sitting and taking notes from the board. They seemed timid and full of self-consciousness, they were not open to exploring ideas, not to mention putting those ideas forward. They had no voice.

I wanted the students to start thinking for themselves, I wanted them to find their voice. It didn't have to be a big, bold and booming voice, not everyone needs to appear super-confident and ready to take on the world, but a voice should exist. There was no spark in their eyes, the lights were out.

I was really concerned about this, many psychological studies have proved that openness is a major player in the skill set needed for learning and for life.

I decided to try project based learning. It had worked really well in the primary school, but these students were fourteen to sixteen, so I was unsure of how they would respond.

I designed a project which saw the students working in pairs and was set around building a model eco-house, reminiscent of the eco-village from the primary school project. This pushed them out of their comfort zone as they worked with partners and met a deadline to present their eco-house in a public exhibition.

The project definitely improved the energy and engagement. If there was a fairground sledge-hammer game which tested enthusiasm instead of strength, the L.A. primary school kids were swinging the hammer with full force enthusiasm, ringing in a ten. The teenagers were now hovering around a four, but it was an improvement from zero. I know teenagers like to be cool, cynical and feign a lack of interest in everything, but I believe we should push against this, I was determined to keep going with the projects, to see if we could increase the enthusiasm level.

For the next project I begin to wonder if it was possible to inject

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some of the energy I had witnessed at the primary school. Could I at least have them swing in a score of six or seven?

The answer arrived unexpectedly, and came from the students.

One day, as I was passing the break room, I overheard the students talking about the Scottish Referendum. A vote had taken place within Scotland, to determine if people wanted to break away from the rest of the U.K. Some of the discussions which took place in school had been a bit heated due to strongly opposing views. I listened to the usually silent students articulating the finer points of political analysis. That passion would be nice to capture during lessons, I thought with a pang of disappointment. I kept thinking about the student's animated discussion over the next few days. I decided that I wanted to pull all of that energy into a project - a project about the referendum.

When I presented the idea, the students were unsure, to say the least, and pushed back. I said it was something I really wanted to try, if they hated it, we'd never have to do another project again.

After finally agreeing to participate, the students were separated into two groups, one group became characters from the 'Yes' campaign, and the other group became characters from the 'Better Together' campaign. Most of the student's original allegiance was already known by all, so they were placed into the opposite campaign and had to see the issues from a different perspective. The objective was for each group to deliver an end-of-project presentation to try to persuade a panel (of teachers and parents) to vote for or against a referendum.

To help them with this task, running parallel to the project, was a course in the 'Five Canons of Rhetoric,' which included:

- Invention (developing your argument).
- Style (how to present your argument).
- Arrangement (organising your argument for maximum effect).
- Delivery (body language and use of voice).
- Memory (knowing your content, so you can speak from the heart).

Armed with their newly acquired rhetorical skills, subject knowledge and desire to gain a competitive edge, the two campaigns battled it out with passion and commitment, which had to be seen to be

believed. The previously cool and cynical teenagers were showing engagement and excitement – ringing in a definite eight on the enthusiasm scale. Parents were telling me that they were discussing the project at home and talking to family members to deepen their understanding of the issues.

This was a learning environment which took everyone by surprise, including the students. Teachers were saying they'd never seen students so engaged, parents were telling me they'd never seen their children so eager to get to school.

What was going on with these teenagers and could we reproduce it? It turns out that yes, it could be reproduced. I would come to realise that subversive drama projects are the key to student enthusiasm and engagement, ringing in a clanging 10 on the enthusiasm scale.

Minds On Fire

I started researching about using games in the classroom and this was when I fortuitously came across the work of Professor Carnes and his book *Minds On Fire: How Role-Immersion Games Transform College*. The book is based on a college programme called 'React To The Past,' (RTTP).

Reading his book validated what we were seeing in our school. It explained why this frenzy of learning had occurred during the Scottish Referendum project including: High levels of engagement, critically thinking about real-world issues, forming strong bonds of community, eliciting empathetic responses, developing leadership skills and producing conscientious researchers and skilled readers. The book gave me the belief that we were on the right track and we could do it again.

In the introduction of the book Professor Carnes writes about posing a question to a student: "Why do 'Reacting' classes generate, almost spontaneously, such high levels of engagement?" He tells us: "The answer seemed obvious. Reacting classes are configured as games. Games are play. People enjoy playing."

Students definitely enjoy playing games, as the popularity in online games and in digital education has shown. I have seen how children will engage with an online program to work through math problems and how it will hold their interest for a whole lesson, whereby they will hunch over a maths textbook with a level of energy more suited

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to sleep. However, most of this type of online learning is done alone and lacks the interaction which is necessary for social development.

There is a different type of engaged play, which is often undertaken naturally during the play of young children - sizing up a situation and figuring out what is relevant; recognizing your options, deciding why a strategy would work or fail, assessing your emotions, all the time developing practical wisdom and reflecting on choices, applying creativity and imagination.

Professor Carnes writes:

Our predominant pedagogical system – rational, hierarchical, individualistic, and well-ordered – often ignores aspects of the self relation to emotion, mischievous subversion, social engagement and creative disorder. Role-immersion games, when configured as an intellectualized pedagogical system, provides access to these often untapped wellsprings of motivation and imagination.

Carnes includes information about how many U.S. students are not satisfied within their educational experience and cites a UCLA survey, which found that on average 40% of students are disengaged or alienated. This has the consequence of not attaining qualifications, a dismal statistic is that a third of U.S. students fail to earn a degree.

The U.K. percentage of students leaving higher education is not quite as dismal as the U.S., however the numbers are increasing.

A Guardian article from March 2018 reported:

Drop-out rates among university students who give up their studies within 12 months have gone up for the third year in a row, according to official statistics.

Figures released by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) show that 26,000 students in England who began studying for their first degree in 2015 did not make it beyond the first year.

Rates of non-continuation were especially bad at London Metropolitan University, where 19.5% of young full-time undergraduates did not continue their studies into the second

year.

Bolton University also had a high drop-out rate at 17%, losing 130 of 755 full-time entrants. At Middlesex University the rate was 16.4%, while it was 14.3% at the University of Bedfordshire and 13.5% at the University of Suffolk

Of all students in the UK starting full-time degree courses for the first time in 2015-16, more than one in 10 (10.5%) are expected to leave higher education without a qualification.

Why are they disengaged? What would they prefer to spend their time doing?

Professor Carnes argues that higher education has always been at the mercy of 'bad play' or 'subversive play', as he has termed the behaviour.

Secondary and even primary education is now compromised by the draw of video games, social networking and Youtube. They bring all the drama and excitement which is totally absent from classrooms. Many of those 'games' which enthrall young people are full of competition. What is it the lure of competitive play?

Competitive Play

In writing about competition and play, Professor Carnes mentions a Dutch historian by the name of Johan Huizinga, who, in 1944, wrote *Homo Ludens – A Study Of the Play Element In Culture*.

I was curious about what Huizinga had to say, so I read his book and found it really interesting. 'Ludere' is the Latin word for 'play,' 'to mimic', 'to mock', 'to deceive.' 'Homo Ludens' is simply 'people who play.'

Huizinga tells us that "we are accustomed to think of play and seriousness as an absolute antithesis." However in thinking about competitive play, he puts forward that the Greek word 'agon' refers to a contest or a struggle. A contest can take any form, chariot racing, athletics or debating. But the play element is the 'agonizing', striving and suffering for the valuable prize which is at stake.

Why the striving and suffering if it's supposed to be play? Huizinga argues that within play the 'antagonist instinct' is man's need to fight. And competitive play whether it be serious, fateful, bloody, scared or fatal, "raises the individual or the collective personality to a higher power."

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Huizinga points to man's basic need to be praised and honored and validated, to be recognized for doing things well. But to be recognized means to set yourself apart, to do things better than someone else would do them, to strive for excellence, this is where the need for competition arises. He believed the culture of civilizations, war, politics, science, commerce was based on competitive play.

However, Professor Carnes feels Huizinga's theory leaves a few holes in understanding subversive play and says:

If civilizations had been built by competitive play, then its motivational force could hardly have been subversive in character. Competition thrills...because it contains the possibility of subverting existing social hierarchies and cultural assumption"...Straddling the boundaries of real and unreal – is a source of the peculiar emotional power of subversive play.

The boundary of real/unreal and order/chaos is the obstacle-strewn path which sees the students watch their step, constantly question their direction, and do a double-take on their own certainties and assumptions of what is right and wrong. This can be challenging as 'being certain' is interwoven into the fabric of our neurology.

Professor of Neuroscience, Beau Lotto, says the primal need to be certain, to predict outcomes, was historically necessary for our safety and survival. This has led to our deep dislike of uncertainty, our inability to cope with unpredictable situations, which often causes us to feel unstable and can affect the quality of our mental health. Lotto says:

Every behaviour we do, we do to reduce uncertainty. The stress resulting from uncertainty is tremendous in our society. It increases brain cell death it decreases plasticity...we do almost everything to avoid uncertainty. Yet the irony is, that that's the only place we can go if we're ever going to see differently. And that's why creativity, seeing differently, always begins in the same way, it begins with a question.

Lotto says that everything we do is grounded in assumptions from previous experience. And how nothing interesting happens from this place. Is there a way to safely move beyond our assumptions? Lotto tells us there is:

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Fortunately evolution gave us a solution, it's a way of being, it's actually a way of being that celebrates uncertainty, it's open to possibility, it's inherently collaborative...it is play.

According to the *Journal of Play*, the elements of play are: anticipation, surprise, pleasure, understanding, strength and poise. Another component of play is the making fun of each other and yourself over mistakes, the banter and humour which is brought about by spontaneous interactions.

In the next chapter we will look at how TPP introduce these spontaneous interactions and the play element into the classroom.

CHAPTER 6

TPP In Action

Three Phases Of TPP

Each phase of TPP provides an opportunity for development. There are three distinct phases:

Phase 1 – The Individual

Entails working individually and learning about the details of your assigned character and how they responded to their life's challenges. They might have wanted revenge, felt powerless or achieved acts of heroism. Those human qualities start to shimmer up off the page, or out of the screen, resonating in the brains of the students, firing up those mirror neurons.

For the quieter student, this phase can be a breeze, they can disappear into the research. For the outgoing students, it can be challenging as they have to reign in their need to be with others.

Often, the scale of the project, the realisation that it is going to be hard work for many weeks will bring complaints. They will say that there is too much information to research, or too little information to put together a detailed profile, or they don't understand the motivations of the character, or they don't like them. They look overwhelmed and afraid.

They are experiencing what Steven Pressfield, in his book, *The War Of Art*, calls 'Resistance.' This is the invisible unstoppable force which descends when you are about to undertake an endeavor which feels big and requires one hundred percent, of your focus, commitment and dedication to see it through. Resistance steps in bringing self-doubt and fear of the task, fear of failure and fear of looking stupid.

What to do about resistance? Tell the students about it and teach them how it is defeated. Firstly by recognising the resisting force, secondly by the willingness to do battle with it, and thirdly by a focus on one step at a time. A resistance rebellion plan is needed, which sounds subversive so gets the attention of the students.

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Successive projects brings familiarity to the old visitor named resistance and the students develop personal battle tactics to see them through.

When they have mastered resistance, they will have acquired a life skill which will keep paying back with interest.

Phase 2 – The Team

The students now join with the rest of their team. This can feel awkward at the beginning, students who would usually have very little to do with each other will now be spending up to ten hours a week in close connection, discussing and dismantling character traits and motivations. They will also be putting together arguments to defeat the other team, which takes advantage of the “us/them” psychology (more information in Part II, Chapter 3), which binds people together when the “them” are on the attack. Strong bonds start to develop, top-dogs and underdogs equalize and all become accepted. Soon, loneliness and isolation is no longer an issue for *any* student (more information in the next Chapter).

This is the stage when the first Disrupters are introduced by the facilitators, which will literally disrupt their plans and call for critical thinking (more in Part I, Chapter 9) and intellectual creativity (more in Part III, Chapter 4).

Phase 3 - The Opposition

The team now join forces against those who are trying to defeat them. However to be victorious, they have to learn about the viewpoint of their opposition, in great depth.

The words of John Stuart Mill, from *On Liberty*:

He who knows only his own side of the case knows little of that. His reasons may be good, and no one may have been able to refute them. But if he is equally unable to refute the reasons on the opposite side, if he does not so much as know what they are, he has no ground for preferring either opinion.

This phase is played out on the ‘stage,’ which is a term used for any interaction between the two factions. It’s the central heartbeat of

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TPP, where the action is, where the opposition can demand that you elaborate on your argument. Their aim is to trip you up, make you feel uncertain, with the objective of making you forget your message and psychologically flee from the challenge.

This final phase is usually not comfortable, even for outgoing students. This is the vital ‘agitation stage,’ which provides the intellectual friction, which rises up from fighting for your right to say what you think, for what you feel passionate about. The conflict is essential, it fires up the neurons and agitates those synapses until they are bright and shiny. The result is a voice full of clarity and conviction.

There is a really interesting area of study, based on the work of Polish psychiatrist and psychologist Kazimierz Dabrowski (1902-1980). He puts forward a theory of personality development, which he named “Theory of Positive Disintegration” (TPD). It is often viewed as a precursor of positive psychology. The theory was based on his belief that anxiety and tension, which are often viewed as negative states, are actually positive and necessary elements of healthy development. He also believed that behaviour and character transforms through emotional growth, which is a process beginning with instinctual egocentrism and culminates in self-awareness, empathy and compassion.

This third phase incurs much soul-searching and a stripping away or burning off of old ways of thinking. However, if a student is vehemently against going on stage they are never forced. After a few projects they will have usually built up their courage and changed their mind.

Facilitator Role

In his book, Professor Carnes writes about a new Professor who was skeptical about introducing RTTP. He had doubts and thought that there would be “workers and slackers.” He thought a class run by students would be a “cringe-worthy nightmare” where “students who knew nothing instructed students who didn’t know the difference.” In Carnes words, “He envisioned an epic failure that might torpedo his career.” So the new Professor kept control of the game, lecturing excessively and trying to oversee the student’s understanding of the information and of their characters. He took a small step back, but still kept control of everyone’s interactions and character moves. However we eventually had to let go. “The game had too many

pieces and too many roles for me to control,” he said. So he decided to sit back and completely hand control over to the students. “The quieter I got, the better the game went.” The students had to then find the answers for themselves, had to become the artisanal directors of the game.

Although, as a facilitator, you watch from the sidelines and can’t keep up with every detail, you still need to have a grasp of how the game is progressing. We were lucky to have two facilitators for TPP at our school. I worked with our wonderful drama teacher, who was skilled in identifying what the students would find engaging. The attitude of the teachers is the key to the success of the projects.

I was assigned to one group, and the drama teacher to the other, we could then meet and plan the Disrupters. If you think this sounds exciting and challenging for the facilitators, you would be right. In a way, it is much harder work than standing at the front of the class reading out text, writing on the board, and trying to elicit a molecule of enthusiasm from the glazed eyes looking back at you, but it’s joyful work. If you can work in pairs (even pull in a volunteer as a second facilitator) it makes the experience so much better.

TPP: The Trial of Patrick Sellar

We took the students to see the play: *The Cheviot, the Stag, and the Black Black Oil*, written in 1973 by the late John McGrath, who was from Liverpool. The play tells the story of exploitation in Scotland from the Highland Clearances to the oil boom. The play is also a study in class differences and how people suffered under the ruling class. The students really enjoyed watching the play and it provided a good foundation for an TPP.

Patrick Sellar was the estate manager of the Sutherland estates in the Scottish Highlands, the largest private estate in Europe at 1.5 million acres. The estate belonged to the Countess of Sutherland and her husband the Marquess of Stafford who, between 1811 and 1821, cleared around 15,000 people out of their homes to make way for valuable sheep to furnish the cotton mills. On June 13th, 1814 Sellar ordered the eviction of William Chilshom and his wife from their croft in Strathnaver. As was the order, from the Countess, if people were reluctant or refused to leave their croft it would be set on fire. This is what happened to Chilshom’s croft whilst his mother-in-law,

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Margaret Mackay, was still inside. She was pulled out by her daughter, but died a few days later. Sellar was then brought up on trial facing arson and culpable homicide charges. However, he had friends on the jury and was acquitted of all charges.

The students separated into two teams, the prosecution and the defense. The brief was to put together the legal case for or against Patrick Sellar. This included researching and reading huge amounts of material as the students would have to be extremely familiar with the events of the Highland Clearances when the time came for the famous trial.

The “Disrupters” (fully explained in Part III, Chapter 4) for TPP included the manipulation of Sellar by the Countess through affairs of the heart. Letters were sent back and forth between the two teams to elevate critical thinking skills and to introduce strategic planning. Secret meetings at the Stone Castle (there was actually a castle-like structure in the grounds of where our school was located). A kidnapping and blackmail introduced surprise and mystery, which deepened and intensified the learning experience.

There was a frenzy of learning. The students were coming into school early in the morning to finish their case briefs. They would work through breaks and lunches, and again we would sometimes have to force them to leave the classroom, to eat or take a walk.

The projects are not re-enactments, or simulations whereby the students act ‘like’ a character, they seem to become the character, taking on how they felt about the issues swirling around them.

The students became immersed in the study of human nature, of others and their own.

In Robert Greene’s wonderful book, *The Laws of Human Nature*, he tells us that human nature is the wiring of our brains, the configuration of our nervous system and how we process emotions. He says:

We are subject to forces from deep within us that drive our behavior and that operate below the level of awareness. We see the results – our thoughts, moods and actions – but have little conscious access to what actually moves our emotions and compels us to behave in certain ways.

Greene urges us to strategically observe other people's behaviour to bring understanding and to free us from much of life's emotional drama. However, he also reveals that this is not as easy as it seems. When we are in the company of others, rather than observe their behaviour, we are more likely to be obsessed with our own. How people are viewing us, what we are saying and how we are responding to others can take over, especially with adolescents. Even if we can prize ourselves free from our own internal echo chamber and venture outside of our head to observe another's actions or listen intently to what they are saying, we then rush to judge and categorise.

Green says a part of the answer is to depersonalise people's behaviours especially when they are irrational and unpredictable.

TPP provide this opportunity, which is an incredible way to study character traits in a dispassionate and considered way, and to learn how to look for the reasons behind the behaviour in a systematic and tolerant way. The diversity of the projects brought to life characters from different countries, time frames, and professions. This provided a world of social and psychological insight into human nature for all of the students.

Playing At Full Speed

The development of every student has a staggered progression. John, is one of our students (his story is in Part II, Chapter 6) and he found his voice in phase two. It was during the Evictor's Trial project planning stage. John had been quietly listening to his teammates for about three or four of the planning sessions. At this particular session, both myself and the drama teacher happened to be observing the meeting when John suddenly jumped to his feet loudly claiming: "This is unacceptable, they can't just move the people off the land, it's not right. I know someone who was evicted and it was the most awful thing they'd ever been through"

I locked eyes with the drama teacher in surprise, it had taken John a few sessions to feel 'safe' in the group, his initial distrust of teachers and peers had caused him to disconnect from everyone. John was now playing at full speed - however his passion was verging on anger. I took him aside and talked about the futility of accomplishing

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anything through anger, though it was understandable that he was feeling angry, I asked him if he could channel those feelings into creating a few hard-hitting and logical arguments. Yes, he told me, he thought that he could, and went off to emerge himself in research and discussions. At the trial, John's character was William Chisholm, husband to Henrietta Mackay. The following is a segment of the trial transcript:

William Chisholm

(To Sellar's lawyer) You said that she refused to leave, so that means they were fully aware of my mother-in-law being in the house when it was burned down. So what you are trying to say - that they didn't know she was in the house isn't true, is it?

Defense Lawyer

Well, she got the eviction notice and was told she had to leave.

William Chisholm

They were fully aware of her presence in the house when they were burning it down.

Defense Lawyer

If she has an eviction notice to leave the land, the order is for her to leave. If she does not leave, then she suffers the consequences.

Prosecuting Lawyer

Objection Your Honour

Judge

Objection granted

Prosecuting Lawyer

By not acknowledging Mr. Chisholm's direct reference, has my dear learned friend here just admitted to the intentional burning down of a house by Patrick Sellar, knowing that there was a live person inside. Is that what you have just admitted to?

Defense Lawyer

(Does not answer. Confers with junior lawyer)

William Chisholm

(nodding his head in agreement with the prosecuting lawyer) Yes.. that's right, that is what he is admitting to!

Prosecuting Lawyer

Have you? Have you just admitted that Patrick Sellar knowingly burned down someone's home with them still inside? Is that what you have just said to me?

Defense Lawyer

No....I...

Prosecuting Lawyer

When we read back the transcript, I think you will find that is exactly what you have just admitted to. Why would you admit to such a thing if Patrick Sellar here is innocent of killing Margaret Mackay?

Patrick Sellar

(Blurts out angrily) I don't know if you listened to the opening statement, I was blackmailed by the Countess and these actions were not my own actions....I would appreciate it if you would...

(Prosecuting Lawyer answers back, but Patrick Sellar is also talking. Everyone joins in, loudly arguing their point. Including John. Chaos breaks out).

Judge

(Banging the gravel on the desk) Order in court! Can the defense please wait until Patrick Sellar takes the stand, then we can listen to his statement. Thank you! Mr. Sellar, you cannot blurt out in court, this is your one and only warning.

John had found his voice – how to express his emotions without giving in to his anger.

Role play projects are especially beneficial for boys, opening them up to being able to show vulnerability and emotions through their characters, including insecurities, fear, guilt and shame.

Emotional suppression is a negative attribute in this game. This surprises the boys, almost all of them have previously tended towards

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not showing one ounce of emotion other than anger or frustration.

The character discussions are an incredibly effective way for boys to talk about feelings without fear of judgement. Boys talk to each other about how their characters would feel about the issues they are facing. These discussions seep into their internal world, they ponder about the challenges men face and how they respond to their own weakness, strengths or responsibilities. It is not a huge jump from a character focus: “I think he’d feel...” to a personal focus “I feel...” When they see that the sky doesn’t come crashing down, it enriches their vocabulary and they start to feel comfortable talking about feelings and emotions, not seeing it as a weakness. It then starts to become part of the boy culture often replacing a culture of mockery and coolness. Once it is accepted by a few, it is then accepted by all. It is some of the most empowering work they can undertake.

This work is also powerful for girls. Although girls are usually more at home talking about feelings, they can become enveloped in their strong emotions and often fractious relationships. It is a good practice for them to be more in control and to focus on the logical arguments and reasoned discussions.

Public Speaking Panic

As the students prepare for the third phase of the trial of Patrick Sellar, dressed in an ensemble of 19th century costumes, borrowed from a local drama club, the atmosphere was electric, students were nervously giggling and bantering back and forth. It seemed more like a theatre night than a classroom assignment.

However, one student, Lisa, was not so excited. Lisa’s character was Henrietta, the daughter of the old woman who died of her burn injuries after her croft had been set on fire.

Lisa had sailed through phase one and managed phase two, but then became really worried about being on trial and speaking in front of others in the final phase. The students were not supposed to read lines from notes during the trial, the whole idea of TPP is to respond to questions, to be ready to restructure your thoughts and defend your argument without referring to a script.

Lisa asked me if her notes could be read out by someone else, a stand in? Maybe “Henrietta” was too upset by the death of her mother to

attend the trial? I didn't think that was the answer.

Her teammates practiced questioning her, she had her character's storyline memorised. I told her that once she was on trial, it would all come back to her. She didn't believe me, she had no confidence in her own ability.

I didn't want to give her a pass, I knew she would feel like she had missed a big part of the project if she didn't take part in phase 3. I told her I would make an exception so she could take her notes into the trial and read from them, I also told her she was Henrietta, upset at her mother's death and at any point she could refuse to answer any more questions, and leave the stand. I then pulled out the winning card – her teammates were relying on her to win the case.

Her attitude shifted and she agreed to go along with this arrangement, knowing she could “act” as if she were too emotional to continue and walk off. The time came for her appearance and she was called to the stand. She walked in gingerly, head bowed low, clinging to her notes. I crossed my fingers.

Lisa placed her notes in front of her. The prosecuting lawyer who was part of Lisa's team would be questioning her. Everyone in the class knew of Lisa's love of animals and her teammates seemed to have put a strategy in place:

Prosecuting Lawyer

Yes, Your Honour. I call Henrietta Mackay to the stand.

Prosecuting Lawyer

Can you tell me what life was like in Strathnaver, before the people were asked to leave?

Henrietta Mackay

It was a beautiful community. Children running around, animals everywhere, it was a really nice place to stay.

Prosecuting Lawyer

What has happened to the people who lived there now, and all of those lovely animals?

Henrietta Mackay

They've been taken away from that beautiful place where they

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once lived. They've seen their families destroyed, their houses burned to ashes. I don't know what happened to the animals, dead I suppose.

Prosecuting Lawyer

Not something you are likely to forget?

Henrietta Mackay

No.

(At this point Lisa's body language changed, she was annoyed, probably more about the dead animals than the people. She took her notes and placed them onto a side table).

Prosecuting Lawyer

Could you tell us about your mother please, and what kind of lady she was?

Henrietta Mackay

She was lovely. She was the mother everyone wishes for. She kept the house perfect.

(Lisa lowers her head in sadness).

Prosecuting Lawyer

I understand this is difficult, can you please tell us what happened on the night in question.

Henrietta Mackay

Well, I was inside with William and I heard a sort of a crackle overhead, I looked above and there was orange flames on the roof. Out of sheer panic I screamed and I also heard screaming outside. I ran outside, William was behind me but then I remembered that my mother was still in the house, lying in bed. Ignoring William's cries and protests, I ran back into the house, which was now filled with black smoke. I then was beside my mother, she was badly burnt, I tried to pick her up but she let out a blood curdling scream because she was burnt so badly. I had to drag her out, William helped me. As we left I could see the village getting burned to the ground. I will never forget the scene before my eyes. We got to the woods, to shelter and I lay my mother on a bed of leaves. William went to collect water from the nearby stream. My mother was burnt and helpless, crying and whimpering every time I tried to help her move. She kept her eyes closed

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and didn't speak for the rest of the five days that she lived. I didn't even get to say goodbye.

(The whole room falls into stunned silence and stares at Henrietta/Lisa).

Prosecuting Lawyer

Ah, err... Those events sound dreadful, something you will never forget.

Henrietta Mackay

Never!

And that was Lisa's journey, overcoming her fear of expressing herself in front of a group of people.

By the time Sellar's lawyer began to cross-examine, 'Henrietta' was more than ready for him. The character's story had taken over any self-consciousness, any sense of feeling awkward. The whole 'courtroom' was caught up in the sadness of this daughter's despair over the loss of her mother and her whole community, including the animals.

After her performance, Lisa was excited, literally jumping up and down, due to the fact that she'd been able to work without her notes.

That is the goal of TPP, the same one which many great directors and actors have, to prepare for your lines, study your character and the surrounding events so well that you can leave the script and the heavy thinking behind and perform from what thoughts emerge inside of your head and your heart.

During the trial, the student who played Patrick Sellar told the whole group how difficult it was to feel like everyone was against you. And how the need to defend himself was really strong.

At the end of the trial, Patrick Sellar took the stand:

Patrick Sellar

It was always the Countess' dream to own a sheep farm and that was what drove her to be so determined to rid the lands of the tenants as soon as possible. She incorporated me into

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that dream. She was always telling me how amazing it would be when we would run the farm together. Then she told me of how she wanted me to go about evicting the tenants and I was shocked.

Defending Lawyer

At any time did you go against the Countess' wishes?

Patrick Sellar

I told a few of the men in the eviction party to be careful to not break the law and to not be cruel to the residents, there are witnesses to verify this fact. Mr. Chisholm was refusing to leave the property and was setting himself up for violent eviction. With his mother in law being of such old age, I feared for him and approached him the day before the evictions and tried to warn him of what was to come.

Defending Lawyer

Thank you Mr. Sellar, that will be all.

Judge

Prosecution, any final comments regarding Mr. Sellar?

Prosecuting Lawyer

Yes, Your Honour. Mr. Sellar, you would have the court believe that your intentions for the land was simply to improve the economic situation. However, I put it to you, Mr. Sellar, that the jury will have to consider the argument for economic improvements over the needs of the people. We understand that the Duke, the Countess and yourself would want to secure their financial situation, but to do so at the cost of the loss of homes and the destruction of family life is unforgivable. I put it to you Mr. Sellar that you are here today, charged with the death of only Margaret Mackay, however you have played your part in this web of human sacrifice of many for the increase in profits for a few. People who have been left at best to move to a new area and take up a livelihood they know nothing about and at worst to freeze and starve or to embark on a journey to faraway lands. The jury, this day, will decide on your fate.

The prosecution rests, Your Honour.

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That is where the magic happens. The students forget they are ‘on stage’, and they bounce off each other, so well versed in every view point. If you captured it as a play, it would be the most authentic performance you had ever seen.

Then family and friends, who have been hearing about the trial for weeks on end, now get to play a part. The transcript for the trial is sent out, along with a request from the judge:

Thank you for taking part in these proceedings. Please read the attached transcript.

You have a difficult decision to make and I would like for you to consider the following:

Is there sufficient evidence to prove Patrick Sellar is guilty of murdering Margaret Mackay?

Is Patrick Sellar guilty of causing damage to the homes of the people of Strathnaver, or was he following orders from the Countess to whom the land belonged?

If you decided that Patrick Sellar is guilty of the above crimes, what punishment would you allocate to him?

Please vote for:

Guilty of murder – punishable by death.

Manslaughter - imprisoned for up to twenty years or relocated to Australia

Secondly, is the Countess Elizabeth Sutherland guilty of leading these crimes. Should she shoulder any of the responsibility of the death of Margaret Mackay, or of the damage to the homes?

Did the countess instruct Patrick to set fire to the houses?

If you decide that the Countess is guilty of the above crimes, what punishment would you allocate to her?

Murder – punishable by death.

Manslaughter – imprisoned for up to twenty years or relocation to Australia?

Parents, family and friends were given a few days to read the transcript and cast their vote by email. There was much anticipation

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during those few days as to which way the vote would go. The time was used for reflection by the students. What would they have done differently? How could they have made their arguments stronger? Now the competitive element had ceased, cross-faction discussion began. An amazing in-depth analysis of the whole project took place. The responses came back, the result of the vote was to send Sellar off to Australia, and imprison the Countess for ten years.

The Trial of Patrick Sellar TPP was a huge success, but was not without it's challenges. The situation with Lisa had been a conundrum and a tough decision for me to make. Should I push her through her fears and reluctance to speak in front of others, knowing it would ultimately allow her confidence to soar. Or should she have been allowed to give in to her fear and step back from challenge and responsibility? The answer seemed obvious to me.

Teachers can often clearly see the students who are having difficulties making friends and building a social life. We know that feeling awkward about speaking in front of other people will impede on many areas of life. Therefore, should teachers, who are tasked with the responsibility of educating young people take action when they witness this occurring? Is it the job of teachers to help students build relationships with others? Maybe the role of educators needs to be examined.

TPP are part of a wider programme of Non-Exam Subjects, these interactive and highly social projects provide opportunities to build relationships and overcome the student's fears of interacting with others.

(Non-Exam Subjects are outlined in Part III, Chapter 5)

Our Sense of Self

Professor Carnes writes about the views of George Herbert Mead, who was an American philosopher, sociologist, and psychologist. He spent much of his career teaching at the University of Chicago. Mead wrote a book in 1934 entitled, *Mind, Self and Society*, which put forward the observation that we don't have a contained sense of self, which we carry around and put into play during social interactions, our self emerges as a consequence of our interactions with others.

Mead says the self is:

A process in which the individual is continually adjusting himself in advance of the situation to which he belongs, and reacting back on it. So that the “I and me,” thinking, this conscious adjustment, becomes then a part of the whole social process and makes a much more highly organized society possible.

If this is true, that interactions with others help us to develop our inner selves, then how can any educational process not address it?

Dr. Jordan Peterson is a Canadian clinical psychologist and a professor of psychology. He is also an author and international speaker. He says:

So the idea is that there's a potential inside you...Some of it is genetic potential and we know that because if we move you into a new environment new genes will turn on inside of you and manufacture new parts of you. So if you stress yourself optimally if you push yourself out into the world you can incorporate information from that journey...You go out and you learn something new and you adjust your behavior to it, you adjust your concepts to it and then you can master it...It also transforms your biological structure at a microscopic level, merely as a consequence of being put in the new situation. So the idea is that there's more to you than you know and the way you call it out is by challenging yourself voluntarily in as many directions as you can manage and that's a real thing...it's actually how you learn to cope in the world.

This was our goal, to challenge the students in all directions, to help them cope in the world. From my own experience, I saw quiet students find their voice during the projects. It was a struggle at first, like most new things, it feels uncomfortable and we want to repel anything which moves us away from our comfortable positions. From the resulting development of these students, it appears TPP might just be about the most powerful learning tool in the box.

This is because they make use of liminal experience.

Liminality

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Before I write about liminality, I'd like to tell you about a rite of passage experience:

When we opened the secondary school, many of the students were from a Rudolph Steiner school, some of them from the same class and were around age fifteen.

The Waldorf school provided a "rite of passage" for students when they reached fourteen. This tradition saw the students spend a week together on the west coast of Scotland. This wasn't a week of comfort and organised events, it entailed difficult conditions in cold weather and required the students to exhibit resilience and resourcefulness. The students were taught survival skills, how to find food and water, build a fire and find shelter for a few days, then they were taken to small islands and dropped off in small groups and left there for two days with no supplies.

Everyone, especially parents were nervous about this trip. Although managed by professionals, there was a slightly dangerous element and the first time all of the students would be in this situation.

When the week was over, they returned home looking different, an air of quiet confidence definitely swirled around them as they took their bags off the coach.

They had bonded over feelings of fear and hunger. They had stories of falling in freezing waters and waiting hours to catch fish for their dinner, making fires, building shelters and supporting each other. They also talked about the process as a rite of passage, which saw them totally separated from society and technology.

The first stage they encountered was feeling terrified and not equipped for the demands placed on them. The middle stage, found them thinking that they just might survive this experience. The final stage was an awareness of this new state within themselves, a new confidence in their own capabilities. They were no longer the same person as they were before. Much of their belief in their own abilities were often attributed to the encouragement from others within the group, how they'd received support from their temporary tribe.

Once at home, they all talked about how comfortable everything felt, and how grateful they were to have a warm bed and access to good food. Their appreciation for what they had in their life was clearly evident.

The objective of the trip was to begin to build a sense of

resourcefulness, and create community. This relied on a specific space - this could only be done in a place, which was the antithesis of home. It also relied on time – the week-long trip felt like a long time to the students.

At our secondary school, we also challenged the students by moving them out of their physical comfort zone. A trip to Italy included a day-long exhausting mountain trek. On a trip to Amsterdam we only had bikes for transportation around the city. This was anxiety-inducing for many of the students (and for me), weaving through the busy traffic. Fortunately drivers in Amsterdam are very courteous towards cyclists, mainly due to the fact that all blame is put on them in the event of an accident.

The aspect of transitional stages was brought into the day-to-day classroom learning through the 3 stages of TPP. However, this challenge focused on the mental transitions, rather than the physical ones. But, in the same way, a space has to be created and time allocated to provide the opportunity for growth. Then, as with the physical challenges, the mental challenges brought about a process, which changed who the students were. They felt differently about themselves after the experience. This change was due to a shift in their thinking, opinions and beliefs.

(More about these changes from a neuroscience perspective in Part II, Chapter 4).

To look at this through a liminal lens we will turn to the research into *Communitas* and *Liminality*.

Communitas is a Latin noun referring to the spirit of an equal, unstructured community who share a common experience, usually through a rite of passage, which is transformational and humbling.

That common experience is liminality, from the Latin word *limen*, meaning “a threshold.”

This threshold is the middle stage of the process. Like the students who faced new and challenging situations, left on a small island to fend for themselves, trekking hour after hour up a mountainside, venturing into city traffic on a bicycle which challenged them physically. And being involved in TPP, which challenged them

psychologically. They all found themselves within a liminal experience, leaving their normal lives, going to a new space and moving through the stages, surrounded by a supportive community.

Liminality as a concept was first developed by Arnold van Gennep in his 1909 book, *Rites de Passage*, where he wrote about the existence of rites of passage in all cultures.

Anthropologist Victor Turner found the work of van Gennep, and in 1963 brought liminality back onto the table in his book, *The Forest of Symbols*. Turner thought of liminality as the time of ambiguity or disorientation which occurs in the middle stages of a rites of passage experience, the time of “betwixt and between.”

Professor Ray Land is a pioneer of liminality and threshold concepts within the field of education. He has written many books including, *Overcoming Barriers to Student Understanding: Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge*. He provides a good overview presentation which can be found on Youtube under the same title as his book.

In the video, Land tells us that a threshold concept or a core concept is a piece of information, which changes your world, like learning about gravity or evolution. He also says concepts are like portals which take you to a place you don't understand or have not encountered before, it transforms your perspective. If students do not experience this transforming effect, they are not likely to progress and will instead enter into “mimicry.” This is not plagiarism or cheating, but it is a boiled down passive type of learning whereby the student will only be interested in the knowledge for the sake of doing what is required of them for their course work. Land says:

They can't own this knowledge and apply it to a different context, they can only hold it in the form that it was give to them and in the context it was given to them... They've not internalised it if they haven't integrated it...so we want to get students beyond that sort of surface regurgitation...

Land says this surface knowledge is fleeting, the student feels like they understand it for a few seconds, but then it escapes them.

He offers the film *Educating Rita* as an example of a young working-

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class woman encountering a threshold concept. The character wants to become educated, but at the same time she knows that education will take her away from her familiar world, so she initially resists the process. When she decides to go all in and become absorbed by her new world, there is a personal cost to pay.

Land puts forward that although these changes haven't necessarily brought her happiness, she has become a more powerful person due to the transition. It is a difficult and troublesome transition, hence "troublesome knowledge." Land says:

There is some encounter with knowledge which troubles our student and provokes a state of liminality...it gets them to realise, the way I've seen things up to now is no longer sufficient, there are other ways of looking at this, there are more sophisticated, or there are different ways of looking at this which I've not encountered before and at that point to take on board this new perspective. Something has to be reconfigured, a once prevailing view has to be loosened or weakened in some way.

Liberal Arts

TPP did have strong historical elements, but there was also the provision of a diverse body of study including science, politics and psychology, which developed analytical skills and multi-cultural understanding. Filming, and video production/editing took place. The building of language and expressive skills both written and verbal also occurred. The students became well practiced in the theatrical side of presentation through their work during an end-of-project court case or symposium.

I thought about this subject diversity for a long time, about how to describe it, encapsulating an accurate description seemed to be difficult. But then it occurred to me that the subjects covered were very similar to a study of liberal arts or the humanities.

The two terminologies are often used interchangeably, however there is a difference in that the Humanities are a sub-section of Liberal Arts.

The Humanities includes: literature, linguistics, history, theology,

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human geography, philosophy and ethics.

Another area of Liberal Arts is the arts, including: drama, music, theatre, painting, drawing, literature, poetry, architecture, film, photography, video production/editing, graphic design and fashion.

The wider scope of Liberal Arts takes in social sciences: linguistics, anthropology, politics, gender studies, economics, business, law, psychology and sociology.

TPP had the capability and capacity to include almost everything you would encounter whilst studying Liberal Arts.

Each Student would become interested in a certain aspect of the project; one student found eighteenth century law fascinating. Another project was based on the last U.S. political campaign and caused many students to become engrossed in the process of politics, both in the U.S. and in the U.K.

There are many students who feel drawn to studying Liberal Arts at university, but worry about how they would use the degree to create a future career. However, many businesses are now valuing the skills which are developed through studying Liberal Arts, including critical thinking, creativity and communication. These skills are vital in most fields and they might not be as developed in students who have studied a specific subject.

Providing students with an opportunity to cover the Liberal Arts subjects in secondary school offers exposure to the workings of the real world, in all of its complexities. If the Enterprise Projects (more information later) are also offered, this then provides a practical, business component to an education.

With the option of traditional classes such as maths, physics, chemistry, biology etc., a fully dynamic, well-rounded and complete education offering would be in place, in which any student would certainly flourish.

Over two years, we covered one Portal Project per term, six in all. The projects always included presentation skills and also incorporated many elements of Liberal Arts.

The following are TPP, we produced, alongside the integrated subjects:

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- The Scottish Referendum - Political/Social Studies/Statistics/Ethics
- The Evictors Trial - History/Social Studies/19th Century Law/Economics/Human Geography/Costume Design/Film Production
- Who Killed JFK? - History/Social Studies/Political/Ethics/Philosophy
- The U.S. Presidential Election - Political/Social Studies/Data Analysis/Filming & Video Production/Ethics/Gender Studies
- The Killing of Julius Caesar - History/Social Studies/Leadership/Psychology/Ethics
- Move to Mars? - Science/Environmental Studies/Ethics/Philosophy/Probability/Film & Music Production/Video Editing

The projects allowed the students to follow their interests, which could include a study of how a rocket gets to Mars, Roman history, or the politics of a presidential election. Facilitators would then act in an administrative role, helping to find specific courses, or people to speak to, whatever the student needed to develop their area of study.

If you struck up a conversation today with one of our students who undertook TPP, they can still vividly remember all elements of each project, the characters, the storylines, the historical details. They could sit down today and re-write their original essays.

All of TPP had been historical, so we thought about designing a futuristic/scientific project. This culminated in the “Move To Mars?” project.

TPP - Move To Mars?

The students look nervous as they sit on opposite sides of the room at the “International Symposium for the Future of Human Habitat.” They have been working non-stop on this project for four weeks. Up for grabs was £50 billion in funding. Investors, on one side, eager to finalise a decision about the advancement of a human colony on Mars. Or, on the other side, eager to invest in the future of Earth. Both sides are looking to secure the prize. The two factions, the Earth team and the Mars team will battle it out to see who secures

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the money. The symposium is the platform for the two teams to put forward their arguments, then a carefully selected international ‘jury’ (aka friends and family) will then vote and select the winning team.

The two teams are allowed three weeks to research and agree on the information they will present. An extra week is allocated for the teams to produce a promotional video to be shown at the symposium.

The following is an excerpt from a fifteen page transcript. Speeches from representatives of the two teams are separated into paragraphs from the Mars team and the Earth team. The students are not reading from notes, the transcript is from a dialogic exchange between the two factions.

The Earth’s team (ET) includes heavy hitters such as:

Polly Higgins* the leading advocate for ecocide law who believes that we should include ecocide as an offence, the 5th international crime against peace.

Also included in the team is Robert Johnston from NASA who studies how life forms react in un-natural environments.

*Polly Higgins, sadly recently past away, for an overview of her amazing life, please see:

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/apr/25/polly-higgins-obituary>

The Mars (MT) team include wealthy business people such as Elon Musk and Richard Branson. They have produced a video with distressing images of deforestation, famine, and crime and begin their presentation with a showing of their video.

Mars Team:

It is Mars One’s goal to establish a settlement on Mars. A human settlement on Mars is the next giant leap for mankind. Exploring the solar system will bring humanity closer together. Mars is a stepping stone in the human race in its voyage into the universe. Humanoid settlement on Mars will aid our understandings of the origins of the solar system, the origins of life and our place in the universe. A mission to Mars will inspire generations to believe that all things are possible, anything can be achieved.

MT: Great achievement has no rules or maps, the x-ray is vital to our society and so is penicillin and neither was discovered with a practical objective in mind. When the electron was discovered in 1897 it was useless and now we have an entire world run by electronics. Beethoven and Mozart never studied the classics, they couldn't, they invented them, exploration and endeavor don't always result in discoveries but they always lead to it.

MT: Despite it potentially being one of the greatest things ever achieved by man, colonising Mars could solve the greatest problem ever created by man. The Earth's over population will be our downfall. There are more people alive today than have died in the whole of human history, our population is growing exponentially and it won't stop growing until disaster strikes. Imagine the whole world being enslaved by China's "one child policy," or imagine being forced to pay royalties in order to be able to have a child of your own? Imagine a world where countries go to war over reservoirs of fresh water and the masses die of thirst. Imagine a corrupt false economy taking hold where the currency is in bottles of water and barrels of oil. Imagine when the greenhouse gas emissions become so great that the water level rises, and floods destroy livelihoods all over the world? This dystopia is on the horizon and we need to act before we become too dependent on our resources to prevent us from leaving. We will be marooned on a planet with a population that is too far down the path of destruction to ever be salvageable. The only way to prevent this is to expand our great civilisation into the universe in order to aid us in the betterment of our society.

MT: It is not just us at Mars One who think this, some of the great minds of our generation agree with us, Stephen Hawking passionately agrees that our goal should be out of planetary colonization. It is essential that we colonize space he says. I believe that eventually we will establish self sustaining colonies on Mars and elsewhere in the solar system.

MT: We'd like to finish by saying that societies are like individuals, we grow when we challenge ourselves, we stagnate when we do not, John F Kennedy said before the Apollo moon landings "We're not going to the moon because it's easy, we are going because it's hard." Thank you.

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The Earth team now have the opportunity to question the Mars team:

ET: We have done a lot of damage to the Earth as your video has shown, but how will that be prevented on Mars?

MT: Well, we have learned from our mistakes. Using our best scientists, mathematicians and engineers humankind has to offer, we believe that by going to Mars we can begin to mend the wounds caused by us on Earth. Initially, not just anyone will go, only those who have the skills to contribute to the infrastructure there. They will be responsible scientists who will research the Mars habitat, so by the time civilians arrive we will know the correct procedures in order to protect Mars

MT: We wanted to convey the consequences of what would happen if we carried on the way we are going and let overpopulation take hold. We wanted to convince people that leaving the Earth is not the daunting thing to do, staying on Earth is. Finally the video aims to bring awareness to the fact that our Earth is not sustainable.

ET: So overpopulation on Earth is obviously a big issue, however if you colonize Mars, under population could be an issue to such an extent that humanity could actually die out. During our research we found out that due to exposure to radiation fertility is often lost, so people who go to Mars could lose their ability to have children, so what would you do, just keep sending new people over?

MT: As we said in our video we'd only be sending a limited number of people at a time. The greatest problem with Earth is how to feed the planet. On Mars we know that we can grow plants in Martian soil.

ET: What would the living conditions be like for people living on Mars? Would it be a way of life the way you'd want to live? Not feeling the fresh air? When you abandon Earth....

MT: Our point is not to abandon Earth, the aim is not to move our whole population to Mars...

ET: So you're actually only saving the people who you are taking to Mars? If, as you say, the world is going to be starving, who would you choose to save? Who will be left behind?

MT: You're misunderstanding the timescales, this is a long term process, it will take a long time. The problem is that there have always been problems on Earth. As soon as a problem ends the next problem comes along, we are never going to solve all of the

problems completely. What we need is an escape route.

It is now the Earth Team's time to present and they begin with their promotional video, showing beautiful images of the Earth and its inhabitants.

ET: We ultimately want the same thing, the safety of humanity. Instead of wanting to run away from the problem and wanting to put a fraction of the human race on Mars, we want to try and solve the problems here on Earth. We need to invest the money into planning a better future for this planet. If you move to Mars, you're going to only be able to save a portion of the people.

ET: We would invest the money into long term things such as education, which in turn, does lower the overpopulation problem. We'd have good family planning education in poor countries. We put it into charities which prevent things such as forced marriages, where children are forced to have children at young ages. We have several projects that we want to do which are long term projects, for instance if we do manage to put ecocide onto the list of crimes against humanity that will definitely have a huge impact as it will become illegal to do awful things to the Earth, just as illegal as genocide and crimes against humanity.

ET: We are designed to live on this planet. We are not designed to live on Mars, our bodies can't take it and it would be a really uncomfortable environment. To start with there is the atmosphere, we couldn't go outside, obviously and very low temperatures, beyond anything that we would ever experience here. What a lot of people don't understand is the dust on Mars is very fine, this would completely disrupt and damage our biology. I've been working on this for many years at NASA I think that we should not attempting to move to Mars.

The full symposium transcript was sent out to the jury (friends and family) and the results weighed heavily in favour of exploring the option of moving to Mars.

The funding was allocated to the Mars team.

The outcome caused jubilation for the Mars team and disappointment for the Earth team. The project was a deep look at the ethics and morals of investing in a technology that will move

some humans away from their natural habitat. The ensuing discussions far outlived the project, and played into later projects, bringing a depth of knowledge and understanding, and genuine ethical thinking to real-world challenges.

All without a teacher leading the class. Where, then does this leave the teacher?

The Teacher's Place?

Professor George Land sees the role of the tutor as the “serpent” who brings the fruit, the troublesome knowledge, which shakes up the ordered and static garden. Land says the serpent is the agent of change for Adam and Eve, altering their state of innocence forever. Even though it looks like loss, the experience has caused them to grow up and become adults.

For TPP, the role of the facilitator is not to bring the easily-accessed information, this is already in play, it is to bring the troublesome knowledge, the ‘Disrupters,’ which are designed to bring confusion and tention. Facilitators have to hold the space for the students. It is not always easy to stand back and watch them work through their frustrations.

Adam Phillips is a British psychotherapist and essayist. He talks about how frustration is a state of optimism, a belief in the future and hope for a different situation, something that will ease our state of frustration. He tells us:

If we are frustration phobic, then we won't find what we want... If we live in a culture that discourages states of anticipation or that assumes that we can't bear it or it will drive us mad or we'll get too anxious then what that means is all the imaginative space that frustration opens up is foreclosed.

Phillips thinks we find it difficult to see children become frustrated because we don't like to be hated by them. He believes the rewards are there if we can bear to leave them alone, for one thing, they'll become more imaginative. He says that children need a language to make frustration more “alluring and interesting and intriguing, rather

than just terrible or frightening.” He also says that frustration is needed to help us think and should be taught in schools.”

Another role of the facilitator is to know where each student is within the process. A helpful tool is to create project maps. We covered the walls of our classrooms in clear sheets of thick Perspex, attached over a white wall (cheaper than installing the writable white walls), which were used to draw or write on to create a visual representation of the pieces of knowledge and the plan of how to use them. Specific ideas were written on sticky notes, which could be moved around. The walls created a place for the teams to meet and see their ideas in action. It was also a great assessment tool for the tutor to talk to individual students to ascertain where they were in the process.

TPP will only work if the teacher takes on a different role. If, as a teacher, you take the centre-stage role, the relationship with the students is distant. If you take the off-stage role and work on the periphery you can build stronger relationships with the students. You are then attending smaller planning meetings, listening to what they have to say and getting to know them really well. You are advising and guiding from the side, which is what all adults should be doing for older teenagers, helping them to find their own voice.

The projects can link various subjects such as history, English, geography, sociology, philosophy. Teacher teams can work really well together in providing an integrated class. I know many teachers would really struggle with this, they’ve spent years studying their own particular subject and feel strongly about the time they’ve invested in creating study modules and putting together assignments. However, if teachers can embrace a new way of teaching, then the rewards are plentiful for both students and staff. If you read reviews from teachers, they say the projects are the most engaging and rewarding teaching experiences of their career.

Teachers who have worked at our schools have said how much they enjoy working in that lower pressure, smaller class, environment. One teacher had to leave us to move back to England, and sent an email saying: “You created a wonderful, nurturing and creative environment for your students, and my time working at the school was the most enjoyable time I’ve had working in education.”

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During TPP, the students are articulating their thoughts, thinking on their feet, responding to opposing ideas, which are all extremely useful skills and should be prominent on the educational checklist. But how often does that happen in school or university classrooms?

Professor Carnes points to a research project which took place at large public university. Twenty master instructors volunteered to be taped during their class. The findings showed that the teachers talked for nearly 98 percent of the time. Of the 2 percent of the student's talking time, most was spent on questions about the content, asking if it would be on the exam paper.

Professor Carnes cites proof that his Reacting classes improve speaking skills. Tape recordings of students were obtained by researchers before and after the Reacting classes and those students who had undertaken the classes had vastly improved speaking skills.

A 2009 study from the American Psychological Association says:

Students in Reacting to the Past showed elevated self-esteem and empathy...and greater endorsement of the belief that human characteristics are malleable...These findings suggest that this pedagogy adds diversity to student experience while producing some beneficial psychological consequences and improvement in academic skills.

In the penultimate chapter of *Minds on Fire*, Professor Carnes looks at how new information is supposed to replace the old, and how knowledge has mostly been advanced by specialisation. However he finds "intellectual horizons" are limited by specialisation. General Education was introduced in the U.S. to counteract those limits but unfortunately, due to the stultifying effects of tradition, those General Education courses are no different than the regular 'specialised' courses.

He says: "Professors circle their wagons around the departmental box and defend it stoutly from menacing presidents and accreditation committees."

Most teachers and Professors at all levels of education simply want to run their classrooms in the same way as they were taught. They are not recipients of being educated through projects, they don't have the skills to be open to experimentation, to take risks, to be creative.

Carnes cites Derek Bok who says that “Most colleges and universities find it next to impossible to break through “The crust of inertia and complacency.”

The world of interdisciplinary study, which could effectively remove the boundaries of box-like thinking, is unfortunately bounded and shackled to the confines of the pre-selected course material.

One professor of physics, Eric Mazur broke through the crust of inertia and complacency when he realised his students were memorising the course work, but not understanding it. He literally flipped the learning on it’s head. I write about Mazur in Part III, Chapter 6.

Our secondary school had an official visitor from an educational department. This wasn’t an inspection, but it was definitely a “check-in.” The visitor spent many hours with me and listened intently as I explained how we offered English, maths and physics as stand-alone separate subjects, though the maths and physics lessons blended into each other as they were delivered by the same teacher. Other than these stand-alone subjects, all of the other subjects were provided through integrated projects. At the end of the visit, he said we were the only school he had witnessed implementing the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence in the way it was supposed to be, in the way it had been designed. I asked him why that was. He said it was because teachers wanted to stay in their own areas, their own departments. Maths teachers won’t work with physics teachers, history teachers won’t work with social studies teachers. It seemed they all wanted to stay in their boxes, and to also keep their students firmly seated in the specialised zones of learning.

Author Henry James, in his 1875 book, *Roderick Hudson*, writes:

I am tired of myself, my own thoughts, my own affairs, my own eternal company. True happiness, we are told, consists in getting out of one's self; but the point is not only to get out—you must stay out; and to stay out you must have some absorbing errand. Unfortunately, I've got no errand, and nobody will trust me with one...Do you know, I sometimes think that I'm a man of genius, half finished? The genius has been left out, the faculty of expression is wanting; but the need for expression remains, and I spend my days groping for the latch of a closed door.

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Getting out, or staying outside of ourselves is something we have to do to take on other perspectives. Of course we will eventually return, but hopefully with an altered mindset, with new information having replaced the old.

The length of time of the projects is key to this staying out. To invest these extended periods of time in an interdisciplinary mode dispenses with the confines of one-dimensional subject specialisation.

The projects are the errand, and the facilitators can be the ones to open the door leading to a world of new intellectual horizons.

In that real world, old knowledge is introduced to new interpretations and merges with new knowledge, the core of intellectual learning.

One of our TPP was a linked series which included: the study of land grabs throughout history, the statistical analysis of the effects on population, how religion affected the views of the people, the ethical effects of power and decisions, the science behind new land grabs on new planets, the legal system of the past and how it has evolved, the way we philosophically explain the events of the past and the plans for the future, the need to express information in writing and in verbal presentations. It is a whirling wheel of imagination and integration for the students *and* the teachers.

Professor Carnes writes about teachers, or instructors who are involved with projects:

No longer obliged to function as authority-bearing dispensers of knowledge, they enjoy being guides and motivators who help students surmount the many obstacles every game imposes...Instructors find Reacting classes provocative, stimulating and enjoyable. Their enthusiasm startles (and often unsettles) colleagues, some of whom eventually visit a Reacting class. There they see students taking charge and working through difficult material. The visitors also realize that a class sparking with such energy might be satisfying to 'teach.'

When TPP are taking place, the learning environment suddenly includes the facilitators as well as the students. "I don't know, let's

find out,” becomes a non-fearful statement from those who are supposed to be the fountains of knowledge. Suddenly teachers become excited to learn. It must be a relief for them, what could be more miserable than delivering the same content year after year?

A different vibe could be felt throughout the school when the students were engaged in the projects rather than when they are taking a traditional lesson. The latter classes are quieter and see the students working individually, they are concentrating on memorising the information. It is actually a good contrast, it would be exhausting to spend all day in project mode.

Professor Carnes refers to the different ways of learning as: traditional classes which “encourage critical detachment” and “Reacting classes which encourage empathetic identification.” He says although they are very different they are “mutually supportive.”

He calls for an exciting academic world through: “The transformational power of new ideas, the exhilarated risk of looking at the world in a different way, and the thrill of challenging accepted beliefs and practices.” He believes that students and teachers deserve an “intellectual wonderland.”

The Magic Fails Sometimes

However, TPP are not 100 percent failure-proof.

Sometimes, introverted students just do not want to join in with a group, they don't want to get up from their desk nor speak in public. If they don't do the research, they are not able to participate. This is a difficult situation and Carnes tells us that Reacting faculty and game designers are always looking to new ways to “motivate the slackers, or minimize the consequences.” More detailed guidance can be of help. To give a reluctant player a list of objectives will keep them focused. They can still turn in essays and do their research and not partake in the presentation part. This can cause other students to wobble, but generally you can keep things on track.

We didn't experience an indifference to TPP, the students were always highly motivated, but a few found phase 1 challenging, and one or two were nervous in phase 3.

It could be that our students were younger, aged fourteen to sixteen,

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still able to jump back into play with a bit of encouragement. Imagine if all students participated in Project Based Learning and Portal Projects from an early age, and it was a natural way to progress through education.

There was a time when we had to stop a project. Prior to exams, the students would cover their academic studies in the morning and we would then switch to project work in the afternoon. Once the students began their coursework leading up to exams, we tried to keep TPP going as they enjoyed them so much. But the time pressures became restrictive, and the upcoming exams nullified the experience. We stopped the role play projects so they could just focus on exams. This decision did have a detrimental effect on the students and the school changed from an amazing place of learning and community to a place of shadow students, gliding about like ghosts, sullen and soulless. Some of the students actively complained about the school saying it was not the same, they didn't enjoy coming into school anymore.

A few of the students actually showed signs of anxiety or even trauma consisting of: confusion, sadness, anxiety, anger, fear, low energy, or withdrawal from the group. We had complaints from parents saying their children were suddenly not sleeping well, that they were unhappy. It was heartbreaking to witness.

I did have a 'post-exam recovery plan' which worked very well. It was an immersive art project, I write about this in part II, chapter 5.

One of Professor Carnes' students grew more confident through the RTTP classes, but as her confidence grew she noticed the isolation of her friends who were taking different classes and not participating in the role-play classes. When not attending lessons within the college, some stayed home outside of classes, to play video games. Many took anti-anxiety medication and didn't leave their rooms because they couldn't face talking to people.

In an American history class, Carnes was looking to compare student's anxieties to young adults on the brink of the second world war. He asked his students to anonymously write down their fears for the future. One answer came back "I worry that with the Internet we've lost the ability to communicate."

When Carnes asked for feedback, one student answered back that she

thought her generation was uncomfortable with people, even talking on the phone. When Carnes asked if anyone else felt the same, 97 out of a class of 100 raised their hands in agreement. And this was in 2010!

To evade the use of this educational pedagogy because of a very small chance of failure - because the storyline doesn't gel or because a small number of students refuse to engage in the discussions and presentations - is the wrong decision. It would be evading what could be a solution, a total reform of educational practice.

Critiquing TPP

In his book, Professor Carnes reveals two main areas of critique with regard to projects. The first is to question if role play, with its powerful presence of character displays is in fact brainwashing. The second is about creating altered outcomes for historical storylines, thereby leading students to believe in alternative narratives.

Brainwashing

A student tells Professor Carnes that he felt an eerily strong connection to the character he was portraying, Professor Carnes asks him if he thinks he was brainwashed. The student replies that in some ways he thinks he was and wonders what this means.

Professor Carnes then posits if instructors have a right to challenge students to such a degree that their beliefs and understandings are shaken to the core, and asks if this process undermines their sense of self? Had his students been brainwashed?

The part of his book, entitled: "Why Brainwashing Doesn't Work" contains so much vital information, I was tempted to go off on a month-long research project about brainwashing. I would liked to have copied the whole segment and insert it here, but I can't.

However, I will attempt to distill the information in a few bullet points:

- Psychologists agree that, in the absence of torture or death threats, brainwashing doesn't work.
- The self is remarkably stable and persistent, early life associations endure.

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- Information about ourselves is retrieved via a strong neural network in our brain, which is easily and quickly accessible.

Elizabeth Taylor is a research scientist in the Department of Physiology, Anatomy and Genetics at the University of Oxford. She is also an author and one of her books, *Brainwashing – The Science of Thought Control* depicts the techniques of brainwashing as isolation, control, uncertainty, repetition and emotion (ICURE):

- Isolate victims from their previous environment.
- Control what they perceive, think and do.
- Increase uncertainty about previous beliefs.
- Instill new beliefs by repetition.
- Employ positive and negative emotions to weaken former beliefs and strengthen new ones.

The TPP don't isolate, or control. All uncertainty about previous beliefs, and a reforming of new beliefs are the responsibility of the students, they are not directed by a facilitator. It seems that TPP do not brainwash students.

Altered Outcomes

The second area of critique centres around the misinterpretation of factual historical events through the twists and turns within project storylines. Professor Carnes addresses these concerns in the chapter entitled: "Teaching The Past By Getting It Wrong?" He explains that many people get twitchy when you mess with history and refers to the work of Michael Oakeshott, a British author, philosopher and political theorist. In Oakeshott's 1962 book, *Rationalism in Politics*, he talks about the complexities of the past and how it seems unclear and without feeling.

Carnes tells us that historians feel they have provided a truthful account of history by simply putting the available facts in a logical order and how Oakeshott, in his 1933 book, *Experience and Its Modes*, disagreed with this:

No distinction whatever can be allowed between the raw material of history and history itself, save a distinction of relative coherence. There is no fact in history which is not a judgment, no event which is not an inference. There is nothing whatever outside the historians experience.

As you would expect, Oakeshott's views were not looked upon favourably by many historians. Carnes reports on more recent controversial declarations, like those of Richard J. Evans, a Cambridge historian. In 2002, Evans said that history was the "invention" of historians and not "a true or objective representation of past reality, which was in essence irrecoverable."

Our secondary school students had a scattering of knowledge about history but they lacked an overview. So the first thing we undertook was the online course 'Big History,' which pans back and looks at the significant events of human history. The sections are divided into: 'The Universe', 'Our Solar System & Earth', 'Life', 'Humans' and 'The Future.'

The students also considered the motivations and methods of the people who record history. In the book, *Historical Thinking: Bringing Critical Thinking Explicitly into the Heart of Historical Study*, authors Meg Gorzycki and Linda Elder explore the subject of historiography:

While history is generally concerned with the study of the past as captured by written documents, historiography is concerned with the methods used to study the past. Historiography focuses on the perspective of a given historian, the methods the historian used to construct the narrative, the dominant concerns in his or her interpretations of the past, the values the historian brings to the recollection and reporting of events, and the assumptions made by the historian about the significance of events and human motives.

The *Glossary of Critical Thinking Terms and Concepts*, by Linda Elder and Richard Paul is a dictionary for critical thinking terminology. Those terms, which support critical thinking are listed as: clarity, accuracy, precision, depth, breadth and fairness. Also included is the terminology which impedes critical thinking, this centres around sociocentric and egocentric thought. In the introduction of the book, the historiography issue is simplified down to two points:

1. History is always told from some point of view.
2. Any point of view may be biased, prejudiced, distorted.

Our students soon found this out through their involvement in the

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projects. They discovered that history is not neat and orderly, complete with names, dates and events all carefully captured by neutral and noble scribes: it is messy, complicated and contradictory. Historical accounts have often been recorded to sway the psychology of the people who are presented with certain narratives, which best suit the politics of the day. Even today.

The projects focus on the significance of the outcome of the events. The decisions made by one person in the far past could have major repercussions on the next generation, or of many generations to follow. And, more importantly, how those events could have derailed, gone in a different direction with the multitude of ensuing consequences. This is to really learn from history and what it can teach us for our lives today.

Post-project discussions took place with the students, to ascertain the distinctive points of reference from the 'official' historical narrative. The students remember those points vividly as they have researched the information and maneuvered the facts through the thick forest of sources and viewpoints. The resounding agreed-upon viewpoints of historians are firmly embedded in their brain. The variation of plot-lines, veering away from those facts is the imaginative play part of the projects, this is what captivates and challenges the students. To re-write history to explore new, un-folding events is where the magic resides.

The objective of TPP is the antithesis of traditional study. It is not to store historical data and then regurgitate for an exam, it is to engage with material, to enter and experience a world of drama, life, love, sorrow, death and revenge through the study of

theology, history, ethics, geography, philosophy and social psychology.

I struggled to think of an insightful analogy to compare the two approaches to education. It feels something like...finding yourself in alone in a cold grey room, sitting on a spindly wooden chair, at a bare table to eat a few stale crackers and drink water, whilst from next door you overhear laughter and excitement and the hum of authentic human connection as a crowd sits to enjoy a lavish feast...something like that.

People are interested in history or there would be no books about history or no movies based on events from the past. People are interested in and attached to people from long ago, how they lived,

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loved, fought and suffered. To cut students off from this rich vein of learning is akin to lighting a bonfire and burning the books containing the stories of those people from the past. To present those rich stories of humanity in a myopic, detached and fragmented way is to lose the life-blood of learning about our past. Professor Carnes says it so eloquently:

When we seek distance to gain perspective, we lose empathy. After something has been dissected, it ends up dead. That's why our scholarly analyses of poetry, music, religion - and history itself - sometimes seem lifeless. Critical detachment can be dull.

He has spent the last two decades dedicated to bringing learning to life. His book, *Minds on Fire*, is a testament to this work. One book reviewer said this: "In a worst case scenario of just 1% of Reacting to the Past students having the kinds of experiences that Carnes describes, implementing this curriculum is the only ethically sound choice for educators."

In my view, that 1% of students, if anything, is flipped whereby 99% have the amazing learning experiences.

About his students who have feasted on the lavishness of RTTP projects he says: "For these students, history exists as an active force in their imagination."

Is imagination in education important? According to Albert Einstein it is:

Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand.

I believe Professor Carnes should be given the highest educational award for his work in setting imaginations on fire through the React To The Past role play programs. I am personally very grateful to him for his work. His book definitely provided the knowledge for me to confidently pursue this approach to education, which transformed the learning environment in our small school.

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It also literally provided a stage on which our students developed a specific theory of thinking, learning about conflict, opposing ideas and the struggle to figure it all out. The students frequently walked the path between order and chaos and arrived at well balanced conclusions.

Conflict and confrontation brings our beliefs to light and helps us to see them in the cold light of day. Those beliefs, which are stored away deep in the corners of our brains. Dark and dusty corners which we don't often visit. But there they are, full of cobwebs and needing a sweep.

The students were constantly encouraged to apply a 'charitable interpretation' of other's intentions. Taken from NLP, these are the presuppositions, which understand that people respond to their experience, not to reality itself and that people make the best choice they can at the time using their internal map of the world.

Our task is to be open and understanding of the information contained in the maps of others, whilst improving our own.

The antithesis of this work, this theory of thinking, is for students to interpret the opinions and beliefs of others as an attack and to respond irrationally and illogically in a way that tips the balance into chaos and minimizes agreement and cooperation.

Young people who take on these highly defensive characteristics are now often called "snowflakes" (more about snowflakes later).

Sociality and Loneliness

The Peer Group

Dr. Astin is the Professor of Higher Education and Organizational Change, at the University of California, Los Angeles and the author of, *What Matters in College*. The book examines how a student's personality, self-concept, attitudes, values, beliefs and cognitive development are affected by their experience in college. Astin apologises for the density of his book and warns of the possibility of information overload, but states that "student development is a highly complex, multivariate process and universities are highly diverse and complex institutions."

Astin says: "The student's *peer group* is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years."

So, not the quality of teachers, nor the structure of the curriculum, nor high-design environments. According to Astin the core principle, which will affect the growth and development of a young person the most, is who they hang out with. The attitudes, values and beliefs of their tribe, creates their self-concept.

Onus On The Student?

What happens if the young person is unable to find a peer group?

There is often a focus on anxiety and depression which affects a large number of students, but does anybody look at loneliness, are the two areas connected?

Stephen Buckley from the U.K. mental health charity "Mind" says: "Feeling lonely isn't in itself a mental health problem, but the two are strongly connected."

Are many students in the U.K. lonely? It seems as though the answer is, sadly, yes. According to a recent report by Sodexo, almost half of university students admit to loneliness, and over one third consider dropping out. Data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency reported that the amount of students dropping out of university is increasing every year.

A 2014 Telegraph article reports on a young people's charity called, "Get Connected." They receive a huge amount of calls from

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students feeling lonely and depressed at university and it is getting worse “The sheer numbers of calls we get show this. We’re getting lonelier that ever.”

News from overseas shows a similar trend. A 2016 survey from Canada reported that nearly 70% of university students are battling loneliness during the school year. They reported they felt “very lonely” and “so depressed that it was difficult to function.”

In another article in U.S. *Psychology Today*, college Professor, Deborah J. Cohan, claims that reliance on social media has made us simultaneously more connected and disconnected. She says that students are turning up to begin college and are more stressed, depressed and anxious than she has ever known, in over twenty years of teaching. She says students are:

Sleeping with their phones, pulling their phones out when they don’t want to appear alone, texting peers and romantic interests because it’s “easier.”

And their increasing discomfort and anxiety with face to face conversations all reveal this loneliness.

Professor Cohan offers advice to alleviate the negative emotions such as: recognising the thoughts as normal, keeping your door open, attending evening and weekend events, seeking help at the counseling centre, seek out mentors, finding study buddies and groups, keeping habits of good self-care including rest, a healthy diet and exercise, taking part in stress reducing activities like meditation and yoga, and finally, committing to turning off your phone for at least an hour a day.

All good advice, however, in the book, *Loneliness*, the authors, John T. Cacioppo and William Patrick tell us:

Among young adults, we found that the greater the degree of loneliness, the more the individual withdrew from active engagement when faced with stressors. Similarly, the greater the loneliness, the less likely was the individual to seek either emotional support or instrumental (practical) support from others.

To venture out, seek out groups and join in with activities can be difficult if you are feeling isolated, alone and unconfident. Should we be putting the onus on the students to cure their own loneliness? Is

there anything else educational institutions can do?

Professor Carnes tells us that there has been an attempt to build community through the arrangement of bricks and mortar. Specialised architects advise on the need for new, inviting spaces to encourage connection. Colleges have responded by investing large amounts of capital installing these social spaces, but to no avail. Carnes says: “The distinctive architecture, inviting arcades and lounges, and state-of-the-art exercise facilities and game rooms - all nearly empty.”

If students want to congregate, it seems, they will pile into any run down, ramshackle space and pay little attention to their surroundings. They will build their own communities.

When we think of a community, we think of people coming together through shared values and interests. This does happen, an easy familiar relationship can develop with people who are similar to ourselves. But strong and emotional bonds are usually formed when groups have to come together when they are, as Professor Carnes puts it, “imperiled by external forces.”

These external forces are the challenges faced by the oppositional team which enable team members to work together forming strong relationships and limiting loneliness. (More information in Part II, Chapter 3, Understanding Us’s and Them’s).

Integration and Retention

Tinto’s (1993) Student Integration Theory, is the most widely cited retention theory. He suggested three main conditions, which need to be met in order to achieve student persistence. The first is retention programmes, which should focus on the needs of the student. The second should see a focus on all students, regardless of their background. Thirdly is an integrated approach, which includes the social and academic life of the student.

Tinto’s theory says that student integration within the institution is key to completion of their studies and a successful graduation. He puts forward three areas of integration:

Normative Integration: Academic and alignment with institutions

attitudes and values.

Structural Integration: Academic and curriculum expectations.

Social Integration: Compatibility of individual within the social set-up.

An Answer?

At both the primary and the secondary school, we put huge effort into successful student integration, it was the main focus when a new student arrived.

Paralleled to Tinto's theory, this is how we approached integration:

Normative: Exploration of attitude and values within the whole community. Students were part of creating the rules and setting the cultural expectation of behaviours and values.

Structural: Expansion of curriculum to include interests of students. Constant opportunities for students to select a study area which aligned with their interests.

Social: Ensured social inclusion through TPP. A single project can eliminate social isolation in the classroom. Allow me to write that again....*a single project can eliminate social isolation in the classroom.*

The fact that a single project can eliminate social isolation seems hard to believe, but it is true. It has been put through rigorous analysis through independent research:

In a report entitled "Exploring Classroom Community: A Social Network Study of Reacting to the Past," the authors Jeff Webb and Ann Engar, put forward a hypothesis about the network effects of intensive peer interaction during role play games.

The authors examined how, over a three month period, student relationships evolved during a Reacting project. They focused on acquaintance and friendship ties, and found a dramatic increase for both during the game. The process, they state "eliminated student isolation," whilst avoiding the scenario of students forming new cliques (or clusters), nor reinforcing cliques, which already existed before the start of the role play project. They suggest this occurs because "structured peer interactions cuts across existing or naturally occurring clique boundaries."

These findings are vitally important. Surely they should be shouted from the rooftops. If loneliness and anxiety or depression are linked, then this could be a solution to help minimise the effects. Maybe it could even counteract mental health challenges which lead to thoughts of self-harm or suicide.

Our experience with TPP confirmed the findings in the report. Even though our school was small and the students did know each other fairly well to begin with, you could plainly see the projects were responsible for deepening existing relationships, strengthening weak relationships, and discouraging cliques.

The authors also saw that the dynamic networks caused a growth in friendships and a higher growth in acquaintance connections. These ties and openness and inclusivity, became stronger, or “denser” with each succeeding game:

Such social capital would benefit students within a class where strong acquaintance networks, in addition to friendship networks, provide them with intellectual challenge, thereby broadening their perspectives and guarding against groupthink.

Again, this is of great importance, to “guard against groupthink” is a vitally important part of educating a young person.

The authors also suggest that these networks of friends and acquaintances:

Would not occur within a traditional, static classroom setting, where there is no opportunity or inducement to create mixed, collaborative groups. These traditional classrooms create small, unconnected cliques, with many isolated students, and little evolution through time.

The study took place with 24 mixed gender students during three RTTP projects. The two survey questions were as follows:

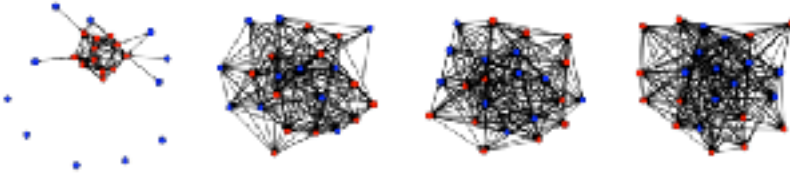
Which of your classmates do you consider friends? For the purposes of this survey, a friend is someone you know fairly well, with whom you would spend time outside of school.

Which of your classmates do you consider acquaintances? For the purposes of this survey, an acquaintance is someone

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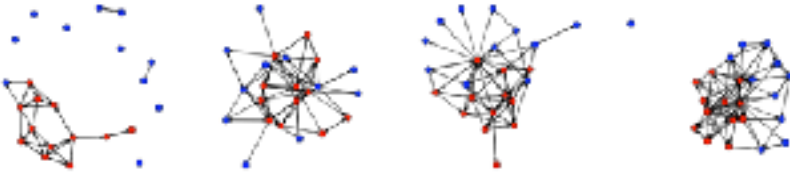
you know, but perhaps not very well. If you saw this person on campus you would probably say hello and might stop and talk.

The results of the survey were illustrated with the following charts representing four rounds of RTTP



1 - Acquaintance Network

The far left chart shows the network before the first game, then how the networks progress over the next three games.



2 -

The total of acquaintance ties added after the first game was 147 acquaintance ties and 31 friendship ties. By the end of three games the numbers had jumped to 220 for acquaintance ties and 50 for friendship ties.

A Sense of Belonging

Friendships begin with acquaintances, and as the prior report states,

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traditional classrooms do not foster an opportunity for strangers to become acquaintances, but keep students separated in small cliques, left to navigate the social scene at break and lunchtimes. You couldn't design a more restrictive social setting, not only leaving students to fend for themselves, but discouraging the forming of collaboration and connection with others during class time.

You also couldn't design a more one-way direction of communication, from teacher to students.

In his book *Collaborative Learning: Higher Education, Interdependence, and the Authority of Knowledge*, author Kenneth A. Bruffee, Professor of English at Brooklyn College, tells us:

Traditional teaching places teachers at the center of attention. Conversation goes on between the teacher and each individual student in the room. Traditional lecturers seem to be speaking to a socially coherent group of people. Actually they are speaking one to one, to an aggregate set of isolated individuals among whom there are no necessary social relations at all.

The schools I founded, offered year-round enrollment. Unlike a single September start, there were new students entering the school all throughout the year. If possible, I would try to coincide a new student's start date with a new project. This gave the opportunity for the newbie to be part of a new team, which always worked well. I would assign a research partner to them, so right away they were in collaboration. If the new student joined mid-project, I would plan for a collaborative art project. One art project in the secondary school involved laying huge sheets of white paper on the ground and then creating a "Jackson Pollock" style piece of art. Much merriment ensued, paint flying everywhere, and the new student feeling a sliver of sense of belonging within the group.

Even though the importance of community is understood, and we have the developmental diamond in our sight, it seems the mining is not in place in the majority of schools and universities. Engar and Webb, the authors of the report tell us that this is still an area of education, which is "understudied and poorly understood." They feel that educational approaches such as projects are important for collaborative learning, believing they are a bonding and bridging of social capital.

Social Capital Theory

In the book, *Brokerage and Closure: An introduction to Social Capital*, Ronald Burt explains social capital:

Social capital explains how people do better because they are somehow better connected with other people. Certain people are connected to certain others, trusting certain others, obligated to support certain others, dependent on exchange with certain others. One's position in the structure of these exchanges can be an asset in its own right. That asset is social capital.

Social capital can become quite political within a classroom. Especially if teachers do not interact with the students, if they come into the room, deliver a block of information and then leave, their knowledge of the social structure within the classroom is sparse. Once they leave the room, most teachers have no idea of who is feeling a sense of belonging, or who is feeling isolated. Students have no common theme to centre around, so they drift off either in homogenous like-minded groups or take out their phone to disappear into.

TPP do away with that whole situation. Even if the current lesson is a traditional class and totally unrelated to a project, the students still have a common campfire theme to which they can all warm their hands to. It provides a similar social setting as you would find when people work together.

With traditional lessons, the student's basic human trait of staying within it's own echo-chamber group is unchallenged and groupthink prevails.

TPP pit the students against each other in a war of thinking. The student encounters others with different beliefs, diverse ideas and has to break themselves out of their echo-chamber and rise to the challenge of the game.

This is true community building and an answer to social isolation.

The building of community doesn't happen immediately, it takes time, however after the students have completed three or four

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projects, they have all had the opportunity to work closely with each other, even in a class of thirty students.

In our schools, the students, who came together to form strongly bonded teams, were from extremely diverse backgrounds, different cultures, genders, and academic or social ability. This was achieved through the humanistic trait of an “us and them” attitude.

(More information about “Us/Them” in Part II, Chapter 3).

The next chapter will examine how TPP expanded the provision of ethical, character and leadership education.

CHAPTER 8

Ethics, Character and Leadership Education

Ethics Education

Before we take a look at providing ethics in education, we need to determine what it is. Is it the same as morality? It is easy to fall into confusion about the terminology, as different meanings are assigned from various sources and sectors, and there isn't a common language around the subject. Historically, they both mean the same thing, "ethics" comes from the Greek "ethos" which means custom or habit. The Roman politician, Cicero, introduced "moralis" as an equivalent translation of ethikos.

However, for many people, morality has a Christian connotation, connected to a person's intrinsic moral code, whilst ethics generally applies to industry standards, from business, law or medicine. These ethics are generally relied upon to communicate shared principles, which everyone is called upon to maintain, so ethics is the word I will use.

There are three branches of ethics generally studied by philosophers: Meta-Ethics, Normative-Ethics and Applied-Ethics:

Meta-ethics (meta meaning after) is concerned with a philosophical look at situations in their entirety. To take everything into account, all attitudes and judgments and to look at the big picture.

It is third perspective thinking

Normative-ethics looks at how you decide to act in a certain situation. What is the right and the wrong thing to do? What are the options? What are the two sides of the story?

It is second perspective thinking.

Applied-ethics focuses on the practical application of those decisions. It is developing criteria and understanding the consequences of those singular actions.

It is first perspective thinking.

An Answer?

One of the main objectives of TPP is to establish a charged situation. Then to use meta-ethics, to absorb the external ethical dilemmas. The next step is aligned with normative-ethics, to internalise and figure out personal opinions, the opinions of others and the rightness and wrongness of those views. The final step, applied-ethics is to decide upon a course of action, applying it, and playing out what will happen, the consequences, the cause and effect of that decision.

This is not an easy process, for the students or the teachers. But it is dynamic and mentally stimulating. It agitates, confuses and frustrates. It also causes the student to mature, grow and become more empathetic in front of your eyes.

Empathy

Professor Carnes puts forward studies from colleges, which show how empathy has declined in recent years.

In looking at the claims of college marketing material, which profess to prepare the character of students, Carnes cites various sources which negate that claim including one from prior Harvard Dean, Harry Lewis who says: "I have almost never heard discussions among Professors about making students better people."

Lewis has written a book entitled: *Excellence Without a Soul: Does Liberal Education Have a Future?* In the book Lewis says:

Universities have forgotten their larger educational role for college students. They succeed better than ever, as creators and repositories of knowledge. But they have forgotten that the fundamental job of undergraduate education is to turn eighteen-and nineteen-year-olds into twenty-one and twenty-two-year-olds, to help them grow up, to learn who they are, to search for a larger purpose for their lives, and to leave college as better human beings.

Should every college be providing courses on ethics and empathy? Even if they do, Derek Bok, former president of Harvard, questions their effectiveness, saying that the students who take courses only do marginally better on tests of ethical reasoning than those who don't.

Maybe the question should be: Do educational establishments exist for the greater good of society, which should equip all students with life skills? Or, do they exist to aid the economic aims of a nation, so should focus on developing skills needed for the job market? Or - is there room for both?

Many educationalists believe that ethical and empathy education is the responsibility of the parents and surrounding family. By teenage years, attentive parents have helped their children shape their character; good manners, healthy diet, plenty of sleep, restricted television/video games etc. This type of nurturing focuses on self-discipline and how to navigate the dynamics within a family structure. That is the ideal. But what about less attentive parents, maybe through no fault of their own, working single parents who are finding it really difficult to raise kids in this peer-pressured age.

Many people don't believe ethics and empathy should be taught in schools. They think we should leave students alone and allow them to arrive at school with the traits that they bring from home and then leave years later, with no interference or influence from the school. This theory, however, fails to take into account those ethical dilemmas, which students find themselves in during the school day.

If a student encounters and attaches to other students who imbue good values, that is great, but it doesn't always go that way. Is a sort of pot-luck peer situation.

I believe schools have a responsibility to ensure a standard of behaviour and a certain set of ethics and values are in place. Schools have the opportunity and the dedicated time to explore character building outside of the home within a group of peers. This is a similar situation in which they will find themselves when they are out in the world. School is the place where young people spend most of their time, it is where they will hopefully transition from immature children to mature young people.

So, how to help them through this transitional phase?

Moral Development and Moral Education was written in 1981 by R.S. Peters, Professor of Philosophy of Education at the London University. His research focused on the areas of motivation,

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emotions, personality and social behaviour. His private tutor as a student, was none other than Eric Blair (the writer George Orwell). In his book Peters writes about Jean Piaget, a Swiss psychologist known for his work on child development. As the Director of the International Bureau of Education, Piaget was passionate about education and in 1934 said:

Only education is capable of saving our societies from possible collapse, whether violent, or gradual.

Peters says Piaget puts forward a distinction in the psychology of morals (or ethics), often bypassed by others. This was *conventional morality* and *rational morality*.

Conventional morality means to follow rules, do what you are told, the justification is through authority - to do what others do, or what they say is the right thing to do.

Rational morality is whereby an individual can see the reason for situations being as they are through their own reflection, and also can see how those situations could play out differently.

Peters then offers the views of Piaget regarding the different stages of childhood. The initial 'Transcendental' stage sees rules as unalterable and sacred. The 'Autonomous' stage sees rules as something to be questioned and possibly altered.

(You can see this in young children, boundaries make them feel secure, they like having firm rules. If you have ever seen a parent give a young child a myriad of choices over what to wear or what to eat and the ensuing confusion and upset, you will have witnessed a child feeling like there is nobody in control).

Through the maturation process the child likes to begin to push against those boundaries to see where they break.

Peters then points to what he thinks Piaget left out of the observations: Is the transition from the two stages only attributed to the maturation process or could it be also due to the environmental factors such as home life and education?

Even though Piaget presented his development theory to UNESCO in 1947, he does not offer any detailed explanations of how a child transitions from one stage to the next.

Peters also says that, as far as he knows, Piaget does not offer any information about the role of the parent or teacher in the process.

Nor does he shine a light on the failure to transition from the transcendental stage to the more reflective and questioning autonomous stage.

Later in his book, Peters tells us that he is interested in the rational form of morality, but argues that this cannot be only the ability to reason:

If this ability is to be effectively exercised, it must be supported by a group of rational passions connected with the demands for consistency, order, clarity and relevance. Secondly, if this is to be exercised in the sphere of interpersonal conduct the individual must be capable of what Piaget calls reversibility in thought.

Are there attempts within schools to help children transition from one stage to the next, to develop from “conventional morality” to “rational morality” and grow into mature young people – to develop their character?

Character Education

Professor Kristjan Kristjansson, is the Chair of Character and Virtue Ethics within the School of Education at the University of Birmingham. He is the author of *Virtuous Emotions* (2018), and *Aristotle, Emotions and Education* (2007). He also wrote the paper “Ten Myths About Character, Virtue and Virtue Education – plus three well-founded misgivings” for the British Journal of Educational Studies.

Kristjansson’s paper claims that “initiatives to cultivate character and virtue in moral education at school continue to provoke skeptical responses.” He lists the myths, which criticise the provision of character education:

Unclear, paternalistic, individualistic, relative and redundant notions, old fashioned, anti-democratic and anti-intellectual, conservative and situation specific.

The misgivings of the provision of character education are listed as:

- The History of Virtue Educational Initiatives does not Augur Well for the Prospects of Future Ones.
- The Study of Virtue and Character Lacks a Clear Empirical Methodology.
- We Know Very Little about the Impact of Previous Interventions in this Field.

Kristjánsson concludes his paper by saying: “We need to take the long view and tread carefully over a bumpy terrain – although that is not the same as treading timidly.”

The Jubilee Centre

The School of Education at the University of Birmingham launched the Jubilee Centre in 2015, which focuses on character and virtues.

The Centre’s website contains the following message from Tom Lickona, from the State University of New York at Cortland:

Societies around the globe are rediscovering ancient wisdom: character matters. In the century ahead, there is no more important human quest than the one the Jubilee Center is undertaking—to generate useful knowledge about how to foster good character in every area of our personal and public lives.

The Centre’s promotional video asks:

What would it take for society to truly flourish - new laws, new leaders, or could the answer be far more enigmatic? Throughout history great minds have recognized that good societies can only be produced by people of good character.

The video claims these critical virtues can be taught and learned by anyone, cultivating moral civic, intellectual and performance virtues. From their site:

The Centre will promote, build and strengthen character virtues in the contexts of the family, school, community,

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university, professions, voluntary organisations and the wider workplace. We believe that character is constituted by the virtues, such as courage, justice, honesty, compassion, self-discipline, gratitude, generosity and humility.

They say that there may be gaps in the educational system in attempting to develop a child's whole character and not just their academic capabilities.

They also cite information from teachers:

80% of teachers interviewed by the Jubilee Centre stated that the British assessment system 'hinders the development of the whole child'. In other words, the current system can hold back the development of a child's moral character. The majority claimed that exams have become so pervasive in schools that they have crowded out other educational goals.

The organisation advises on asking a school about their character education strategy. Not just to ask if they have one, but to ask if it is "intentional, planned and organised or unconscious, reactive, and random."

What do parents think about character education? Populus carried out a poll for the Jubilee Centre which produced the following results:

In Britain, 87% of parents agreed that schools should focus on character development *and* academic study, not simply academic study alone; 84% of parents also agreed that teachers should encourage good morals and values in students.

The full results can be found on the Jubilee Centre's site under "Parents Survey."

The site also provides resources on how to integrate character building into subjects. Whilst the whole programme is admirable, is it a simple as that? Can teachers just pull in a prescribed 'Character Course' and weave it into other subjects? Do students see it as another thing to learn?

The university offers an online course through "Future Learn" entitled "What is Character? Virtue Ethics in Education." The objectives of the course offers insight into why good character is important – builds relationships, better pro-social behaviours, such as

cooperation, respect, compassion, increased employability and promotes democratic citizenship.

There is a mixed-methods approach to character training:

- *Students complete a “self-report”* - from the Values in Action Survey, which is a free personality test.
- *Teacher reports on how the students function as a group.*
- *Students respond to moral dilemma tests (on paper).*

In 2015, The Jubilee Centre issued the “Character Education in UK Schools Report.” The 40-page report was launched by Professor Sir Anthony Seldon, Master of Wellington College and claims to be the most extensive study of character education ever undertaken.

Throughout England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, 10,000 students and 255 teachers in 68 schools were interviewed.

The report cites information from U.S. sociologist Christian Smith, Professor of sociology at the University of Notre Dame and co-author of the book, *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*. Although based on U.S. information, the findings could be comparable to the U.K. The book points to a decline in moral values.

The report also writes about an interview with Smith in which he says:

Our findings suggest we are failing to teach and model moral reasoning skills, visions of a good life that transcends material consumption and immediate bodily pleasures, and the importance of participation in public life for the common good. The emerging adult lifestyle does not appear to be preparing youth for moral integrity in a challenging world, success in marriage, responsibility and sacrifice, or democratic citizenship.

The report asks: How can schools help to develop persons of character and public-spirited citizens? The report then claims that the answers lie within the text of the report. If they have the answers, I thought it would be worth a look.

Key Findings:

The report identifies the top and bottom seven schools according to testing the student’s ethical reasoning through moral dilemmas. At

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both the top and bottom of the scale, different schools could be found: big and small, rural and city, faith and non-faith and independent and state.

The top schools had things in common, teachers who were:

- Committed to development of the whole child.
- Knowledgeable and passionate about character development.
- Had time and the flexibility to discuss moral issues.
- Could rely on parents and families to help and support (91% in the top schools, compared to 52% in the bottom).

The report showed 54% of secondary and 80% of primary school teachers, said that their school already had a ‘whole school approach to character building.’

Only 33% of teachers stated that they’d had specific or additional training in moral or character education, yet 60% stated that they had to teach a subject relating explicitly to the development of the whole child.

When asked what single change they would make to achieve better character education for their students, many teachers recommended that schools provide more ‘free space’ where students could be themselves and do things they really like, without having to think about exam scores.

The report flagged up weak links in the education system:

- Students taking the moral dilemma tests appeared to approach the dilemmas from the perspective of self-interest.
- On average, participating students had less than a 50% match (42.6%) with the preferred responses to the moral dilemmas.
- Students struggled to identify why they would take a certain action (justification) more than deciding what that action would be.
- Girls (47%) significantly outperformed boys (37%) when faced with these moral dilemmas.
- Students who participated in sporting activities did not perform better than those who were not involved in sport.
- Students who were involved in music, choir or drama outside of school hours did perform better than those who did not.

Almost all teachers said they were willing to attend character

education training and saw moral education as important, the report states:

Teachers were also optimistic about their capacity to develop character in students, although we need to be cautious about this claim, given that this confidence may not always be justified. A Populus poll commissioned by the Jubilee Centre (2014) indicated that the general British public may in fact lack confidence in teachers' competence in this area: only slightly more than half of the respondents agreed that 'teachers are generally competent to develop good character in children'.

The factors, which hinder a teacher's desire or ability to help their students build good character are attributed to time constraints due to a focus on exams, league tables, reports and inspections:

Teachers in the study saw this too with over three quarters claiming that the 'modern student assessment system' hindered efforts to develop the whole child.

The Office for Standards in Education (Ofstead) recognised, in 2012, that the Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) curriculum was not yet good enough with respect to training/curriculum coherence.

Teachers were asked what single change they would make and this was their response:

The wish to have a less subject-laden and test-based curriculum, more time for extra-curricular activities and team building, and a stronger pedagogical relationship with children.

The key recommendations from the report include:

- Members of school staff should be trained in developing character and each school should have at least one teacher who is especially passionate, knowledgeable and directly involved with the implementation of character education.
- Character education should focus more on helping students

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to identify the interests of others who are involved in their actions, to identify morally bad choices, and to think about the justifications for actions.

- Schools should objectively assess their own efforts towards the development of students' characters.
- Extra-curricular activities should be encouraged but further researched for the actual contribution they (do and could) make to the development of character.
- Politicians and policy makers should recognise that moral virtues such as honesty, kindness and courage are just as important as performance virtues such as resilience, self-confidence and grit.

I don't know how the centre suggests their recommendations be followed up, how, when and by whom? Does it lie in the realm of the schools or the government?

Also, does the recommended character education intend to provide the student with what they'll need in life: resilience, courage and compassion? Or is it character conditioning, to teach "good behaviour," the sort of old fashioned good manners a strict Victorian grandmother might have expected to see – the personality traits of timidity, courteousness and compliance?

It is a complex issue, as we will see in reviewing 'The Big 5 Personality Traits.'

The Big 5 Personality Traits

'The Five-Factor Model' (FFM) is also known as 'The Big Five Personality Traits.' Over the last twenty years, this model has been the most consistently used by personality psychologists. The five categories have been found to contain most known personality traits, they are: Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, Neuroticism, Openness and Extraversion (CANOE).

These personality factors open up to character traits:

- 1. Conscientiousness:** Organised, diligent, self-disciplined, prefers planned rather than spontaneous situations, focused, reliable. Can be: stubborn and inflexible.
- 2. Agreeableness:** Friendly, compassionate, cooperative, trusting. Can be: naive or submissive.

3. Neuroticism: Sensitive, emotional, excitable, dynamic, vulnerable, insecure, victim mentality. Can be: psychologically anxious, emotionally unstable, prone to anger, have low impulse control.

4. Openness: Adventurous, likes novelty and variety over routine, has appreciation for art and emotion. Can be: unpredictable, lacking in focus, a risk taker.

5. Extraversion: Outgoing, enthusiastic, sociable, likes to talk, energetic, assertive. Can be: attention-seeking, can overwhelm and dominate other people.

The character strengths the Jubilee Centre, and probably most character education programmes are trying to instill, or install, are the first two traits of conscientiousness and agreeableness. There is no blueprint on how to integrate students with neuroticism personalities. There is no mention of nurturing openness or responding to the needs of the extraversion personality. For a successful life, conscientiousness is helpful, of course being kind and courteous are traits you want students to have. But you have to watch out for too much of the agreeableness factor as we'll see later on.

I write about how TPP helped our students examine where their characters personality, and ultimately their own personality, sat within the Big 5 character descriptions, and how they were able to balance the extreme traits, later in this chapter.

The Transformation of Experience

I don't believe the development of the big 5 personality traits can come through self-reports, teacher evaluations or student's written responses to moral dilemmas. I believe it can only come through experience. In the words of David Kolb: "the transformation of experience."

Kolb, an American educational theorist wrote his book, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, in 1983. He said: "Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" He believed effective learning happens when a person progresses through a cycle of four stages:

1. Having a concrete experience
2. Observation of and reflection on that experience
3. The formation and analysis of abstract concepts

4. Use of this analysis testing a hypothesis in future situations, resulting in new experiences.

If those concrete experiences are created, what type of character traits should we be looking to encourage? What about magnanimous traits?

In Search of the Magnanimous

In the book *The Abolition of Man* C.S. Lewis tells us:

As the king governs by his executive, so reason in man must rule the mere appetites by means of the 'spirited element.' The head rules the belly through the chest.

He says it is what Plato tried to tell us many years ago. The chest is seen as the seat of sentiment or magnanimity.

I was interested in the word "magnanimity," it comes from Latin, "magnus" meaning "great" and animus meaning "mind/spirit/soul." To be magnanimous, you have to display the following qualities:

- Nobility of mind and character.
- Loftiness of thought or purpose.
- Dignity of soul.
- Generosity of spirit, easily forgiving an insult or injury.
- Refusal to be petty or resentful.
- A willingness to face danger and sacrifice personal ease, interest and safety for noble purposes.
- Encounters danger and trouble with tranquility and firmness.
- Distains injustice, meanness and pettiness.
- Delights in acts of benevolence.

These are qualities of strength, resourcefulness and responsibility. They make conscientiousness and agreeableness character training seem meek and mealy. Interestingly, the antithesis of magnanimity is "pusillanimity", in Latin pusillus translates to "very small" and animus to "mind/spirit/soul" and includes the following qualities:

- Weak, afraid, timid,
- Displaying a lack of courage or determination
- Frightened of taking risks
- Lack of confidence or drive
- Not living up to one's potential
- Waits for others to take control

Lewis, in writing about the qualities of magnanimity being held in the chest, and bemoaning the presence of “chest-less education,” had this to say:

You can hardly open a periodical without coming across the statement that what our civilization needs is more ‘drive’, or dynamism, or self sacrifice, or ‘creativity.’ In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and demand the function. We make ‘people’ without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honour and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate, and bid the geldings be fruitful.

Where do we learn the qualities of how to be magnanimous? Who shows us the traits of being noble of mind and character. How do we go about having dignity of soul or generosity of spirit? Where do we find the strength to face danger with tranquility and firmness for noble purposes? Or how to rise above the pull of resentment, pettiness and meanness?

Generally, not within the school walls. Historically, people received their moral guidance from religion, however, for many, that has disappeared and there is often skepticism about any sort of religious training within schools. This wouldn’t be so tragic if something had taken its place, but unfortunately, that is not the case.

Conflicting Definition and Ideology

James Arthur, in his book, *Education with Character: The Moral Economy of Schooling* says: “Britain has a long history of ill-conceived and ineffective efforts at character education.”

In the British Foreword to the book, Professor Gerald Grace says that people are often skeptical and react negatively to the idea of character education for three reasons. Firstly, it is due to the wariness of the connection with religious education and an attempt to indoctrinate the young. Secondly, it was attached to a cultural class-based system which had two different spokes, one for a leadership class, a ‘public-school’ toolkit, and another spoke for the working class, based on respect, and all of those other ‘Victorian-grandmother’ traits, perfect for social control (see how differently Eton students are educated in Part IV, Chapter 2). Thirdly, a concern about political ideologies such as Fascism and Communism.

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Professor Grace then calls on us to not abandon the quest, but to develop a character education, which is not “person dominating” but which includes respecting the “personal integrity of young people.”

He provides one of his favourite quotes from author Ernest Hull SJ:

Character is life dominated by principles, as distinguished from life dominated by mere impulses from within and mere circumstances from without.

In the American Foreword to Arthur’s book, Karen E. Bohlin, Executive Director of the Centre for Advancement of Ethics and Character at Boston University, says that early American education was seen as a moral endeavor, and that American people are now eager to return to it. She also says:

Virtue was considered a means to sustain ‘the body politic,’ a direct approach to moral instruction prevailed. Students were taught Scripture and moral adages. By 1836 the *McGuffey Reader*, a more secular resource, became the mainstay of the American curriculum. Rich in moral tales, selected Bible stories, exhortations and moving accounts of heroism and patriotism, this reader presented students with images of a virtuous life on a daily basis.

Bohlin goes on to tell us that an evolving trend towards a scientific method moved the curriculum away from the philosophical and moral exposure within the school and handed that responsibility over to the home. After the U.S. social and political upheaval in the 1960’s, confusion over traditional ideals took root. Teachers moved away from moral training, preferring the safety of neutrality, leaving students to figure it out for themselves.

Bohlin now calls for both an intellectual and a moral vision of education, which will enable students to “engage in dialogue that addresses the underlying principles that inform political arguments” and to “judge and critique those customs, social institutions and laws that hinder both their own and other people’s civic or moral development.”

Bohlin puts forward that, although there is a need for character education, there is little understanding about how to go about providing it.

Arthur included a quote by Stanley Hauerwas, who was named "America's Best Theologian," by Time Magazine in 2001:

To emphasise the idea of character is to recognize that our actions are also acts of self-determination; in them we not only reaffirm what we have been but also determine what we will be in the future. By our actions we not only shape a particular situation, we also form ourselves to meet future situations in a particular way. Thus the concept of character implies that moral goodness is primarily a prediction of persons and not acts, and that this goodness of persons is not automatic but must be acquired and cultivated.

Arthur says to enter the discussion about character education is to:

Enter a minefield of conflicting definition and ideology. It is rare indeed to find an educational topic about which there is so much fundamental disagreement. The only generally agreed position seems to be acknowledgement of its importance.

In agreement with James Arthur is Dr. Marvin W. Berkowitz, Co-Director of the Center for Character and Citizenship, and the Sanford and Professor of Character Education, at the University of Missouri, St. Louis. He writes about his confusion surrounding the language of moral education and also sees it as a minefield, in fact he calls it a "semantic minefield." He says the terminology is vast and includes: moral education, values education, character education, civic education, citizenship education, democratic education, morality, social-emotional learning and positive psychology. Plus the terminology of the myriad of initiatives and programs drummed up by well-meaning government educational departments.

Berkowitz says the language changes geographically and historically and has no moral GPS to navigate by. He says the field is stagnating through lack of focus, suspicion and a "my theory can beat up your theory" approach. He says:

This stuff is so important, not just to the world but to our individual identities and psyches, that we balk at the prospect that someone else will meddle with our core commitments and beliefs, and those of our children and communities. So

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we become paranoid and project our fears onto the terms. And we search for the holy semantic grail; the one word that will unify us all.

Berkowitz claims the one word does not exist and it never will, not because of the terminology, of what to name it, but of the skepticism with the whole domain. He says he doesn't care what it is called, call it what you like - "just do it and do it wisely and well."

A Waste Of Time?

It seems as though we have gone through an exhaustive account of reviewing character education, however, in the spirit of always listening carefully to your opponents point of view, I would like to finish with a look at a debate hosted by Policy Exchange UK in 2014.

The debate was entitled "Teaching character education in schools is a waste of time."

The panel included Toby Young, Editor of the *Spectator* & co-founder of the West London Free School, and Martin Robinson, author of *Trivium 21*, he is also a drama teacher. They are both for the motion, they agree that teaching character education is a waste of time. On the opposing team is Dr. Anthony Seldon, Master of Wellington College and James O'Shaughnessy, Managing Director of Floreat Education.

Going into the debate, I was firmly on the side of the opposing panel, who were there to discredit the view of character education as a waste of time. Again the subject is drenched in complexity, but the panel for the motion put forward some very good points, and after I'd finished watching the debate I did have new and valuable insights - and a slight change of opinion.

Young starts the debate by talking about what we mean by character, and what traits are desirable. He says self control, tenacity and resilience have a high correlation with success later in life. But he thinks these qualities should be nurtured outside of school hours, and not take up valuable curriculum time. He puts forward that the only serious attempt to measure teaching character came from a U.S. study by the National Centre for Educational Research. This study saw thirty five social scientists attempt to teach character in seven elementary schools, the study was repeated seven times. The results showed zero impact on social and emotional competence, on

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behaviour or academic attainment. Young says the results were “not negligible, but non-existent, nada, zilch, a complete waste of time.”

The opposition supporter, Anthony Seldon disagreed, and puts forward arguments from Aristotle, and talked about great characters such as Churchill and Einstein.

Martin Robinson, then talks about character and how originally the meaning of “character” related to a mark on the body or an imprint on the soul. He had a few interesting things to say:

In theatre, it is said, an actor knows how great the part is by how many choices the character has, moral dilemmas if you will. A corridor with doors, the actor has to show the door the character chooses and also all the ones they rejected. Character is how we respond to choices. Our children wander the corridors and are often lost.

He quotes Keats who said “the soul is formed by the narrative of life.” Schools should help us form and help us understand our own and others narratives. He talks about the narrowing of the curriculum and the decline of the arts and says, “The curriculum is becoming all STEM and no flower. How is that going to help kids with the narratives of life?”

Robinson also refers to the Jubilee Centre, and how they promote “A core set of universally cosmopolitan virtues.” He also wants to know about “naughty characters,” those students with the neuroticism or extraversion personalities, where is the plan for them? He recounts a story about Churchill, and how, in 1884, his headmaster at the Ascot Prep School For Boys provided a less than glowing report card, which recorded that Churchill’s conduct had been exceedingly bad, that he could not be trusted to do a single thing, and that the boy had no ambition.

Young ponders on the fact that character lessons could have stripped Churchill of those qualities that enabled him to go on to meet the challenges he did. “Maybe difficult times call for difficult characters” he offers.

Robinson’s other points include:

- The formalisation of character training will incur more data collecting to align with OFSTEAD visits.

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- The lack of cohesiveness with current Public Health England initiatives. The programs are too short and the students see it as a waste of time, they don't take them seriously.
- The need to discuss humanity and what it means to be human throughout the curriculum (not just within allocated classes).

The next speaker is James O'Shaughnessy, who is a prior student of Wellington College, he supports character education in schools though he acknowledges the challenges:

I'm not saying that there is a whole suite of things out there that we know work, we are in the infancy of this, the art of it, the theory of it. The Aristotelian philosophy behind it is well established. What we haven't got yet, because it is really quite a young field, is the science of it. We don't know which interventions might work, but we do know some...We don't now how to do it, there is not an answer.

Seldon is firmly in favour of teaching character education and tells us: "You can identify a great school by it's sense of moral worth and how calm and focused the students appear." In the debate, he does not address the details of exactly how he achieves the sense of moral worth in his school, however, in an article in which Seldon is interviewed, he explains in more detail:

- I regularly ask all 1200 in school assembly to close their eyes and be totally still. I begin each weekly staff meeting on Monday break with a period of silence, which allows everyone to collect themselves and let go of the baggage. Mindfulness is key to all we do.
- Seven times each day, the students stand behind their desks and chant the "Character Promise" before they are seated: "Character before knowledge." They pledge to focus positively and constructively in the lesson, and to show visible respect to the teacher.
- Students who demonstrate success in the character compass can become 'Character Prefects', and are given a blue blazer, a gold tie, and special responsibility.
- Form tutors are also 'Character Tutors' and very deliberately model the behaviours they want the students to present. They hold regular tutorials to discuss the progress of the students'

understanding.

- A ‘Character Handbook’ is given to all as a guide and reminder, and ‘Character Rewards’ are given to students who excel.”

I’m not attempting to denigrate Seldon’s attempts to improve the lives of the students at his school. I’m sure they are all polite and exhibit exemplary manners and poise, however the main tactics he puts forward, mindfulness and rewards, are questionable.

Mindfulness

The British Psychological Society writes about the introduction into schools of ‘Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning’ (SEAL). “SEAL is not a neatly defined syllabus nor a mandatory content-specific course – schools pursue SEAL in highly varied ways. Nonetheless, published SEAL guidance documents do provide a framework for achieving these expanded goals.” They then put forward that schools can include mindfulness as a way of delivering SEAL objectives.

Willem Kuyken, a Professor of clinical psychology at Oxford University and director of the Oxford Mindfulness Centre, asks for caution in plowing ahead with mindfulness training in schools:

There’s a lot of enthusiasm [about] mindfulness and we think that the enthusiasm may be ahead of the research, I completely see why people might say it’s wishy-washy, which is why we’re working to ensure there is good research answering important questions about whether it works, how it works and how it can be best implemented in school systems.

There have probably been at least 20 studies now of mindfulness in schools, all of them small, all of them not designed optimally.

Professor Kuyken, will be looking to document the benefits of mindfulness with a five-year study of almost 6,000 children.

I believe it is right to tread carefully. An interesting discussion,

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between four Buddhist teachers from the Bodi College in Devon, is taken from the ‘Tricycle’ online course: *Mindfulness: Its Origins, Purpose, and Transformational Power*:

Stephen Batchelor: Mindfulness is a total embrace of life itself, which includes its richness and the beauty but also opens us up to its tragic and painful dimension—the things that we prefer to forget. The word *sati*, mindfulness, means to remember. It means to recall those dimensions of our lives that we prefer to put out of mind.

Christina Feldman: I’ve had people tell me that they believe they were happier before they began to cultivate mindfulness. But I think what they’re actually saying is that they used to find it easier to forget. One thing we don’t say in the advertising for our mindfulness course is that once you begin to wake up, it’s actually quite challenging to fully go back to sleep.

Akinano Weber: Something else that can get overlooked is that mindfulness is a team player. It’s not the one thing that does it all. It’s about as famous as you can be on Buddhist charts. But I have not come across a passage in the Buddhist literature that says, “Mindfulness is the one thing that makes you free, awake, or happy all the time.”

What the Buddhist teachings do say is that mindfulness plays a crucial role in any of those undertakings—freedom, happiness, becoming whole, waking up, growing to have a nonreactive intelligent response to our lives and our worlds. But other factors have to be present as well. Insight is one of those factors. Ethics is another. Stillness, stability, and wisdom are factors. This is part of a package.

One of the parents in our primary school was a movement therapist which included a mindfulness element. She wanted to try her technique with the students, after agreement from the parents we decided to trial it for a month. Whilst the techniques seemed to work for a few students, it did not work for them all. Some of them did not want to go inside their head, it was often a scary place to be. In

the primary school, it was also often stressful for the teachers who were trying to coerce the more active members of the class to be still and relax, and getting annoyed if the children were not complying. In the secondary school, the students did not want to participate in focused mindfulness classes, however they did try yoga and many of them enjoyed the breathing exercises at the end of the session.

More effective was our immersive art projects and our weekly hikes in nature, they brought about a relaxed and reflective state in the students.

Most effective was the students not being in a stressful environment, having freedom and control over their day and focusing on the gradual development of personal ethics and wisdom and insight into the world through the projects.

I think it could be inauthentic and unethical to coerce students into a mindfulness project to escape a damaging school environment, or to use it to control behaviour.

Rewards

Alfie Kohn is an American author and lecturer in the areas of education, parenting, and human behavior. He has written extensively about extrinsic rewards and intrinsic motivation. He says:

Research and logic suggest that punishment and rewards are not really opposites, but two sides of the same coin. Both strategies amount to ways of trying to manipulate someone's behavior - in one case, prompting the question, "What do they want me to do, and what happens to me if I don't do it?" And in the other instance, leading a child to ask, "What do they want me to do, and what do I get for doing it?" Neither strategy helps children to grapple with the question, "What kind of person do I want to be?"

We had a strict policy in place, both in the primary and the secondary school, no rewards or punishments. There were never any gold stars or best student charts on the walls. There were never any detentions. Students were asked to "take a break" in the office if they were struggling in the classroom. Only one time in four years was a student not allowed to go on a hike in the primary school, decided on by the school community, because he had repeatedly made it difficult

for other students to enjoy their day.

If you offer rewards, that is what becomes important, if you dish out severe punishment, that becomes what the student is trying to avoid and will creatively conjure up the most elaborate plans to narrowly evade the punishments, resulting in endless negotiation and conflict.

An Answer?

Many students from the schools I ran were faced with really challenging life situations such as having a difficult home life - stressed parents, divorce, remarriage, destabilising and often changing family situations, addictions and mental ill health. Also, prior school experiences had left many of these students with feelings of isolation, being left out, lacking in social skills, being misunderstood, not belonging. Or even, while attending our secondary school feeling worried about exams, or about their future.

Students need substantial, practical and tangible training in how to remain resilient, deal with change and failure, to face their future with a sense of strength and optimism. They need to learn how to negotiate on their own behalf. They need to build strong characters.

At our schools, along with eliminating rewards and punishments, we also didn't focus on character education at all, nor moral, civic, or democratic education, nor social/emotional learning. We only focused on TPP. The design of the projects forces students to negotiate on the behalf of their characters and examine those traits to determine how useful they were during the process. Their peers and coaches will be quick to tell them if their attitudes, beliefs or behaviours are not helpful – for the benefit of the projects, or for the benefit of themselves.

The aspects of the Big 5 personality traits are used to illustrate to students which elements are useful and which are not:

1. Conscientiousness

Useful: Being organised, productive, diligent, self-disciplined, reliable and focused.

Not Useful: Being inflexible, rigid and too tied to convention.

Preferring to encounter planned rather than spontaneous situations.

Students need to be ready to face the ups and downs of the process, the plot twists are enough to challenge a person with high levels of extraversion and openness, never mind a person who likes things in order. Being stubborn and refusing to undertake perspective thinking is a quick way to alienate others and weaken the whole team.

2. Agreeableness

Useful: The ability to create close relationships. Being friendly, understanding, compassionate, cooperative and trusting others.

Not Useful: Being too agreeable, even with your own teammates, it could mean you get taken advantage of, always the minute-taker, always last with your opinions. Too much agreeableness displays a lack of confidence or courage.

Dr. Peterson warns of the dangers of being too agreeable. He says that people come to see him for psychotherapy for many reasons, but a frequent reason is because they are “too agreeable.” Peterson then provides those clients with a sort of assertiveness training, which focuses on the “ability to learn how to negotiate on your own behalf.”

However, disagreeableness can also be damaging. People who are highly disagreeable are more likely to be those people serving a prison sentence

3. Neuroticism

Useful: Sensitivity and emotional openness.

Not Useful: Overly sensitive and emotional, excitable, insecure, unstable, angry and low impulse control. Can lead to over empathising and a scale of feelings, which run from an inability to think rationally and control the emotions, to severe anxiety and/or depression. Some traits can cause mayhem in a team and have to be worked through. High neuroticism is uncommon, all students want to work well and be part of a successful project, but if there are strong underlying high neuroticism traits, stressful situations can cause them to surface. If it seems extreme, there needs to be a support system in place, which would include the student’s family and doctors or therapists. With lots of understanding and talking, students can use

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the experience to bring their feelings out into the open. Usually the joyful, exciting and fun environment provides a sense of belonging, and healing can take place. I believe it is more effective to have the students collide into something that invokes their negative feelings and to have the opportunity to address them, than to keep the feelings locked away.

The voices of the young people who go to the extreme measure of violence and taking their own lives and/or the lives of others comes back to haunt, when they talk about feeling alone, nobody to talk to, like they didn't fit in.

4. Openness

Useful: Being creative and open to new ideas. Appreciating aesthetics. Ability to creatively and quickly manipulate abstract concepts or information into a new sense of understanding. Capacity for adventurousness, creative, love of variety and novelty.

Not Useful: Overly zealous creativity, haphazard approach with a lack of direction and focus. Impulsivity. Excessive non-conformity. High levels of self-valuation.

The risks have to be measured and considered, this is very good practice for the student high in the openness trait.

5. Extraversion

Useful: Being outgoing, enthusiastic, sociable, energetic and assertive.

Not Useful: Too attention-seeking, attempts to dominate situations or teammates. Others feel overpowered and creates unease in the team.

It can be difficult for the extrovert to reign themselves in. So it is good practice in self-discipline.

Throughout TPP, all of the traits are displayed at some point or other by the characters. Also present are the magnanimous traits: facing a difficult situation with integrity, rising above pettiness, taking responsibility for actions, which are deemed harmful, being generous to your peers with your time and ideas, acknowledging fear and forging ahead regardless, facing failure and responding graciously, awareness of your call to lead and stepping in with confidence and

courage. The students learn how each trait is useful or not useful, and can then use that information to reflect on their own character traits and can start to understand how each trait helps them be successful within situations and relationships, or not.

We are neglecting the opportunity for student development when we don't provide a platform in which to practice these skills.

Leadership

As with character education, much has been written and talked about training young people in the art of leadership. The conclusive and tangible nuts and bolts of leadership training, as with character education, has no common language nor general agreement of how successful leadership can be taught, or even explored in schools and colleges.

We could shine some light on the subject of leadership if we go back to basics and ask what *is* effective leadership and what are the leaders of flagship companies of today doing?

Professor Carnes points to a 2014 article in *The New York Times*, an interview with Laszlo Bock, the senior vice president of people operations at Google. Bock said that after basic knowledge in technical subjects, the initial most important quality in an employee is not I.Q., it is “general cognitive ability,” which is the ability to learn quickly and to pull together and process different and often incongruous information.

The second most important quality, according to Bock, is leadership: “In particular, emergent leadership as opposed to traditional leadership.” He explains emergent leadership as the ability to step in and lead when your skills are required and then step back and allow others to bring their expertise when their skills are more suited to the task. “You have to be willing to relinquish power,” he says.

Bock goes on to stipulate that this requires ownership and intellectual humility, the ability to learn from failure, which is often absent in many graduates from “hotshot business schools.”

He says the most successful employees at Google are passionate and fiercely argue their point of view, but they are also open to new information, allowing it to change their opinion, “You need a big ego and a small ego in the same person at the same time.”

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Bock left Google to launch a startup called Humu. From their website:

Humu drives behavioral change with the power of people science, machine learning—and love.

Professor Carnes poses a question about leadership: “If the essence of transformative leadership is improving how others think and act, how can students be expected to learn it?”

Fortunately, he can answer the question:

The answer...is to shift perspective from teacher to learner. Students learn how to work with others by working with others; they learn leadership by leading and by being led. Role-immersion games do just that, by thrusting students into complicated situations that oblige them to work in teams – and sometimes to lead them. This reciprocal conception of leadership – channeling individuals into effective collective action – has become the dominant ethos of the modern workplace. Unfortunately, this idea has little resonance within the pedagogical structure of higher education.

Professor Carnes says we need this reciprocal model of leadership, we have to sometimes suppress our own desires, and sometimes step up into a leadership role. He says we need workers to speak up and we need leaders to listen - for the health of our businesses, communities and nations.

The important philosophical discourse surrounding leadership practice is rare in education at all levels. Professor Carnes says that too often, economic and political elites call the shots, but are spared the burden of studying philosophy.

He believes, to make change in the world, it is more effective to join forces with others. However, there are not many students who have the thinking skills nor the teamwork or leadership skills to utilise after they leave their education. He says:

We have little evidence that the enormous public expenditure for higher education has strengthened our democracy, improved our communities or benefitted our society.

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Students who undertake RTTP or TPP counteract that narrative. After being involved in a reacting game, Carnes tells of a student who wrote about the effects of the game, how students find “their own authentic capacity to effect real change in culture – to have a vision for the world and be bold enough to enact it.”

We experienced the same expansion of awareness with our students, suddenly the world in all of its complexities, enters the classroom, changing their perspectives, attitudes and showing them how to be leaders.

An Answer?

Our students talked about what they had previously studied in history in their time before they came to the school. Mostly their studies centred around the second world war. Some had studied Roman history, but had found it boring. A discussion about Julius Caesar ensued and how his life was anything but boring. The knowledge surrounding Caesar was splintered, they knew he had been murdered but didn't know the reasons behind the crime.

The students decided they'd like to do a project about Caesar, and then explored the different formats the project could follow. One student thought it might be interesting to produce an after-life round-table review, this was agreed upon by everyone. This review took place after everybody who was involved in the plot to kill Caesar, and his defenders, had died. Caesar had called a meeting to determine why he had been murdered. The students formed two opposing groups, the supporters of Caesar demanding an explanation for why his life came to a brutal end, and the killers of Caesar putting forward their reasons for committing the crime. Both teams had deeply researched the events and put forward their arguments as in all other projects. However this project seemed to deepen their interest and understanding around leadership.

In listening to the round-table review, it struck me how the students who were in the role of supporting Caesar defended him by talking about his leadership skills, how he had inspired his army, when and why it had worked well, and when and why it had failed. They were drawn to how Caesar had amassed the most powerful army Rome had ever seen. How his loyal “comrades” loved their leader and felt his equal as he marched beside them on the battlefields and ate with them in the mess hall.

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However, they realised that Caesar was also determined and brutal. It was an opportunity for the students to explore various leadership styles and how power can be a force for good, or a dangerous manipulation of man.

After the project there were frequent references to Caesar's leadership style and the students would often use what they had learnt throughout the project to refer to other situations saying, "It's like when Caesar wanted to motivate his army."

The answer to effective leadership training in our school was definitely to let the learning unfold through various projects, by the students uncovering of leadership skills through walking in the shoes of great leaders in the past, and understanding their strengths and weaknesses.

The students also learned about leadership by leading and being led.

Implementing Ethics, Character and Leadership Education

The approach to ethical, character and leadership education varies from school to school and teacher to teacher. It is a hit-and-miss lottery, which shouldn't be the case. A national vision should be created which gives teachers the tools and the time to implement these crucial skills.

The 'The Association of Schools and College Leaders' (ASCL), has set up the 'Ethical Leadership Commission,' chaired by Carolyn Roberts. She has this to say:

The nation trusts us to form young people into the best that they can be. The public expects us to know what kind of example we should set them, but do we? How do we know what's right or wrong?

Roberts also says:

We should be more confident in our own judgment. As adults we know what makes for a good society and what we want for our own families. At home most of us try to model honesty, love, wit, good temper, accountability, justice, magnanimity, reciprocity, duty, service, hope and all the virtues of a good life, tricky as it might be. We know that

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wealth and status don't amount to strength of character and that kindness is more important than dominance...We hope fervently that someone, somewhere is telling them a better way to live.

If that someone is a teacher and that somewhere is a school, then we have to ask who is providing the training for those teachers? Who is deciding what type of character training they will need to pass along to those in their care?

In her amazing book, *Life Lessons*, Melissa Benn tells us:

There is probably no area of current education policy where successive governments have made such a crass mess of things than in the way we train, treat and reward today's educators...Official policy works with equally depressing consistency to undermine the creation of a highly skilled, confident, well paid and autonomous profession.

A 2018 survey by the U.K.'s National Education Union (NEU) tells us:

Initial findings from the latest NEU workload survey of 8,173 members, shows the continuing scale of the workload problem facing teachers and the impact this is having on their willingness to stay in the profession.

- A staggering 81% of teachers said they have considered leaving teaching in the last year because of the pressures of workload.
- 40% of respondents are spending more than 21 hours a week working at home at evenings and weekends
- More than 80% are now teaching more hours than the average teaching hours in 2016, as schools face rising pupil numbers at the same time as a recruitment and retention crisis.

Less than 15% of teachers said that they had a good work-life balance all or most of the time. Around 2,500 teachers provided information about their workload including the following:

We are not trusted to get on and do our job. We are

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accountable at every level which creates more stress and paperwork. We are exhausted and great teachers are being driven out of the profession because they are burned out!

I don't know how I can change how I work, I don't know how long I can maintain it, and the impact that it's having on my family is horrific. I am near marriage breakdown and one of the reasons is my job.

I will be giving up teaching after this year as the workload and pressure has become too much.

Kevin Courtney, Joint General Secretary of the National Education Union, said:

The Government cannot keep burying its head in the sand about the issue of workload. It is clearly driving the majority of teachers to despair or out of the profession all together. The continual long hours spent on unnecessary work such as data collection for arbitrary Government targets is not only demoralising but is unsustainable mentally and physically. If the Government does not act decisively and soon, the recruitment and retention crisis will seriously damage our children and young people's education.

The large percentage of teachers who have considered leaving the profession points to an educational crisis. Benn passes along another piece of dismal news, for September 2018, there was a 40 per cent drop in teacher applications for secondary schools.

Benn says that the once family friendly teaching position, now requires hours similar to a job in law, without the status or big salary.

Finnish Teachers

An educational crisis is occurring in other countries, but not in Finland where the educational profession is difficult to enter due to the excess of candidates, and a degree is required, preferably a masters degree. If you are fortunate to secure a place, the conditions are enviable. John Hart wrote an interesting article for the Guardian in which he offers a personal account of teaching in Finland after moving there with his family. He says:

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Teachers in Finland are given a great deal of responsibility and are allowed unfettered flexibility in what and how they teach. Performance isn't observed and graded. Instead, annual development discussions with school leaders provide feedback on a teacher's own assessment of their strengths and weaknesses. Detailed plans are not expected either. The notion that a teacher should provide evidence to prove what they've done is ludicrous. Each teacher marks work when it benefits them or the student, but not for anyone else's sake.

Teachers enter the profession full of drive and enthusiasm. They are in the job for the right reasons. We must trust them and keep that drive alive. To do this, we must give them the tools and time they need to recover after a hard day at work. If teachers aren't encumbered by tasks that don't benefit them or their students, they'll be able to do a better job.

A comment listed underneath the article offers an interesting view:

So, this isn't about education or teachers, it's about society. This is where we get the U.K. paradox. We need a better education system, but it needs a better society to support it. But we need a better society, which primarily comes from a better education system creating the citizens that want to keep improving that society.

(More about education in Finland in Part IV, Chapter 1)

Teachers who are overworked and stressed do not have the time nor the inclination to lead students in the ways of ethics, character and leadership.

A recent report from the BBC points to a NASUWT teachers union poll of five thousand teachers. Nearly a quarter say they face violence once a week. Almost half have been threatened verbally. One teacher says:

Verbal abuse is now part of the daily working landscape for a primary teacher.

Another teacher says:

Having taught for almost 40 years I have witnessed a

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demonstrable and seemingly unstoppable deterioration in pupil behaviour.

The Department for Education said such violence was "completely unacceptable". However, the report says: "There appears to be no appetite for tackling the issues that face teachers in the classroom."

How are we to implement ethical education when so many teachers are in survival mode?

We've had excellent teachers work at our schools who wouldn't dream of going back into mainstream education to face the challenges.

Even if teachers are not facing high levels of behavioural issues, and they believe ethical education is something they want to implement, how would they fit it in to an already overcrowded curriculum?

Is the knowledge-based curriculum the villain in the story?

In his book, Professor Carnes readily admits: "Many Professors, including me, regard the academic world as a place to advance knowledge rather than build character." But surely employers want their companies to be filled with people whose character displays good decision making, empathy and stable emotional management.

Employee mental health is also a big factor. Companies want people who are able to maintain a balanced life, manage stress and possess self-discipline and self-control. Exhibiting anger issues and a lack of empathetic reasoning causes a firework show in the workplace.

The importance of these stable states of emotion was brought to the frontline in 1996 when Daniel Goleman brought out his book *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. The main message was to understand and manage our own emotions and to recognise and positively influence the emotions of others.

I read this book when it first came out and much of the information inspired and influenced the content of future training I undertook with teachers and heads of schools. They really valued spending time together to discuss emotional intelligence and how it impacted their work with students, and with each other.

CHAPTER 9

Critical Thinking Skills

If you asked any parent this question: would you like your child to be able to think critically?” They would obviously say yes. Thinking is good, being able to think with clarity and intellect is a useful skill to have in life. Some families try to bring this type of thinking to their conversations by asking their children questions and challenging their points of view. If this happens, that’s great. However, with busy lives and the distraction of phones, games and social networks, our children’s attention spans are dwindling by the year.

Is there a way to create a culture of critical thinking in schools? A way to weave it into the time when children and young people’s time is allocated for learning?

What is Critical Thinking?

Before we look at the ability to think critically, let’s look at what the term “critical thinking” actually means.

The definition from OED reads: “The objective analysis and evaluation of an issue in order to form a judgment.” This seems clear enough until you try to put this into practice, especially within a classroom. How do you objectively analyse and evaluate? Whose judgment are you forming, and how are you doing that? Once you start to break it down, critical thinking becomes rather complex and unclear.

The Stanford Encyclopedia of philosophy says, “Critical thinking is a widely accepted educational goal. Its definition is contested, but the competing definitions can be understood as differing conceptions of the same basic concept: careful thinking directed to a goal.” Okay, so we need a goal and some careful thinking to get us there. It’s still not crystal clear.

The Stanford site also provides information about John Dewey, the influential American philosopher of education. He called it “reflective thinking” and defined it as “active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the

light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends”. Maybe we are getting closer to a definition, but it still remains unclear how you put that into practice and use it in the classroom.

In 1956, Benjamin Bloom offered a more in-depth explanation of critical thinking when he published *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. This was a framework for categorizing educational goals. The upside-down pyramid shaped illustration, known as Bloom’s Taxonomy consists of six categories – from the bottom: Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation. Knowledge, is stipulated as the necessary precondition for putting the following skills and abilities into practice. Though how knowledge comes first is a bit confusing to me, maybe he meant information gathering?

Then in 2001 a revised Bloom’s Taxonomy was published: *A Taxonomy for Teaching, Learning and Assessment*. This revision was written by instructional and curriculum researchers, cognitive psychologists and assessment specialists. It is thought to be a more dynamic approach incorporating “action words” to describe the cognitive processes. The labels changed to: Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyse, Evaluate, Create. Knowledge has its own classifications: Factual Knowledge, Conceptual Knowledge, Procedural Knowledge, and Metacognitive Knowledge. Bloom’s Taxonomy, and its revision is still in the warm area, but it seems to be all about knowledge management and not really about critical thinking.

In my experience, the gathering, retention, management and recall of knowledge seems to be a different skill than being able to think your way through a situation. Some students know how to study well, they listen in class, write notes or create a mind map and are then able to recall and reproduce the information when needed. This is a skill and a very useful skill, but that same student might struggle when asked to research a topic, put forward the main points, articulate various viewpoints, including their own, whilst being aware of personal biases.

Knowledge management involves cognitive tasks. Critical thinking is a different skill, it is cognition plus metacognition – thinking about

thinking.

Can critical thinking be developed? And more specifically, can it be developed in a classroom environment?

Edward de Bono is a physician, psychologist, philosopher and author of many books about creative thinking. He thinks that creative thinking is definitely a skill which can be developed. He tells us:

The Key point is that for 2,400 years we've done very little about thinking since the GG3 – Greek Gang of 3 – Socrates, Plato and Aristotle.

At the Renaissance when Greek thinking came to Europe, the people running schools and universities were church people. They didn't need creativity, they didn't need design, they didn't need perceptual thinking. All they needed was truth, logic and argument in which to prove heretics wrong. And that became the core of education, leaving out creativity, design and so on.

De Bono proposes that the sector that is most interested in creative thinking is not education or politics, it is business, due to the need to meet financial obligations.

He calls for designing the way forward by taking creativity in thinking seriously. He says we could do this by implementing robust training programmes, devoting time and setting targets. All, he says, are almost totally absent from education.

De Bono says that many courses and programmes based on critical thinking are “EBNE” – Excellent, But Not Enough.

On The Radio

I found a Radio 4 series entitled Bringing up Britain. One of the episodes focused on critical thinking and asked: “How can we nurture critical thinking skills in children and young people?”

Mariella Frostrup is joined by: an editor, a columnist, a comedian, a former chief examiner of A-level Critical Thinking, a teacher of philosophy and critical thinking, and someone from the School of Education at Durham University.

They sounded like an informed lot so I eagerly settled in to listen to the experts. I was soon disappointed when the conversation centred around a few points: Firstly, philosophy for children (not in the curriculum, so parents have to fund). Next is how young people should decipher the news (be aware of fake news and be skeptical of media). Lastly, exams on critical thinking (which have disappeared).

One guest says he is astounded by the fact that, following the high profile critical thinking achieved when it was first introduced, the exams have now been removed and have not been replaced. When asked why they had failed, he said it was an experiment and they became trivialised.

There was then discussion about how maybe the need for an exam is not necessary, but the problem is due to a lack of interest in a subject if it does not culminate in an exam.

The talk turned to the possibility of parents maybe not understanding what critical thinking is, maybe they think it is “new-agey” rather than realising how critical, creative thinking is for young people.

Another guest claims that critical thinking is equally as important as literacy and numeracy. However then the guests declares that “it’s a shame we don’t know what it is because I think most parents would want their children to have access to it and they would probably even want to go to the classes themselves.”

A question is put forward by the host: “Is the elephant in the room not Britishness? That we are not very good at critical thinking?”

One of her guests offers the fact that Europeans are probably better at critical thinking because French students are taught philosophy until they are eighteen, so they are probably more comfortable with philosophical ideas, and that is a failing of the British educational system.

The radio discussion left me wondering where was the intellectual exploration of how we encourage our young people to think critically, so I did a bit of research.

Critical Thinking in the Curriculum

I looked into what had happened to the critical thinking exams which had been talked about during the radio discussion. A newspaper

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article from The Independent, 13 October 2016, entitled “A Levels Dropped” reports on the various subjects being terminated in England by the Department for Education and Ofqual, the Exams Regulator. The exams include: Citizenship studies, Communication and Culture, Critical thinking, Global Development, Statistics and World Development.

From the comments section below the article, one reader had this to say:

I cannot understand at all what this is all about. (except that these are all studies which encourage logical and critical thought, which our Tory dictators presumably fear). Will the "non-banned" list be stuff that can be learned by rote?

However, the banned critical thinking exam seemed to be centred more around arguments, reasons and conclusions, rather than thinking creatively and critically. Again, this is more about knowledge management rather than critical thinking. An old copy of the A-level syllabus presents the outline:

- Analysing arguments.
- Judging the relevance and significance of information.
- Evaluating claims, inferences, arguments and explanations .
- Constructing clear and coherent arguments.
- Forming well-reasoned judgments and decisions.

Other exams in critical thinking, or thinking skills, can be found at The University of Cambridge International Examinations. They are a provider of international qualifications, offering examinations and qualifications all over the world to 10,000 schools.

The aims for their Thinking Skills syllabus is as follows:

- To give candidates a specific and transferable set of skills for solving problems, critical thinking and reasoning.
- To encourage candidates to apply these skills to realistic scenarios.
- To develop candidates’ abilities to understand and engage confidently in argument and reasoning.

The International Baccalaureate

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Yet another provider: The International Baccalaureate (IB), offers “The Theory of Knowledge.” The IB has an interesting history which began in Paris at the start of the twentieth century. Marie-Thérèse Maurette was born in Paris, in 1890. She became an educator, married, and then worked at the International School of Geneva, founded by the League of Nations and local educators.

In 1948 Maurette wrote an educational handbook for UNESCO entitled “Is There a Way of Teaching for Peace?” The twenty page document begins by declaring:

To educate children so that they may become members of the human race as a whole, and not merely members of separate nations, is an immense task – an undertaking so vast that the old-established and powerful churches have failed; and many people are prepared to resign themselves to the old saying: “Homo homini lupus.”

(Homo homini lupus is a Latin proverb and means “man is wolf to man.”)

Maurette questions if techniques exist, which can imbue the spirit of peace and international collaboration. Her work within the school evolved into the framework for the IB, which was established around the mid 1960’s by a group of teachers from the school. The IB was awarded university recognition in 1980 and the exam is available in over three thousand schools throughout the world, with almost three hundred located within the UK.

In this document, Maurette argues that students should be skilled in teamwork, social interdependence, mutual aid and frequent community volunteer work.

I was excited to find out about the IB. It has different educational programmes for different age groups and the learner profile describes the attributes and outcomes of education for international-mindedness:

The International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme is an assessed programme for students aged 16 to 19. It is respected by leading universities across the globe.

Claims include that the diploma will have excellent breadth and depth of knowledge. That the students will “flourish physically, intellectually, emotionally and ethically”. And that

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the students will “Explore the nature of knowledge through the programme’s unique Theory of Knowledge course” (TOK).

TOK, the site tells us, is “mandatory for all students, and is central to the educational philosophy.” It is also “an opportunity for students to reflect on the nature of knowledge, and on how we know what we claim to know.”

The structure of TOK is a “thoughtful and purposeful inquiry into different ways of knowing, and into different kinds of knowledge, TOK is composed almost entirely of questions.” The questions include:

- What counts as evidence for X?
- How do we judge which is the best model of Y?
- What does theory Z mean in the real world?

TOK is also an attempt to “gain greater awareness of their personal and ideological assumptions, as well as developing an appreciation of the diversity and richness of cultural perspectives.” TOK aims to “make students aware of the interpretative nature of knowledge, including personal ideological biases – whether these biases are retained, revised or rejected. It offers students and their teachers the opportunity to: reflect critically on diverse ways of knowing and on areas of knowledge, consider the role and nature of knowledge in their own culture, in the cultures of others and in the wider world. In addition, TOK prompts students to: “be aware of themselves as thinkers, encouraging them to become more acquainted with the complexity of knowledge, and to recognize the need to act responsibly in an increasingly interconnected but uncertain world.” The programme asks the students to examine the interpretative nature of knowledge, as well as their assumptions and personal ideological biases and if those biases are retained, revised or rejected. The course is assessed through an oral presentation, which asks the student to apply what they have learned through TOK to a real-life situation. The assessment also requires the student to provide a 1,600 word conceptual essay

The IB approach sounds really close to a solid critical thinking programme. Who would not want this level of thinking skills for

their child? Is this too good to be true?

Sort of. As I looked more deeply into the nuts and bolts of TOK a search on Youtube brought up a video entitled “How I got 100% for TOK presentation.” The student presenter tells her audience to become familiar with the TOK terminology including inductive reasoning fallacies and generalisations - “if you want to impress your examiner.” She goes on to advise getting facts from reputable sources, to have a counter claim and so on. Good advice to run a polished and professional presentation.

Another Youtube video entitled “How to do a TOK presentation right!” is presented by a TOK examiner. This is a popular video with 131,000 views. The comments section contains messages complimenting the presenter, but also expressing concerns about their own teachers and how they hadn’t prepared them as well as the video’s presenter would have.

The TOK programme seems to offer really good skills in sorting out information, categorizing facts, checking sources, and presentation layout. But it also seems to be a very formulaic approach to the management of knowledge.

Again, “EBNE.”

Foundation For Critical Thinking

There is an actual Foundation for Critical Thinking, based in California. They have been holding annual conferences for the past thirty eight years.

The 2018 conference focused on:

Critical Thinking Throughout Education and Across the Professions – in Every Classroom, Every Boardroom, Every Business, Every Government, in Every Country Around the World.

The late Dr. Richard Paul, the original founder, was a Professor at Sonoma State University for almost thirty years, later becoming Professor Emeritus of Philosophy. He spent his life talking about how schools do not provide an opportunity for critical thinking or intellectual development. He said:

It is now generally conceded that the art of thinking critically

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is a major missing link in education today, and that effective communication and problem-solving skills, as well as mastery of content, require critical thinking. It is also generally recognized that the ability to think critically becomes more and more important to success in life as the pace of change continues to accelerate and as complexity and interdependence continue to intensify. It is also generally conceded that some major changes in instruction will have to take place to shift the overarching emphasis of instruction from rote memorization to effective critical thinking (as the primary tool of learning).

Dr. Paul also wrote about three “waves” of critical thinking research, which started in the 1970’s. He said the first wave was dominated by philosophers and focused on the theory of logic, argumentation and reasoning. The theorists of this wave are concerned with persuasion and argumentation. They ignore the broad meaning of logic and view it in a narrow and technical way. Human emotion, feelings and behaviour are not taken into account.

It seems that critical thinking courses like the former A-level, the Cambridge Examination and the IB’s TOK, exemplified these first wave characteristics: narrow, technical and without the obvious importance of the human aspect.

In looking at an educational setting, Dr. Paul writes:

In the first wave of critical thinking practice, the dominant paradigm came from philosophy and logic and the dominant educational manifestation was a formal or informal logic course. The idea was to establish a basic course in critical thinking which would provide entering freshmen with the foundational intellectual skills they need to be successful in college work. Almost from the beginning, however, there was a contradiction between the concerns and ideals that gave rise to the theory and practice and actual classroom practice. The ideals were broad and ambitious. The practice was narrow and of limited success.

This first wave also faced the problem of skill transference, how to take the information from critical thinking classes and apply them in

other subjects. Dr. Paul tells us that the students reverted to lower-order skills like rote-memorisation to be able to pass their exams.

Dr. Paul tells us that the second wave looks at critical thinking from a different perspective other than logic. This wave has made strides, and views critical thinking through the lens of cognitive psychology and critical pedagogy. However, the research comes from various areas such as biology, business and nursing, so is not integrated and lacks “a shared intellectual tradition.”

Again, referring to an educational setting, he had this to say:

The second wave of critical thinking research and practice began when increasing numbers of educators and administrators began to recognize that one course in critical thinking at the college level does not a critical thinker make.

And this:

After all, what does it mean to think historically, to think geographically, to think mathematically, to think philosophically, to think aesthetically, etc? These are pressing second wave questions. However, since most subject matter specialists have not studied informal or formal logic, they are not well-positioned to integrate insights from logic into their concept of their field.

Dr. Paul tells us that the phenomena of “pseudo-critical thinking” became common. An expensive testing system for critical thinking was introduced into Californian schools, but was soon vetoed when it was found to be poorly designed. There was also political tension when liberals liked the test but conservatives thought the test and the whole agenda aligned too much with the liberal’s views.

The third wave of critical thinking, according to Dr. Paul: “Represents a commitment to transcend the predominant weaknesses of the first two waves.” He also said that third wave theorists are still relatively rare, this caused him concern as he felt there needed to be a general recognition of the importance of moving beyond the first two waves. It would need people to think outside of their own discipline, to widen the premise of logic, to be open to picking up the

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findings of the first and second wave, and the motivation and opportunity to push it forward.

In relation to education he said:

From a third wave perspective, an adequate account of informal logic and critical thinking must shed significant light on the logic of everyday thinking as well as on the logic of the disciplines (if it is to attract the attention of educational reformers and those concerned with the application of critical thinking to everyday life).

Dr. Paul introduced insights, such as the notion of ideas and the fact that to understand the logic of one idea you have to stretch to understand the relationship between the initial idea and the surrounding ideas. He says this requires a “level of intellectual discipline and presupposing intellectual criteria and standards.”

In thinking about ideas as a system, he says:

You miss the logic of curriculum if you think it’s just a matter of listening to things that would be good to know. You miss the logic of teaching and learning if you say: “Any questions? No? Good, then we can go on.” You miss the logic of memory if you think rote achieves it. To know anything is to know the system around it.

Is there anything else we can look at, which would move us closer to understanding what a third wave of critical thinking would look like? How about the Socratic Method?

The Socratic Method

The Socratic Method is touted to be an excellent path to critical thinking. This method, named after the Greek philosopher Socrates, is popular in legal classrooms. The underlying principle is to question your assumptions and beliefs by placing an individual in a pressured “hot seat” to answer question after question until they begin to doubt how they ever arrived at their viewpoints in the first place. This is played out in front of the whole class and is designed to be engaging and to foster an intellectual classroom environment.

However, when the brain succumbs to stress, it often shuts down and goes into survival mode. Many students find the interrogative process

intimidating and humiliating. It has, Professor Carnes tells us, been given up on or softened in some law schools due to the student's unhappiness with the method.

Carnes says:

As Nietzsche and modern scholars have perceived, the Socratic method fails because it arouses mistrust among interlocutors who retreat, turtle-like, within the hard protective shell of their self.

If the Socratic method is difficult for many university students, it would be unbearable for most secondary students who do not want to be singled out and questioned to within an inch of their life. It makes them too exposed, too vulnerable .

Agitators, Perspectives and Assumptions

Agitators

When I started to think about what a “third wave” of critical thinking might consist of, an image of a prism came floating into my mind.

Instead of a beam of light hitting a prism, it was replaced by a beam of thought. I didn't know what to make of this so I looked into what happens to a beam of light when it hits a prism.

When a beam of white light hits of a piece of ordinary glass, the light waves reach the surface and then travel through to the molecules inside the glass. The waves slow down and travel through the molecules at the same speed. The beam of light is fixed and together (when it exits the glass) and hits the surface beyond, showing a single white light.

Alternatively, when a beam of white light, hits the surface of a prism, the slanted angle causes the light to separate and splash out, like sprays of water from a wave, which has hit a jagged rock jutting out to sea. It then enters the glass separated into the strands of colour spectrum. The light waves then interact with the molecules and travel at different speeds due to the various wave lengths, violet is the shortest so is the slowest, red is the longest and the fastest. Orange, yellow, green, blue and indigo fall in-between. The light exits the glass

separately and the colour spectrum is separated out and easy to see with the naked eye.

It seemed to me, that critical thinking was just like that. You are trying to convert a single, flat beam of thought into an interesting array of different coloured strands. But the process needs an agitator, something that acts like the molecules in the glass, which prevents the one linear thought sticking together, it needs to go through a process, which causes the thought, or line of thinking, to separate into strands, to be challenged and pulled apart. Once on the other side, these separated strands can then be examined, picked through and then reformed into a new brighter, bolder beam.

The third wave of critical thinking needs an agitator, to challenge and pull apart a single, one-track, beam of thought.

What is that agitator? It is – other people. Interaction with other people in complex situations, which requires effort, which is difficult to navigate through, trying various routes and bumping into obstructions which need to be removed or obstacles which need to be avoided or traversed. All in an attempt to get to the other side, the destination – the prize. It is agonizing, exhilarating and transformative.

Not long after I had been thinking about prisms, I found a little gem of a story on Youtube, an interview with Steve Jobs, which aligned nicely with my prism/agitation theory:

I've always felt that a team of people doing something they really believe in is like...when I was a young kid there was a widowed man that lived up the street. He was in his eighties. He was a little scary looking. And I got to know him a little bit. I think he may have paid me to mow his lawn or something. And one day he said to me: "Come on into my garage I want to show you something." And he pulled out this dusty old rock tumbler. It was a motor and a coffee can and a little band between them. And he said: "Come on with me." We went out into the back and we got just some rocks. Some regular old ugly rocks. And we put them in the can with a little bit of liquid and little bit of grit powder, and we closed the can up and he turned this motor on and he said: "Come back tomorrow."

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And this can was making a racket as the stones went around.

And I came back the next day, and we opened the can. And we took out these amazingly beautiful polished rocks. The same common stones that had gone in, through rubbing against each other like this (Steve claps his hands together), creating a little bit of friction, creating a little bit of noise, had come out these beautiful polished rocks.

That's always been in my mind my metaphor for a team working really hard on something they're passionate about. It's that through the team, through that group of incredibly talented people bumping up against each other, having arguments, having fights sometimes, making some noise, and working together they polish each other and they polish the ideas, and what comes out are these really beautiful stones."

We ask a lot from young people, we want them to come out of education like polished shiny rocks, but we don't provide the grit powder, the motor or the coffee can. All of the programs, which attempt to teach critical thinking, do not provide the necessary agitation. They are a good foundation, often excellent, but not enough. They present a formulaic process to create technical knowledge of language and argument. However, to really think critically, to dive into the third wave and to delve into the deepness of the human psyche, you have to involve emotions, feelings and behaviour. You have to tear apart beliefs and assumptions and drag them into everyday experience

Perspectives

I have written a lot about perspectives so far, a reminder of what perspective taking is:

The Three Positioning Perspectives:

- *First position* – this is your own reality, your own view of the situation. Personal mastery comes from a strong first position. You need to know yourself and your values to be an effective role model and influence others by example.
- *Second position* – this is taking a creative leap of your imagination to understand the world from another person's perspective. It is the basis of empathy and rapport in an emotional capacity; and

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the basis of understanding ideas and opinions in an intellectual capacity. It gives us the ability to read another person's map.

- *Third position* – this is a step outside first and second view and a move towards a detached perspective to see the bigger picture.

I will also go on to write about perspective taking many more times before the end of this book. If you are getting the feeling that perspective taking is very important, you are completely correct.

Assumptions

To open up, to ask more questions, to summon the courage to be vulnerable, to tear apart beliefs and assumptions does not come easy to young adults (or older adults). They don't want to dig deep, don't want to lay their cards on the table. They are used to burying emotions and feelings under a shallow veneer of casual interactions. In a classroom setting, feelings and behaviours are never explored, students would never experience vulnerability, or explore critical thinking - unless you are taking part in a Portal Project, which contains the agitator, it was designed into working in opposition with the other team. And applying the 'Story Stages.'

I developed The Story Stages as a structure to self-check the thinking process. They were the key to the process of critical thinking for the students:

Assumption Story Stage

What story are you telling yourself when you have a shallow grasp of the facts? This step is evaluated after skimming the surface information, and checking what premature assumptions and judgments you have made.

Deconstruction Story Stage

This step Applies "First Principle Thinking," which boils down into the foundation of the story. Asking, what is true? What is proven? It deconstructs and locates the origin of the evidence.

Reconstruction Story Stage

The final step looks at the initial assumptions and judgments from the first stage and compares them to the facts from the Origin Story. Did they align, or did you identify biases or cognitive distortions? It

then reconstructs the whole story using first, second and third person perspectives.

An example of how the Story Steps work could be seen during the Patrick Sellar TPP:

Stage 1: One of the students, Aiden, was a staunch denouncer of Sellar's actions; an initial reading left him assuming that Sellar must have been an evil person to commit the atrocious acts of clearing people off their land to make way for capitalist consumption.

Stage 2: Aiden deconstructed the story using research, including the perspective of Sellar. He had also not thought about the Countess' role in the clearing process. Aiden realised that Sellar was probably under a great deal of pressure to clear the lands, even if he might not have agreed with the decision. A comparison with soldiers at war who disagree with their orders were discussed and paralleled with the plight of Sellar.

Stage 3: Aiden reconstructed the story and uncovered various recorded statements, such as the fact that Sellar was overheard telling his men to ensure that no people were to be hurt. Also the orders given to Sellar from the Countess were reviewed.

The ensuing discussion Aiden had with the rest of his team centred around a few points of interest including posing a question. If it had been a man ordering a woman to carry out these orders, a shift in the allocation of power and responsibility - would it have brought about a different reaction, different assumptions? After the project, Aiden explained how his beliefs had shifted: "I still don't agree with what he did. But his only other option was to walk away, give up the placement and lose his job. I can see how people feel cornered to commit horrible acts, under the name of another."

'APA' is the foundation of critical thinking:

Agitation: Encounter friction with others within a complex situation.

Perspectives: Deconstruct the situation from multiple perspectives.

Assumption: Reconstruct the facts, eliminating assumptions by using first principle thinking.

TPP also gave the students the opportunity to critically think on their feet. They explored the internal map of their characters; their

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strengths, weaknesses and vulnerabilities. They had a platform to use the material they had lived and breathed through multiple interactions. They responded to what was happening in their brain at that present moment, adapting to new pieces of information. They learned that they could respond spontaneously, even if they needed to take a few seconds to put their thoughts together, they didn't have to rely on a script or notes. That was when the really interesting dancing dialogue occurred alongside the emotion and authenticity. This is when they were producing their own knowledge, their personal theory of thinking.

The difference between consuming information for regurgitation and producing knowledge through APA becomes so obvious when you see the student's experiences transform into real learning. Information retention suddenly seems stagnant and static, inert and immobile. Whilst the interpretation of that information through APA becomes a voyage, a "knowledge odyssey."

In the next chapter, I would like to tell you about how our students were able to take those new voyages of the mind which changed their brains.

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CHAPTER 10
The Changing Brain

At Odds

Sitting on top of a small desk in the corner of the classroom sat a large glass jar. The jar had a label taped to the side which read “Stuff to Discuss At Meeting,” written in purple felt-tip. Students would drop notes containing ideas into the jar, or concerns or complaints. The notes were either finished off with a scrawled signature or were left anonymously blank.

On this particular day, I am sitting in front of the group of teenagers, holding a piece of paper which read “Anxiety is a big problem for young people, we should talk about it as a class.”

The note was not signed, but I know it had been written by one of the girls, due to the handwriting and the fairly certain knowledge that this wouldn't be a subject the boys would put forward.

I read the note out loud. One of the girls, Charlotte quickly looks up and scans her classmates.

“Would anybody like to start?” I ask. Silence.

“What is anxiety? What does it feel like?” I ask.

Charlotte, takes a big intake of breath. “Well...there is the mental part, where you are going over stuff in your head, and you can't think straight, then there's a physical part where you feel shaky, or your stomach aches.”

I nod my head encouragingly, when it seems that Charlotte has finished, I say, “That sounds like a good description, does anybody else have anything to add to that.” I look around the group.

Alfie is leaning back on his chair, “Well, if I'm feeling anxious about something, I just stop thinking about it, just put it out of my mind,” he says with a nonchalant sweep of his hand.

Charlotte's head snaps around to look at Alfie.

“Well, that's good that you're able to do that, not everyone is as tough and unfeeling about things which are upsetting them”

Alfie sits forward quickly, banging the chair legs on the floor. “I'm not saying I'm unfeeling, I'm saying that it makes more sense to just

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try and put things out of your mind which are upsetting, go do something to take your mind off whatever....”

Alfie’s voice trails off as Charlotte, now starts to become visibly upset, takes out a tissue and starts dabbing at her nose. Alfie looks taken aback, surprised and confused. He tries again, more softly, “I’m only....” but stops abruptly when Charlotte leaps up from her chair and walks towards the door, eyes full of tears.

Alfie looks over to me and opened his arms in a silent gesture of, “What the hell just happened?”

I give him a reassuring look and head for the door thinking how well the meeting was going.

Charlotte is sitting in the meeting room, now very upset.

I go and sit down opposite her and wait.

“He is so insensitive” she says. “How can he not understand that not everyone can just put things out of their minds, he just doesn’t care, it’s offensive to other people, and what they are dealing with.”

I give it a few more minutes, just sitting with her, until she takes a settling huge intake of breath, before I start to talk.

“I know it seems to you that Alfie was being off-hand, trying to minimise how you feel, but could you consider that you might be a bit sensitive, it might affect you more than someone else? I know things haven’t been easy for you.”

Charlotte looks ahead, avoiding eye contact.

I go on, “I don’t think he knows how difficult you find it, to turn off anxious thoughts, he has a completely different map of the world, his gender, his background, his culture all give him his own view of everything. The “how to deal with anxiety” signpost is drawn out differently than yours. It might not be right, but we’ve all got our own views.”

“Why give his version of his map at all,” Charlotte says angrily. “He bypassed ‘how does anxiety feel’, straight to ‘here’s the solution’, thank you very much, in twenty seconds.”

I wait a minute.

“I know it seemed like that, but I do think he was trying to offer help, advice, in a clumsy way I know, but I do believe he was trying.

I pause again, then go on.

“Do you really think he is insensitive and offensive, that is who he really is?”

Charlotte looks to the floor, “No...not all of the time, obviously, there are times when he is quite kind, he does listen to other people a lot.”

I nod my head in agreement. “He is a good listener, he certainly heard what you were saying” I say with a smile, trying desperately to lighten things.

“You can say that again,” Charlotte says, her face smoothing and the merest trace of a smile appeared.

“Can you give him the benefit of the doubt, that he was just trying to contribute to the conversation, share how he feels?” I ask.

Charlotte lightly nods her head in what looks like agreement, but isn't.

At break time, I call Alfie in to the meeting room

“How are things with Charlotte?” I ask.

“I don't know,” he shrugs.

“Listen Alfie,” I say gently “Charlotte is quite sensitive, especially if she thinks someone is not understanding what she is trying to say.”

“Yes, I get that” he says “but it works both ways, I would like her to respect how I feel. What if I started crying about her calling me unfeeling, how would that work?”

I can understand his point, but don't want to escalate the situation.

“I know, Alfie, it's difficult, I am sure Charlotte now recognises that you were just trying to get help her see how you deal with anxious thoughts, maybe be a bit careful in future. Anyway, let's leave it there, I'm sure things will be fine, she'll give you the benefit of the doubt.”

“Oh, nice of her,” Alfie says sarcastically as he gets up to leave.

Over the next few days, I question myself about how I had approached the disagreement. I had handled Charlotte with kid gloves and almost told Alfie to watch what he said in future, to be careful with his words. He was a conscientious boy, very self-disciplined and focused, but could often show signs of inflexibility. How would this affect him expressing his views in his future relationships? I knew I was evading the truth, Charlotte was showing

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signs of neuroticism, being overly sensitive and emotional, how would she deal with different views within her future relationships?

I wondered if I should intervene again, but I decided not to, I thought I would watch for a while and see what happened.

Fortunately, a solution arrived during the *Evictor's Trial* project. Charlotte and Alfie were placed on opposing teams and had to argue their points. Charlotte's character interrogated Alfie's character. Through discussion, Charlotte's teammates helped her to see some of her accusations didn't stand up, as there was not enough evidence. This is the beauty of the students challenging each other, even when they are on the same team. They have to watch out for the "us versus them" groupthink, as it will blind the whole team towards presenting a logical and rational case.

Charlotte was also part of the defense team who put together an argument that the Countess of Sutherland had manipulated Patrick Sellar to carry out the brutal removal of people from their land. The Countess was accused of luring Sellar into a romantic involvement to ensure he carried out her bidding. Deconstructing the trial scene brought interesting observations. Charlotte, a staunch supporter of women's rights, took a different view to a woman always being in the position of a victim. She had travelled to the land of second and third perspective and it had enabled her to see how a man's power could be used by a woman for her own benefit and profit. This led to an analysis of how the situation would affect the lives of both of the characters going forward. It was a valuable lesson in how power-plays and complex motives can exist in relationships.

The TPP experience had a huge impact on Charlotte, both as a desensitising process, the more she faced confrontation, the stronger she became. It also elevated an openness trait which saw her develop a reduced certainty of her own 'rightness,' a definite change in how she perceived situations. These changes had not seemed attainable in "real-life."

All of the students have to enter into perspective-taking, which is a surefire way to change the neurochemistry of their brains.

For Alfie, his views became more fluid as he was able to peek into the world of women, from a safe place behind his character. He was able to talk freely about the differences in attitudes and behaviours

without fear of being called insensitive.

This was important to me, to know that the boys had access to their feelings and emotions. I had spent many hours talking to girls and their parents about their anxieties and concerns, I knew that girls will normally be vocal, which is really helpful when they need help.

But boys will not be vocal, they stay quiet. Sometimes very quiet, which is very worrying.

Equality between boys/girls and men/women can be a hot potato within a classroom setting. I like the work of Christina Hoff Sommers. In answer to being asked “What are you fighting for as a feminist right now?” Her reply is well-considered and logical:

What I see among younger people, is that there is a real possibility for reaching a totally new level of equality and respect. I think it is something that men and women should do together. I worry because I sometimes see signs of female chauvinism, as a replacement for male chauvinism, and I hated male chauvinism. But I also don't like female chauvinism, and there is something called misandry like misogyny, thinking of men as toxic and masculinity is a pathology. It's a lack of understanding and compassion. We need to see one another as human and as equals, and I think that this generation can get us there...it's still early for a new wave of feminism, but that's my hope. It's going to be about men and women coming together, we're not two separate teams competing for a trophy. We're on the same team and we build our futures together – as equals.

TPP had certainly helped Charlotte and Alfie see that there had been a lack of understanding and gave them a platform on which to explore a new way of thinking which included equality and respect.

The Brain That Changes Itself

In order to discover what happened to the students, psychologically, during the projects, and how they had altered their thinking to such a deep degree, I researched the work of Norman Doidge. He is an American psychiatrist, psychoanalyst and author of, *The Brain That Changes Itself*.

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In the book, Doidge introduces us to Alvaro Pascual-Leon, the Spanish Professor of Neurology at Harvard Medical School who talks about the neuroplasticity of the brain and how it can either promote change or cause rigidity and repetition. Rather than thinking of neuroplasticity as elastic, which stretches and returns back to its original shape, Pascual-Leone puts forward that it is more like “Play Doh” whereby any pressure changes the shape, but each imprint will be incorporated into the material changing the molecules forever.

The reason the brain has plasticity but doesn't endlessly change through external imprints, or experiences, is due to genes, which form the structure of the brain. However the influence of genes only goes so far. We have around 22,000 genes in our DNA, but the brain is a powerhouse of 100 billion neurons and hundreds of trillions of synaptic connections.

Pascual-Leone uses a skier analogy. If our brain was a snowy mountain the genes would be the rock formation and the angle of the mountain, the basic structure. Our neural pathways would be the tracks laid down in the snow by our skis. Infrequently traveled tracks will be light and frequently traveled ones will be deeply ingrained, allowing for a slick and quick journey down the mountain. New tracks are not easily made, we're unsure of where to ski and the journey is slow and clunky. We are much happier staying within our well-worn tracks. What is then needed to get us off-track and into new territory, is a road block, something to cause a change in direction.

The blocks are events or situations, which lay outside of the normal terrain. They cause the brain to look up and shake free from passivity and fear. They can be a shock, a surprise, something unexpected or unusual.

For Pascual-Leone's experimental road block, he took a group of people with normal eyesight and blindfolded them for five days. During this time he mapped their brains with Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (TMS). Denying the need for sight caused the brain to start reorganizing itself. Within two days the “visual” cortex area of the brain started to be taken over for the use of touch and sound. This level of plasticity was an “astounding” finding for the scientist. After the five days, the removal of the blindfolds caused the visual area of the brain to stop processing sound and touch senses and

return to being used for vision.

So, the message from his experiment is in order to develop areas of the brain, you have to block or interrupt those deep tracked pathways (obviously blocking much needed senses such as sight is not necessary).

This is what is causing the change in thinking. TPP interrupt the usual pattern of thinking. The students are thrown into a world of emotional and imaginative experience. Who is this person they are assuming the character of? What happened to them? Why did they make those decisions? The interruptions to the regular patterns are also the disorienting changing environments, the challenges of preparing an argument, the plot twists, the humour - all contribute to frequent evaluations of their thinking. The conflict and confrontation throws their thinking into different areas of their brains

The blocks not only knocks them out of their deep tracks, it drags them to the top of the hill and pushes them swiftly over the edge leaving them struggling to regain their balance as they flail down the hill.

This definitely interrupts their usual behavioural and attitudinal patterns. Why do they even attempt to stay on their feet, why don't they take off their skis, refuse to take part and stomp off home? Because they are immersed in the game. If you think this is hugely challenging, you'd be right. If you think it induces anxiety, you'd also be right. If you think they can't cope and buckle under the strain, you'd be wrong, very wrong.

Rather than packing up and going home, they become immersed in the challenge of navigating the mountain terrain. Immersion is an interesting phenomenon as we'll see.

Immersion

To understand this immersion mentality we can compare the experience to video game immersion.

In their research paper "Measuring and Defining the Experience of Immersion in Games" the authors say that "immersion" is seen to be a critical component in video gaming, however, the actual meaning and the cause of immersion was still unclear. They set about to define immersion through various experiments and analysis of previous studies. Their findings showed that there are three levels of

immersion. The first is engagement, this is the initial investment of time, effort and attention. The next level is “engrossment” where barriers have to be overcome, emotional as well as skill-based. Then the third and highest level is “total immersion,” where there is a feeling of being present in the moment, all external stimuli fades, awareness of time diminishes, and there is total focus on the game. The first two levels are most common with the third being fleeting and rare.

“Flow” is the highly focused mental state, named by the Hungarian-American psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. Flow seems the same as immersion and displays the same components of Csikszentmihalyi’s description: clear goals; high degree of concentration; a loss of the feeling of self-consciousness (sense of serenity); distorted sense of time; direct and immediate feedback; balance between ability level and challenge; sense of personal control; intrinsically rewarding.

However, although immersion does elicit similar states as flow, it differs from flow in certain areas: Students can be immersed in the projects, but still be aware of external stimuli. Flow describes a “serene mindset, whilst immersion is much more emotionally charged.” The authors say “these findings suggest that a key part of immersion in games is that they are provoking; not only are they viewed as positive experiences, but negative emotions, and uneasiness run high.”

This might sound like something to avoid within a school setting, however, negative emotions, uneasiness and uncertainty are carefully built into the mechanics of TPP.

Uncertainty and Antifragility

The projects offer not just immersion, but immersive developmental and growth through the application of “antifragility.”

Being antifragile sounds similar to the resilience and robustness qualities which are so often chased in education, however, antifragility is not this.

To understand the difference we can look to Greek mythology. The Phoenix rises from the ashes, regenerates and renews, it is robust and resilient. However, the multi-headed Hydra, a dragon-like water serpent takes this one step further. If the Hydra suffers the misfortune of having one of its heads lopped off, it responds by re-

growing two new heads. It not only survives defeat, it is strengthened by it.

That's the difference between robustness and antifragility.

This is the theory contained in Nassim Taleb's book, *Antifragile: Things that Gain from Disorder*. Taleb writes about the concept of "antifragility," a term he coined to describe the opposite of fragility. The opposite of fragile is not, as Taleb tells us, being unbreakable, this implies resistance but not change, things stay the same. Antifragility, like bones, or the immune system strengthen under the effects of stressors, volatility and change. The antifragile thrives on uncertainty and disorder and uses this to grow.

To evade introducing these calculated and measured stressors into the lives of young people, to neglect the encouragement of a gradual move from an immature and fragile state to a mature and antifragile one, is harmful to their development. If the capacity to encounter adventure, failure and risk is absent from a young person's education, then that education it is not conducive to a life of responsibility and resourcefulness.

The facilitators at our school were always taken aback by how quickly the students could go from subdued, de-motivated and fragile-like in a traditional classroom setting to energised, more robust and antifragile in a project class.

I think Pascual-Leone's skier experiment shows why this change can occur so rapidly.

He was really curious about how swiftly the brain could rewire itself and couldn't believe that it could happen within a couple of days. When placed in a growth culture, outside of the body, nerves grow very slowly, not more than a millimeter per day. For the people who were blindfolded, the visual cortex could only have started to be used for different functions if pathways already existed. It seems the brain's ability to reorganize itself is based on an "operator theory," which puts forward that for any brain function, the most competent set of neurons is called upon as an operator and selected for the task. These neurons can be located anywhere in the brain, they do not live in only one area.

An Answer?

The actions of most of the students when they come together and click as a team, appears as though this is practiced behaviour. The excitement, the focus, the high-energy activity, the loudness, the total acceptance of their teammates as allies, the competitive spirit – all seem vaguely familiar, it looks like these neuronal pathways have been used before. As though they have plugged into a time when they were engaged and curious and delighted by being with others and motivated by the most intrinsically rewarding aspect of behaviour, play.

Could these play-based projects be an opportunity to turn back the clock for students, seeing a return to child-like (as opposed to childish) ways of behaviour. Even those students who are disengaged and demotivated? In my opinion, the answer is yes. The projects can tap into those well-worn neural pathways from long ago and return the students to a more open-minded state, releasing them from self-centredness and the need for certainty.

Certainty

A need to be certain is part of our human makeup but it is detrimental to accepting change and developing. TPP eliminate this need by encouraging openness to the views of others and rationality in questioning your own beliefs.

Why does the need for certainty exist in the first place?

Professor of Neuroscience, Beau Lotto, says the primal need to be certain, to predict outcomes, was historically necessary for our safety and survival. This leads to our deep dislike of uncertainty, our inability to cope with unpredictable situations, which often causes us to feel unstable and can affect the quality of our mental health. Lotto says:

Every behaviour we do, we do to reduce uncertainty. The stress resulting from uncertainty is tremendous in our society. It increases brain cell death, it decreases plasticity...we do almost everything to avoid uncertainty. Yet the irony is, that that's the only place we can go if we're ever going to see differently. And that's why creativity, seeing differently, always begins in the same way, it begins with a question.

Lotto says that everything we do is grounded in assumptions from previous experience. And how nothing interesting happens from this place of assumptions and knowing. Is there a way to safely move beyond our assumptions? Lotto tells us there is:

Fortunately evolution gave us a solution, it's a way of being, it's actually a way of being that celebrates uncertainty, it's open to possibility, it's inherently collaborative, it is play.

TPP incorporate all of the elements of play: anticipation, surprise, pleasure, understanding, strength, poise. Along with the good type of conflict, which doesn't attack your sense of self, but which is a challenge to a "make believe" character. The final component for play is the making fun of each other and yourself over mistakes, the banter and humour, an ability to laugh at yourself.

Neuroscientist V.R. Ramachandran says humor involves an unusual juxtaposition of ideas. He believes that humour, poetry and metaphor causes communication and cross-wiring to occur within the brain. This, he says, is the basis for creativity. He thinks there should be courses in schools for humour and laughter.

He tells us:

Ideas...are enshrined in different neural architecture in different parts of the brain, even far-flung regions of the brain – ideas and concepts access connections across the brain and creates a greater propensity to link seemingly unrelated ideas and concepts and that's the basis of metaphor and creativity. So now you can get to the molecular basis, look at the neural basis...and esoteric abilities like creativity for the first time in the history of neuroscience and brain research. How you tap into it, now that's a big question.

An Answer?

One possible answer to what Ramachandran was pondering about, is provided by the fact that students do tap into all of these elements

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during TPP. They also engage in a more complex style of semantics. Their use of language is specific, to portray significance and awareness of connotation. Language becomes more poetic, figurative and includes imagery, analogies and humour to convey meaningful ideas. The students carefully choose their words to illustrate their thoughts and emotions. They study historical writings, which often requires the need to imagine what message the voice from a bygone era is trying to convey. They can often be heard exclaiming loudly that they have suddenly come to an understanding about how to interpret a piece of research, or they have found a new way to present information. They are caught up in a cross-firing, cross-wiring fusion of ideas and displays of creativity.

They also learn about body language, and facial expressions. How you hold your body and how your face looks when you feel a variety of emotions from joy, pride and love to sorrow, guilt and hate. They also learn how to manage their anxiety before a presentation, how to shift their own mental states in order to portray the message of their characters. They learn to hold rational discussions, full of facts and free from irrational feelings.

Once located in a team, they have a definite objective to meet, a goal in sight. Even the most timid student can contribute to the process. Personal responsibilities are then developed, project by project, until there is a willingness to face psychological and social danger and sacrifice personal ease for the noble purposes of the group.

Their sense of themselves is expanding, they're aware of the growth happening inside of their minds. With each succeeding experience the actual neural change in their brains and nervous systems are unfurling, equipping them not only with coping mechanisms for their life, but with the strength and dignity to meet adversity with tranquility and firmness. Magnanimity in motion.

In experiencing this process, it is difficult to stay in the deep tracks of unquestioned opinions and victim-like mentalities. It is almost impossible to display the characteristics of what is now known as a "snowflake."

Snowflakes

In Chuck Palahniuk's 1996 film, *Fight Club*, the storyline centres around characters who turn to extreme fighting to alleviate discontent with their soul-crushing jobs in the corporate world and their un-rewarding materialistic lives. At one point the main ring-leader shouts through a megaphone to his followers: "You are not special. You are not a beautiful and unique snowflake. You are the same organic and decaying matter as everyone else."

The term "Snowflake" was born.

Snowflakes are seen to display the antithesis of magnanimous qualities. They can be timid, over-sensitive, lack courage, avoid taking risks and have no resilience to adversity. However, they can also be quick to take offense, intolerant to disagreement and can become angry and vocal in a group.

Actor George Takei (of Star Trek fame) tweeted: "The thing about 'snowflakes' is this: They are beautiful and unique, but in large numbers become an unstoppable avalanche that will bury you."

U.S. universities, mostly located in the Northeast and the West coast, are facing a challenging time. Many young people are now closing down free speech by the use of "no platforming," which is a demand to deny speakers, who clash with their views, platforms to speak at their universities.

The U.S. Social Psychologist Jonathan Haidt co-wrote a book with Greg Lukianoff, a U.S. attorney. The book is entitled, *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure*. It was written in a response to these challenging times in universities.

What has happened?

The website for the book explains:

Something has been going wrong on many college campuses in the last few years. Speakers are shouted down. Students and Professors say they are walking on eggshells and are afraid to speak honestly. Rates of anxiety, depression, and suicide are rising. How did this happen?

The authors say these challenges originate in ideas, which are

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becoming more prevalent in American education and childhood as a whole and that these ideas can be boiled down to three statements or “The Three Great Untruths:”

1. What doesn't kill you makes you weaker.
2. Always trust your feelings.
3. Life is a battle between good people and evil people.

In the book, and in interviews Haidt offers the opposite perspective:

1. Friedrich Nietzsche: “What doesn't kill me makes me stronger.
2. John Milton: “The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.”
3. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: “The line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.”

Haidt says if young people believe these untruths “we can pretty much guarantee that they will have lives of failure and misery and lack of effectiveness.”

Why has this happened?

The author's put their theories of why the season of the snowflake has come about:

1. *Political polarization and purification.* Universities used to lean left but now they're so far left and there are now hardly any conservative teachers. No diversity, no opposing views means no student exposure to different viewpoints.
2. *Rising anxiety and depression.* “Z-Gen” or “iGen” are immersed in social media.
3. *Paranoid Parenting Practices.* People began raising children differently in the 80's and 90's. Now a culture of “safetyism.”
4. *Loss of free play and risk taking.* A different attitude towards play and what is dangerous.
5. *The growth of bureaucracy at universities* – “Student as consumer” mind-set.
6. Increasing passion for social justice – Subversion, outrage and social justice warriors.

What can be done?

The author's suggestions include:

Parents can:

- Practice free-range parenting.
- Provide more unsupervised time.
- Cultivate independence through more experiences.
- Limit device time.

Schools and universities can:

- Teach Cognitive Behaviourial Therapy (CBT) to all incoming students.
- Oppose the “Great Untruths.”
- Entwine their identities with freedom of inquiry.
- Encourage gap years and admit students who can show evidence of their ability to live independently.
- Orient and educate for productive disagreement.

These are all valuable suggestions. However, with regard to providing your child with freedom, I don't think we will ever return to the days of letting our young children roam the streets from an early age. There are reasons for this:

- We are more protective, more aware of the real or imagined risks.
- Technology offers a way to socialise with friends in various locations through gaming.
- Nobody else is doing it. There used to be kids all over the streets and in parks, but they were in a group where there was safety in numbers.
- Adults used to look out for young people. There would be neighbours and shop keepers who knew your parents, they would tell you off in a heartbeat if you were misbehaving or causing harm to your own, or someone else's safety.
- Parents have different value systems now. At one time, most parents agreed on what was acceptable behaviour and what was not. This cannot be counted upon now.

Perhaps in looking at letting children and young people take risks, we can break it down into two different types:

Physical risks

Calculated risks are part of childhood: climbing trees, swimming in oceans, sports, long hikes, rough play between young children.

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Obviously dangerous and life-threatening activities should be avoided. Also information about personal safety, not going anywhere with strangers etc., should be provided.

Mental risks

Young people should feel comfortable putting their opinions forward. They should be open to other people challenging those opinions. They should be able to deal with conflict in a rational and mature way. “Freedom of inquiry” and “productive disagreement” should definitely be a part of a young person’s development.

In a presentation given by Haidt to “Think Forum,” an audience member asks Haidt to respond to a criticism he had received about the book. Somebody had put forward that the author’s recommendations for combatting coddling were too weak. That we are not going to get back to a thriving healthy social order until people have a sense of being bound into something which gives them a sense of meaning and belonging. That thing should not be therapeutic, but something like religion or patriotism. Haidt replied that it was a fair critique and is something he is still thinking about.

I think Haidt and Lukianoff’s book is a gigantic step towards understanding the reality of life in many higher educational establishments. It has opened up a conversation about one of the most important challenges of our time: how to educate the young, so humanity improves and evolves.

However, I also agree with their critic, to come up with a solution, the challenge needs a cohesive plan. If you look at religion for example, the glue which held people together centres around a few traditions. One being the frequency of the bonding experiences, people meet at least once a week. Another is the repetitive stories of good and evil, love and hate which leads to a request to self-reflect on your own behaviour and how you treat others during the coming week.

How to bring about this sense of bonding in a non-religious way within schools might be a murky proposition to most, but to me it is clear, it is through TPP. These projects do bond the young people and their facilitators or coaches together. There is frequent social

interaction, at least three times per week. There is ongoing analysis of the behaviours of others, whilst also reflecting on your own thinking.

In response to his findings, Haidt set up the Heterodox Academy focusing on viewpoint diversity, which is described on the website as:

The state of a community or group in which members approach questions or problems from multiple perspectives. When a community is marked by intellectual humility, empathy, trust and curiosity, viewpoint diversity gives rise to engaged and civil debate, constructive disagreement and shared progress towards the truth.

They have various tools to help reach this goal:

- *Open Mind* is an interactive platform designed to depolarize communities and foster mutual understanding across differences.
- *Campus Expression Survey* is a self-report tool for students.
- *Guide to Colleges* is a rating system for America's top 200 universities, according to the degree of viewpoint diversity you can expect to find on campus.

Haidt says the coddling culture is not so evident on the continent, it is predominantly an “Anglosphere” problem within the U.S., Canada and the U.K.

The term “Snowflake” took hold in the U.K. following a book by Clair Fox, director of Institute of Ideas. The book is entitled, *I Find That Offensive*. Fox writes about her experiences from visiting two secondary schools:

Teenagers who believe that words really hurt and that contradictory opinions to their own beliefs were the cause of real harm. And yet, despite the pupils' apparent hypersensitivity, their emotional suffering was combined with an almost belligerent sense of entitlement that their feelings should take precedence.

Another author, Mick Hume, lays out his views of the threats to free-thinking, free-speech and free-expression in his book, *Trigger Warning: Is the Fear of Being Offensive Killing Free Speech?*

In an interview Hume says:

...it's like when we used to have the old maps of a world that was slightly uncharted and in the unknown corners they put *'here be dragons do not sail off the edge of the known world, do not expose yourself to something dangerous beyond this point.'* That's what trigger warnings do. It's saying there might be something in this this book or this video that you find objectionable, offensive and harmful and therefore you might think about not exposing yourself to it - and that is a very dangerous starting point at a university more than anywhere else.

Many “Snowflakes” wear a mesh of steel beneath their fluffy and fragile exterior. They can act in an entitled and self-focused manner if they feel misunderstood. The term “micro-aggression” is now in use, and the Snowflake will point to how a comment has injured them. The impact on them is the important factor, regardless of the intent, which could be innocent.

Anywhere people gather, either a school, a university or a family, conflict and misinterpretations will occur. Our language is restrictive, our maps look different.

An Answer?

What softens the steel and fortifies the fragility within the snowflake? Not teachers, not parents, but peers. In the projects, peers restrict each other's snowflake sensibilities with their awareness of the two systems of thinking.

Daniel Kahneman, Nobel Laureate in Economics wrote, *Thinking Fast And Slow*. The book looks at how errors and misunderstandings in language occurs. Kahneman tells us we have a two-system way of thinking:

Thinking Fast - System 1

Emotional, intuitive, automatic and judgemental. Forms your first impressions and seeks a coherent storyline so often jumps to conclusions.

Thinking Slow - System 2

Conscious, logical, rational and slow. It is called upon for unexpected problems, which it then analyses and looks to solve.

Although we all consider ourselves to be rational thinkers, we actually spend most of our time in System 1 mode. The objective of the teammates during the projects is to ensure there is no jumping to conclusions, being prejudicial, or ignoring evidence. They, as well as the opposition are the agitators who challenge your individual thinking as well as ensuring the team are not falling into groupthink, but instead practice critical thinking utilising the story stages.

We need to sort out the snowflakes, for their own good. We should be aiming to raise and educate “anti-fragile hailstones.” Thunderstorms lift hailstones, through strong up-drafts, to the top of clouds. When they collide with super-cooled water they develop extra layers and grow stronger. An increasing intensity of the updraft, causes the hailstones to become larger and stronger. They are anti-fragile.

Narcissism

A strong sense of self is a vital requirement for a life well-lived. Self-efficacy is what we all want for our young people, however when that moves from feeling worthy and capable to feeling superior, it can lead to narcissistic tendencies.

In their book, *The Narcissism Epidemic*, authors Jean Twenge and Keith Campbell write about parents and how many have forgotten a simple rule, “Kids should not always get what they want.” And, that higher narcissism of college students is the result of parents who are indulgent.

The authors also tell us:

Education reform is also necessary to combat the narcissism epidemic. In schools, the emphasis on self-esteem has to go. No more “I am special” songs; no more “everyone is a winner.” Beyond learning itself, the focus should be on developing a love for learning, a sense of self-efficacy (if I

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work hard I can master a topic), the ability to get along with others, and a high level of self-discipline and emotional resilience.

Extreme Snowflake syndrome, if left unchecked, can produce a person who relishes their victim role, who looks to others for attention and to help them to fight against perceived aggressors. They develop an inflated sense of their own importance, they are always at odds with other people, displaying a lack of understanding and empathy.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) is published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA). It offers a standard criteria for the classification of mental disorders.

The DSM lists the “Narcissistic Personality Disorder” traits. The following are indicators of NPD:

- Have an exaggerated sense of self-importance.
- Have a sense of entitlement and require constant, excessive admiration.
- Expect to be recognized as superior even without achievements that warrant it.
- Exaggerate achievements and talents.
- Preoccupied with fantasies about success, power, brilliance, beauty or the perfect mate.
- Believe they are superior and can only associate with equally special people.
- Monopolize conversations and belittle or look down on people they perceive as inferior.
- Expect special favors and unquestioning compliance.
- Take advantage of others to get what they want.
- Have an inability or unwillingness to recognize the needs and feelings of others.
- Be envious of others and believe others envy them.
- Behave in an arrogant or haughty manner, coming across as conceited, boastful and pretentious.

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- Insist on having the best of everything.

There are other traits, which various psychologists and therapists add to the DSM list:

- Engaging in bragging about achievements, claiming to be an expert.
- Not liking people who don't admire them and displaying flattery and attention to those who do.
- Showing no obvious signs of remorse or gratitude.
- Body language is arrogant and haughty.

The causes for NPD are not fully understood but they are thought to be linked to one of the following:

- **Environment:** It is thought that too much praise, or too much criticism can cause an imbalance in a child's sense of self.
- **Genetics:** Parents, or grandparents who display signs of narcissism can pass along those imbalances.
- **Neurobiology:** The way the brain processes the outside world and the connection to behaviour.

Obviously, young children are primarily focused on their own needs. Awareness of the needs of others only builds as they become older. The following traits show a child is losing their 'centre of the world' attitude. When they:

- Stay curious, realising they don't have all the answers.
- Are honest and speak their minds in an authentic and caring way.
- Show gratitude and appreciation.
- Act in a responsible way.
- Ask for help, and don't mind if they get things wrong.
- Don't compare themselves with everyone else and are happy to improve on their past performance.
- Don't always seek the approval of others and don't need to be in the spotlight.
- Display signs of empathy for others, and treat them with respect.

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- Don't expect special treatment.
- Regulate their emotions and behaviour.
- Are able to handle a certain level of stress, and easily adapt to small changes.
- Are not striving for absolute perfection all of the time.
- Feel secure enough to respond well to constructive criticism, open to feedback
- Show humility.

Humility

Humility is one quality that people feel conflicted about. However, humility is seen as a valuable asset in the business world. A Forbes article from author and former Navy SEAL Jeff Boss tells us:

Humble people can receive a bad rap. Humility is frequently associated with being too passive, submissive or insecure, but this couldn't be any further from the truth.

Instead, humble people are quite the opposite - confident and competent.

Humble people are still self-efficacious; they just don't feel the impetus to boast about themselves but instead, let their actions speak for their ideals. To be humble is not to think less of oneself, but to think of oneself less.

Rick Pitino, the former American basketball coach, says this about humility:

Humility is the true key to success. Successful people lose their way at times. They often embrace and overindulge from the fruits of success. Humility halts this arrogance and self-indulging trap. Humble people share the credit and wealth, remaining focused and hungry to continue the journey of success.

Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn was a Russian writer, historian and former inmate of the Gulag. The Acton Institute had this to say about him: "Solzhenitsyn took a sledgehammer to the crumbling foundations of the Soviet system and, more than any other single person, was responsible for its collapse."

Solzhenitsyn had this to say:

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It's a universal law - intolerance is the first sign of an inadequate education. An ill-educated person behaves with arrogant impatience, whereas truly profound education breeds humility.

Surely, a profound education should be the right of every young person?

Part II Connecting To Themselves

CHAPTER 1 Reconnection

For students to connect to themselves, they need to use their experiences from their external world to develop an internal understanding of how they respond to others. This form of self-analysis causes the maturation process to develop. However, in order to use the external world for this development, they have to feel part of the world. This is often the challenge; children and young people who feel wounded by the world will retreat.

This part of the book is an attempt to examine how they can be pulled back from their place of retreat. It contains multiple components:

- Governmental programmes and full-time support from those around them.
- Managing social media, the effects of shame and the power of vulnerability.
- Understanding ‘Us’ versus ‘Them,’ and Perspective-Taking.
- Developing a Voice of Reason. A practice of developing their pre-frontal Cortex through play, perspectives and facing obstacles.
- Tools to bring balance to both brain hemispheres through exposure to the arts.
- Alternative wellbeing techniques.

In Johann Hari’s book, he writes about the Bromley-by-Bow Centre in East London. The consultants are focused on the emotional health of their patients and have different programmes for depression, loneliness or anxiety. One of the prescription programmes is to create a garden. This includes bringing together a group of people to create something practical, to nurture something and see its growth. It is really healing for the group, however, it is also difficult to achieve alone.

One participant, Lisa, tells Hari:

If you're depressed, you can't just go out and find a bit of garden and get stuck in it and you'll feel better. It has to be managed and supported...someone has to help you do it.

Lisa also tells Hari that she was desperate to reconnect with people and when she did through the gardening programme she "stopped obsessing about me so much, I had other people to worry about." Reconnection to other people and to nature helped Lisa recover.

This sort of practical and meaningful work is something which can and should be implemented within schools. Young people often don't want to engage in conversation and, for many, the traditional talking therapies have no impact.

Hari tells us:

Normally, depressed or anxious people-when they are offered treatment beyond drugs- are put in a position where they have to talk about how they feel, but often that's the last thing they want to do. Their feelings are unbearable.

Charles Eisenstein is an author, his books include, *Sacred Economics and The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know Is Possible*. I attended an inspirational talk he gave at The Findhorn Eco Village on the West Coast of Scotland. He has important messages for human evolution.

In an interview, Eisenstein says that mental health is wholeness, and wholeness is to be found in the quality of relationships. The "multi-dimensional relationships" we used to enjoy are lacking in modern society. He advocates for changing conditions rather than maintaining conditions through medication and tells us:

We need alternative support structures that understand that society has got an illness and to adjust to that is to make you ill. In that viewpoint depression could be a symptom of health. It could be a symptom of the soul's rebellion. Depressions are kind of a withdrawal from life, so then non-participation is a good thing.

When asked about educating children, he advises avoiding sending them to "normal" schools. Or, if there is no option, then as a parent, to ensure that you don't become an ally of the school, attaching your child's self-esteem to their academic performance.

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Eisenstein's words remind me of something the Indian philosopher and writer Jiddu Krishnamurti wrote decades ago:

It is no measure of health to be well adjusted to a profoundly sick society.

To create a healthy society, particularly a school society, we have to look at the quality of the relationships children and young people have with each other. These relationships form how they think of themselves and connect to each other.

If connection is created with others, trust and safety follows. The biological alarm system won't be on high alert at all times.

Connecting to yourself is undeniably linked to connecting with your fellow humans.

The children and young people, who have withdrawn from life do seem to be caught up in a "soul's rebellion." They enter into a static liminal phase which implants a gap, waiting to encounter new information, a different way of seeing the world, which will reactivate them and help them move towards a new stage of mental health.

As professor Ray Land says: "Something has to be reconfigured, a once prevailing view has to be loosened or weakened in some way."

But this is difficult to do from within the liminal bubble. People around them have to find a way to pull them across the threshold and back into life.

And, who are those people who will support and ensure good mental health for our young?

What is the current situation for a child or a young person facing these challenges?

To learn more about the plans at a governmental level, in the next chapter, we'll look at the recent government initiated "Green Paper."

CHAPTER 2

Mental Health Support

Government Green Paper

A joint 'Green Paper' was published in December 2017 by the Department of Health and the Department for Education. The key proposals suggested:

- Designated Senior Leads for Mental Health - A designated mental health person in each school.
- Mental Health Support Teams – Linking to schools and colleges, trialled in up to a quarter of the country by 2022/23.
- Waiting Time Standards – a four week waiting time for CAMHS to be in place by 2022/23 in 'trailblazer' areas throughout the country.

There was criticism of the paper:

A joint report by the health and social care and education select committees criticised the proposals for not being swift enough, being only available in some areas and for not taking into account financial pressures facing schools and health organisations.

The green paper was also criticised by MPs for failing to take into account fragmentation across education, as a result of the establishment of academies and free schools, and for a lack of focus on early intervention.

MPs were particularly critical of plans to set up "trailblazer" areas to test the proposals, which will only reach between a fifth and a quarter of areas by 2022/23.

They also said schools and colleges would struggle to appoint designated mental health leads due to pressures on the teaching workforce.

Statements from the report include:

The proposals put significant pressure on the teaching workforce without guaranteeing sufficient resources.

There is also little or no attention to prevention or early intervention. The suggested speed of delivery will leave hundreds of thousands of children with no improvements in

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provision for several years and with possibly worsened provision if staff leave to join trailblazer areas elsewhere.

Witnesses raised concerns that the government was 'tinkering' rather than using the opportunity to 'truly transform' the system.

MPs also said the Green Paper fails to specify how groups of vulnerable children, including those in care and in contact with the criminal justice system, will be better supported:

We regard the Green Paper's indication that provision 'might extend' to areas such as young offender institutions and secure children's homes as wholly insufficient in the face of considerable need.

Health and social care committee chair Dr Sarah Wollaston said:

We want to see more evidence that government will join up services in a way which places children and young people at their heart and that improves services to all children rather than a minority.

Robert Halfon, education select committee chair added:

The government must back up its warm words by taking urgent action to address the mental health issues which children and young people face today.

Children's commissioner for England Anne Longfield said the report represents a "stark warning about the scale of the crisis in children's mental health services." She also added:

The committee is right to say the Green Paper is not ambitious enough. It is time for the government to set itself an ambitious deadline, with staging posts along the way, to deliver a fully joined-up system that closes the gap between spending on adult and children's mental health services, introduces proper monitoring of need and access, and invests more in early intervention so that problems are dealt with before they become critical.

The Children's Society's Chief Executive Matthew Reed said MPs are right to highlight a lack of specific action to support the mental health needs of specific vulnerable groups, such as those affected by sexual abuse and domestic violence. Reed also said:

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We would urge ministers to ensure that at least one of the proposed trailblazer schemes should be focused on the most vulnerable children.

From the charity Young Minds:

We think that far more needs to be done.

The Government's proposals will only be rolled out to, at most, a quarter of the country in the next five years, which will be of little consolation to the thousands of young people and parents who are struggling to access support in other areas of the country.

They added:

We think the Government needs to take urgent action to:

- Invest in additional resources to support young people, and parents, to self-manage emotional distress and mental health conditions;
- Make childhood adversity and trauma a public health priority;
- Improve crisis care support for children and young people who are experiencing a mental health crisis;
- Introduce increased and long-term funding for CAMHS, so that all children and young people can get the help and support that they need.

Other organisations joined in with their concerns. This from the British Psychological Society:

Because the green paper does not focus on prevention and the wider social and political determinants of mental health, it represents a missed opportunity.

From The British Association for Counseling and Psychotherapy:

In our response, we commended the Government for their renewed focus on children and young people's mental health but raised many concerns with the key policy proposals. Our main comments were:

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- We feel that the proposals and the timescales for rolling out the proposals across the country lack ambition.
- We are disappointed that the green paper failed to recognise the important role counselling and counsellors already play in 61% of schools and colleges throughout England.
- We are broadly supportive of the idea behind Designated Senior Leads for Mental Health, but concerned that some of their proposed responsibilities are not appropriate for non-clinical staff.
- We are concerned by the lack of detail for how Mental Health Support Teams will be staffed, what training staff will have and how they will work with existing services.
- Despite assurances to the contrary, we're concerned that the new capacity will end up replacing existing services rather than acting as genuine extra capacity.

I attended a conference in July of last year, alongside around 400 teachers and mental health workers. The title of the conference was: 'Children and Young People's Mental Health: Providing Effective Support.'

The overview notes for the conference stated:

The NSPCC recently found that in the last two years over 100,000 children, referred to child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), were rejected for treatment. That's 150 children a day. Mental health issues are hitting the headlines more frequently than ever before, with children and young people being particularly vulnerable. Half of all mental health problems have been established by the age of 14, rising to 75% by age 24. While the national government has started implementing its Five-Year Forward View for Mental Health using £1.4 billion, with particular priority for children and young people, reports are not yet showing positive results.

A presenter at the conference was a young woman, Claire Eastham, who has published a book entitled *We're All Mad Here*. She told the audience about how her mental health problems had started when she was at secondary school. The classroom experience was stressful, she dreaded being called on by teachers. She was socially isolated,

eating lunch alone in the school cafeteria.

After Claire's presentation two women came onto the stage. One was a representative from the Department for Health and the other was a representative from the Department for Education. Their bio in the flyer said they had both been instrumental in putting together the joint Government Green Paper. Their presentation was a basic reiteration of the recommendations outlined in the paper.

After they had finished speaking, Claire Eastham rejoined them on stage and it was time for the audience to put forward questions to all three presenters. I raised my hand and asked Claire Eastham did she think that the proposals of the Green paper would have helped her with the anxiety and depression she faced during her school years. She stumbled over a few words, looked awkward, and then passed the question along to the government representatives. They asked me to elaborate. I said that the proposals seemed to offer solutions for after the fact. Where was the intervention plan? The plan which should save children and young people from facing mental illness in the first place.

Their answer was that they hadn't looked into it that deeply. You could feel the frustration emanating from the audience, people shook their heads and murmured their disbelief. It was a shockingly inadequate response to one of the most challenging and serious crises of our times.

At the coffee break, I approached Clair and apologised for putting her on the spot, she told me not to worry, that she understood what I was trying to do.

I then talked to some of the teachers and health care workers; everyone I talked to was totally unimpressed with the Green paper. Their main concerns were simply mathematical - how is one person going to oversee the mental health of up to 1000 young people? Who is going to take on that responsibility?

I don't know what type of therapist the government intends to put into schools. Parents from both our primary and secondary schools would tell me they took their children to therapists who stated that the first port of call they advised, was to medicate the teenager. The first port of call? Shouldn't medication, due to the lack of knowledge about the long-term effects on the brain, be the last port of call?

There are many other approaches to help children and young people, which can be implemented within schools.

From my experience, many young people who are suffering trauma-like effects are resistant to sitting down to a weekly meeting with a psychotherapist and share their every thought.

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)

CBT is probably the most widely used form of psychotherapy, which aims to help manage anxiety disorders by changing thinking patterns and successive behaviour. It attempts to modify and challenge emotions which are dysfunctional, including questions such as:

- What is the likelihood of this happening?
- Think of the worst case, best case and most likely scenario, how would you cope with each one?
- Have many times has this prediction come true?

This is obviously a very simplistic explanation of CBT and while it works well for some people, it is not a cure-all. For the teenagers at our school who were attending CBT therapy, they felt that it only had minimal impact, they might feel a bit better after the session, but the effects didn't last. For other students, they wouldn't entertain the idea of a talking therapy. As Johann Hari says, sometimes people can't talk about their feelings, they are too unbearable.

However, I have heard of other young people for whom CBT therapy works well. In these cases, the therapist took a more practical approach and did not push medication. I do believe it depends on the individual therapist as to how successful CBT is in helping young people.

To talk about “what you can hardly bear” is not contained within the approach of NLP, which has the view that detailed discussion of upsetting issues is likely to reinforce those thoughts and feelings, carving a deeper groove within the neuronal structure. NLP focuses on re-wiring those thoughts and feelings which can be approached in two ways, the deeply engrained thought patterns you have in your head and the feelings they produce in the body.

There is a lot of available information relating to the mind/body connection, which is really interesting, but to go off on that tangent, would've added another thirty pages to this book. I have learned a lot from physician Gabor Maté, who wrote *When The Body Says No*. And also from psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk who wrote *The body keeps the score*.

United Nations – Right To Health

To look at what is happening on a global level, in response to adolescent mental health, we can take a look at what representatives of the United Nations have to say.

Dainius Pūras is a Professor and the Head of the Centre for Child psychiatry and Social Paediatrics at Vilnius University; he is also the United Nations Special Rapporteur on ‘The Right to Health.’

A 2016 article from the UN website says: “Right to health in adolescence: the costs of failing are too high” – UN expert warns.

The article goes on to quote Professor Pūras:

The foundations laid down during adolescence have profound implications for the social, economic and political development of society as a whole. Hence, the costs of failing adolescents are simply too high.

This is particularly important when it comes to providing mental health services for adolescents,” he said. “Psychosocial interventions should be provided at the community level in a manner that is ethical and consistent with adolescents’ rights, and on the basis of available evidence, with a view to avoid institutionalization and the excessive use of psychotropic medications.”

Professor Pūras also urges States to respect an adolescent’s “evolving capacities” and to recognise them as “rights holders.” He also calls for the rights of the young person to participate in matters which affect their health and wellbeing, even as far as designing, delivering

and evaluating the services which operate to assist them in their rights to health.

The following year, Professor Pūras called for a “revolution in mental health care.” He said that only a revolution would end the neglect, abuse and violence. He talked about the neglect in mental health systems around the world, and how this violates the basic rights of all people. He also wants to move away from “traditional practices and thinking.” He called for an awareness of the “dominance of the biomedical model,” the “biased” use of evidence which is “contaminating knowledge about mental health,” and the “overdependence on medication.”

Professor Pūras wants new ways of thinking about mental health and asks the psychiatric profession to instigate action. He says: “It is crucial now to assess the root causes of failure and to chart a way forward.”

A recent Guardian article reported on a study which stated that the overuse of social media is affecting the mental health of girls much more than boys. Professor Yvonne Kelly said this about the findings: “Girls, it seems, are struggling with these aspects of their lives more than boys, in some cases considerably so.”

An Answer?

My first reaction when faced with children and young people who were obviously struggling with their mental health, was to apply the critical thinking Story Stages to my own thinking:

Assumption Story. What initial stories was I telling myself about this young person’s experience? What judgments was I making?

Deconstruction Story. What was apparent after applying First Principles thinking? What did I find when I deconstructed down to the truth? What did I know for sure?

Reconstruction Story. Did any of my initial assumptions prove to be accurate, or were personal biases in place? Build a new story from first, second and third perspectives – starting from the perspective of the child or young person.

Once this process had been completed, I could then design a plan, specific for that student. It could involve their family, other teachers, peers. The plan included:

- Allow students to control their school experience through subject choice.
- Removing undue pressure by offering a non-exam curriculum (Part III, Chapter 5).
- Right brain active meditation through immersive art programmes (Part II, Chapter 6)
- Elimination of isolation and loneliness through TPP (Part I, Chapter 7).
- Building self efficacy by designing a compelling future with the Life Design Programme (Part III, Chapter 5).
- Rational thinking through critical thinking provision (Part I, Chapter 9)
- Developing the maturation process through projects and TPP (Part I, Chapter 6).
- Varied approaches towards wellbeing through alternative techniques (below).

Exploring Alternative Wellbeing Techniques

There are not enough therapists in this country, and young people are waiting many weeks, even months for an appointment.

However, there could be a range of wellbeing provisions, alternative therapies which could be explored.

Cold Water Therapy

Some of the students in the school, were interested in “The Iceman,” the name given to Wim Hoff, a Dutch extreme athlete who climbs snowy mountains in bare feet and shorts. His programme is based on cold therapy and a special breathing technique. On his website Hoff says:

Because we wear clothes and artificially control the temperatures at home and at work, we've greatly reduced the natural stimulation of our bodies, atrophying the age-old mechanisms related to our survival and basic function. Because these deeper physiological layers are no longer

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triggered, our bodies are no longer in touch with this inner power.

Cold water therapy, or hydrotherapy, dates back to ancient Egypt and was re-introduced in the 18th century with a book entitled *On The Healing Virtues of Cold Water*. The therapy works by causing the surface vessels on the skin to constrict, which then sends blood to the body's core to conserve heat. It also brings a fresh blood supply and the accompanying oxygen and nutrients to the organs and the brain.

A *Psychology Today* article reports on research into the decrease in stress hormones and a relaxation of the “fight or flight” response, which are the result of hydrotherapy. The article goes on to reveal a study which compares the results of hydrotherapy with a SSRI medication:

The anxiety scores showed an improvement in both groups, with a clearly superior result of the water therapy compared to the effect of the drug. Remission and sustained response rates were also significantly higher in the hydrotherapy group. Also, the water therapy was found to be safe and without side effects as well. (Dubois et al., 2010).

The simplest form of hydrotherapy is to take cold showers, reducing the temperature of the shower to where you can tolerate it, just for a few seconds at first until the body acclimatizes.

We learned all about the breathing technique and tried it in the classroom, it was really effective for relaxation. We also tried the cold water therapy by going swimming in a nearby freezing Scottish river. After the initial shock of the water, the students enjoyed being in the lake and swam around for twenty minutes or so. Afterwards they reported feelings of wellbeing which lasted for a few days.

I was intrigued and found a course Wim Hoff was leading in London. I enrolled on the course and was trained in the breathing

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technique and took part in the cold water therapy. large plastic pools that were set up in the grounds of the Oval cricket ground and filled with water and tons of ice. In groups of six you would step into the pool and sit down, a person stood next to the pool with a stopwatch, I think it was two minutes before you were told you could get out. The trepidation before getting into the pool overtook your nervous system as some sort of unconscious survival response wanted you to turn and run. The process of staying in the line, expressing your doubts to the people around you and then using the group energy to get in the pool and sit in the coldest water you could imagine, resulted in a heightened sense of wellbeing.

Imagery and Breathing Techniques

In both the primary and secondary school I would work with students, at the request of their parents, and with the agreement of the student. Sometimes, I worked with imagery and breathing techniques.

One ten year old girl in the primary school came in to us having suffered a lot of bullying from her previous school, she had persistent stomach aches and her mum had taken her to many doctors with little success. I asked her to focus in on where the pain was in her stomach and asked her to give it an image, she said it felt like a hard stone. I then asked her to introduce something which would remove the stone. Fairies with little hammers turned up and removed small pieces of the stone bit by bit. At the end of the session her stomach pains had gone.

I would tell the parents how they could help their children. One six-year old was having bad dreams about a clown, I suggested to his mum that she have him think of a superhero figure who would help him to see the clown off. The boy imagined him and Superman putting the clown into a rocket and then blasting the rocket into outer space. The clown was never to be seen again and his mum was happy it had worked so well.

Secondary students also respond well to imagery work. It was empowering for them to know that they had tools to change how they felt, that they could control negative effects both physically and psychologically.

We should be exploring various forms of therapy in order to

maintain good mental health for young people. Immersive Arts classes, cold-water therapy, sound therapy, there could be on-going trials to determine the effectiveness of each one.

Cyber Shaming

An element of adolescent life which is appearing frequently now in the news is how much the use of social media affects mental health. Cyberbullying is a new level of bullying, with people able to stay anonymous and free to abuse whomever they want, sometimes with tragic consequences. Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat are the platforms mostly used to bully online. Information from “Ditch the Label” show the following information from people who’d received online attacks:

- 68% - Had been sent a nasty private message:
 - 41% - Had rumours about them posted online:
 - 39% - Had a nasty comment posted on their profile:
 - 34% - Had a nasty comment posted on their photo:
 - 27% - Had photos/videos of them that they didn’t like:
 - 24% - Had their private information shared:
 - 23% - Had been bullied in an online game:
 - 18% - Had somebody impersonate them online:
 - 18% - Had their profile wrongly reported:
- Reprinted with permission from Ditch the Label (<https://www.ditchthelabel.org>)

Dr. Marion Underwood and Dr. Samuel Ehrenreich co-authored an article for *American Psychologist*, putting forward the idea that cyberbullying and cyber-aggression are often misunderstood and the real risks can have long-term implications on mental health, even if only one incident occurs. They say:

The impact of even a single episode is potentially extremely serious because the behavior is immediately viewed by hundreds of friends and followers and is preserved forever in digital form.

The U.S. National Institutes of Health has been funding Dr. Underwood's longitudinal study and research in this area since 1995. The study looks at the use of digital communication and how there is little distinction in the importance between online and offline relationships. The online world can be more important because of its

high visibility, where the popularity stakes are high.

Jonathan Haidt has created a “work-in-progress” Google doc and has invited a conversation about the role of social media in mental health. There are conflicting reports, published in January 2019, one says that there is little or no association between social media use and harmful mental outcomes, the other states that there is a substantial link. Haidt says:

This Google doc is a working document that contains the citations and abstracts of some of the published articles we have found that shed light on a question that is currently being debated in the USA and UK: Does social media use contribute to the recent rise of adolescent mood disorders (depression and anxiety) and related behaviors (especially self-harm and suicide)?

Both Haidt and contributor Jean Twenge declare that they are biased. They both believe there is a link.

In interviews, Haidt says that the use of technology is different for boys and girls. Boys mainly play video games whereas girls can become unhealthily addicted to social media.

Social media is often used to shame others. Shaming is a direct way to destroy a person’s psyche. Carl Jung, the Swiss founder of analytical psychology, called shame a “soul-eating emotion.” Jungian analysts call shame “The Swamplands of the Soul.”

It causes the person shamed to question their own sanity: is this verbal attacker telling the truth? It allows a split to occur in how people see themselves.

Because the young person has not yet had the time to lock into their own sense of self, it leaves them feeling untethered and destabilised.

Brené Brown is an American research professor in The Graduate College of Social Work at the University of Houston. She has based her career on studying courage, empathy, shame and vulnerability. In her book, *Daring Greatly* she writes:

Shame breeds fear. It crushes our tolerance for vulnerability,

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thereby killing engagement, innovation, creativity, productivity and trust. Blaming, gossiping, favoritism, name-calling and harassment are all behaviour cues that shame has permeated a culture. I'm confident that shame exists in schools because 85 percent of the men and women we interviewed for the shame research could recall a school incident from their childhood that was so shaming, it changed how they thought of themselves as learners.

In a Ted Talk, "Listening To Shame" Brown tells us shame drives two messages, "never good enough" and "who do you think you are?"

Guilt, Brown tells us is different from shame. Guilt feels like "I made a mistake" whilst shame feels like "I am a mistake."

She also says that shame is an epidemic in our culture. It is highly correlated to: addiction, depression, violence, aggression, suicide, eating disorders and bullying.

Shame affects males and females differently. For women it is complex and varied, it hits when they don't feel like they have all of the plates spinning perfectly in the air. For men it is simple, shame hits when they feel weak, especially when blame comes from the women in their lives. And the antidote to shame? Brown tells us it is empathy.

Vulnerability

Another Ted talk by Brown is entitled "The Power Of Vulnerability," which has received almost forty million views. In the presentation, she talks about being struck by her findings about vulnerability. She tries to come to terms with the fact that vulnerability is the core of shame and fear, and worthiness, however it is also "the birthplace of joy, of creativity, of belonging, of love."

Brown calls those who practice vulnerability "the wholehearted." They are those who live from a deep sense of worthiness.

Social shaming, especially when it occurs online for the world to see, shuts down a young person, causing them to lose trust in those around them. This also includes dropping any displays of vulnerability, which kills the joy, creativity, belonging, and love Dr. Brown speaks about.

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In Latin, the word vulnerable comes from “vulnerare” which means to wound, injure or maim. So to make ourselves vulnerable leaves us open and exposed to being attacked physically or psychologically. Why would we put ourselves forward for this? It seems we have to initiate a state of vulnerability to elicit the same from another, to start the ball rolling towards joy and belonging.

In Daniel Coyle’s book, *The Culture Code – The Secrets Of Highly Successful Groups*, he writes about the importance of the vulnerability loop. It is a “shared exchange of openness...the most basic building block of cooperation and trust.” The steps are as follows:

1. Person A sends a signal of vulnerability.
2. Person B detects this signal
3. Person B responds by signaling their own vulnerability.
4. Person A detects this signal.
5. A norm is established; closeness and trust increase.

Coyle tells us it seems intuitive that we first build trust and then take a chance on being vulnerable. However, according to science, the opposite is true, vulnerability comes *before* trust.

Being vulnerable is often seen as a show of weakness, but it’s not, it’s a show of courage. Being vulnerable is being open to change, it requires a shift in perspective. It is a move from self-protection and wariness of other people’s responses, to being courageous and being willing to be wrong, and accept the chance that you might fail.

An Answer?

Parents would talk to me about their child’s phone use at home. When they asked about my approach towards my own children, they were often surprised at how strongly I felt about the over-use of technology. My two sons did not have phones until they were fifteen. Then they were not allowed to have passwords, which would block out anyone from looking at their phones. They had to put the phones down, in the living room at 8pm and not pick them up again until the following morning. If I felt like they were overusing the phones, they would lose them for a few days. It was not easy and caused tension, but I was determined to keep control of the situation.

At school, the situation was also difficult, students would spend break times in the classrooms hunched over their phones. I talked to them

about not over-using their phones, and tried to encourage them to go outside, have a walk, get some fresh air. So they would go outside, find a bench to sit on and hunch over their phones. We did have some parents who wanted a complete ban on phones in school, which I considered, but the students used their phones for research. It was a worrying problem, I knew social media was seeping into their everyday experience, however, I also knew that none of them were the victims of serious cyber-bulling. Although I did hear about a few incidents of messages sent from kids from other schools which were not entirely positive and definitely affected the mood and behaviour of the students in our school.

However, when we began TPP, suddenly we didn't have that problem anymore. The students were now not interested in their phones, other than using them for research if they couldn't find a laptop to use. The classroom was taken over by discussion and activity in readying themselves for their trials or symposiums or presentations. I would still tell them to go outside for a walk, for some fresh air and if you followed them you'd see them sitting on a bench excitedly talking about the project.

In comparison to TPP, social media seemed trivial, boring and immature. It lost the power to shame or influence, these students were too busy. Their time was taken up with studying human nature, and being part of a team who were in competition mode.

They were also learning about the interesting and often damaging psychology of "Us's and Them's," which we'll explore in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

Understanding “Us’s and Them’s”

Dr. Robert Sapolsky is an American Professor of neurological science at Stanford University. He is also an author, his books include *Behave – The Biology of Humans At Our Best and Worst*. One of the chapters is entitled ‘Us Versus Them.’ By relaying a few stories, Sapolsky shows us how an Us/Them mindset is overridden.

One story is about Irish soldiers in the U.S. Civil war, and how they inserted green sprigs into their hat while fighting. If they died on the battlefield or needed medical help, identification to their homeland would supersede the Them/Us scenario of fighting on opposite sides, and a fellow Irishman would help them regardless of flag affiliation.

Another story is from the First World War, called the Christmas Truce. Warring soldiers from different nations left the trenches, and ventured into No Man’s Land to shake hands with their enemies and celebrate the Christmas of 1914. They spent time together singing Christmas carols, playing football and swapping bottles of wine, bars of chocolate and tobacco. They saw that their enemies, those who’d so recently been labeled “Them” were as cold and as scared as they were. They saw that their enemies were also under the belief that they were doing the right thing. Their similarities outshone their differences, and they all became “Us.”

In Arthur Conan Doyle’s book, *The British Campaign in France and Flanders*, he wrote about the experience:

For a single day, the opposing forces mingled in friendly conversation and even in games. It was an amazing spectacle, and must arouse bitter thoughts concerning those high-ranking conspirators against the peace of the world, who in their mad ambition had hounded such men on to take each other by the throat rather than by the hand.

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There are many books written about the event. There is also an excellent movie, *Joyeux Noel*, and even a Sainsbury's advert based on the story which does a great job of portraying the emotion of the coming together of kindred spirits on a Christmas Eve, far from home.

These stories show how Us/Them mindsets disintegrated connection, but can also be reversed. However, it takes work to override our internal alarm system which is set up to ensure our survival. The alarm made sense when we were in tribal mode and needing to guard against another person who did not behave like us, nor looked like us. Modern times call for a disengagement of this alarm system and an awareness of how our biological impulses can cause our behaviour to cling onto the differences of others, to want to take them by the throat rather than by the hand.

An Us/Them attitude can apply to race class, gender, age or ideology. Many school communities have an Us/Them approach towards students and parents. The teachers are the "Us's" and the students and parents are the "Them's."

I once worked at one school where there were no drama classes within the curriculum. So I introduced a lunch-time drama session and opened it up to all of the senior students. We had a good turnout, boys as well as girls were interested in drama. I wrote the bones of a play for the class and told the students that they could make changes to their character, and even to the plot line if they received agreement from their peers. They really liked having some control over the play, and would come to me after every session requesting re-writes. Most of the other teachers were not happy that I had "gone rogue" and arranged a drama class without permission from the College of Teachers, who ran the school. The teachers were even more incredulous that I had handed over responsibility to the students for making changes to the characters lines and actions and also the storyline. They derided their ability and dismissed their imaginative power and waited for everything to fail. Shadenfreude at its finest. But the play didn't fail, the students showed they were able to create something wonderful, independent of the input from adults. We staged the play for parents and some of the more open-minded teachers, it was a big success. The students were buzzing with new-found confidence and stronger ties with their peers.

Because I had handed the reins over to the students, I was able to watch from the sidelines, and help out when needed. To the students, I had initially been a “Them,” but the experience shifted me into an “Us” category. However, from the teachers perspective, I was now on the side of the students and parents, and they moved me into the “Them” box, and things got tough for me. However, on the bright side, the shift to focusing on how much they disliked me, did help ease the conflict within their own group and gave them something to talk about.

When I delivered the Magic Me programme to the school in Essex, all those years ago, I was able to erase the Them/Us attitudes with almost all of the whole community. This was only viable because the head teacher was fully onboard. If you don't get buy-in from the top it can create chaos. Chaos is an opportunity to work things out and move towards order, but only if there is a solid plan in place. Sometimes, depending on the culture, this can be really difficult to do, some people are just not open to seeing situations from other people's point of view.

In Sapolsky's book, he tells us:

Racial Us/Them-ing can seem indelibly entrenched in kids because the parents most intent on preventing it are often lousy at it. As shown in studies, liberals are typically uncomfortable discussing race with their children. Instead they counter the lure of Us/Them-ing with abstractions that mean squat to kids—“It's wonderful that everyone be friends” or “Barney is purple, and we love Barney.

In the same way, Us/Them scenarios in schools between the students and the students and teachers, are never addressed. There might be messages of treating everyone equally, but to the students, this “means squat.” In fact, it can cause more harm and elicit what is known as the “ironic process theory” or the “post-suppressional rebound” or the “white bear theory.” These all refer to the psychological process of deliberately suppressing certain thoughts which has the opposite effect, either consciously or unconsciously.

Suppression Rebound

Sapolsky's book notes led me to a research paper entitled *Perspective-taking: Decreasing Stereotype Expression, Stereotype Accessibility, and In-group Favoritism*. The authors explored the role of perspective-taking in

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debiasing social thought. Although talking to students about the harm of stereotyping people or groups, seems like a good idea, findings show that this type of shallow instruction, which looks to suppress stereotypical thoughts, actually produces the rebound effect resulting in an increased negative bias. If this occurs at a non-conscious level, it can be dangerous and difficult to address.

Suppressing unwanted thoughts about a particular person or group with inauthentic attitudes will eventually play out in unconscious behaviour. If real and true attitudes are brought into the open, then a process of deconstruction and perspective-taking can occur.

A detailed research paper relating to this is entitled: *Out of Mind but Back in Sight: Stereotypes on The Rebound*.

Two videos of a reenactment of a University of Wales experiment shows an interesting interpretation of the study. A student is asked to look at a mug-shot style photo of an intimidating-looking man whose face is covered in tattoos. She is then asked to write a constructed view of the man's life, however, she is instructed to avoid using any stereotypical language.

The student says how she believes the man has a normal life with friends and family he supports. He plays with his kids. She also writes that he might have an education and probably is in college. She writes that he is friendly and willing to help out anyone.

Then a second student is given the same instructions minus the order to not include stereotypical language. She writes about how the man looks like a bad person, a violent drug-taker who has been in jail and that he should be kept in jail for the safety of others.

Individually, the students are then asked to go to a different room. They are told the man from the photo will be in the room. When they enter the room, he is not there, and they are told he has just gone to take a break and will be back soon. The man's belongings, a back pack and a jacket, are sitting on an end chair in a row of around ten chairs. The Student who has written nice things about the man sits almost as far away from his belongings as possible. The other student who has written what she really felt, sits almost as close to his belongs as possible.

The conclusion is, if you try to externally sugar-coat stereotypes, it will have a psychological subterranean "rebound." The first student needed to put as much distance as possible between her and the man, but would probably not have been able to articulate why this was so.

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The authors of the paper tell us that there are differences in perspective-taking, the first involves imagining how another person feels in a certain situation, and the second is putting yourself in the situation and imagining how that would affect you personally. Both views create empathy, but only taking on those feelings as your own produces internal emotions like distress. This is the view that will create the most empathy, even though it is based on an egoistic psychology, rather than an altruistic one.

They also tell us: “The probability of perspective-taking increases when one has endured the same slings and arrows as the target person.”

The paper also offers an interesting insight into how actors and observers have different experiences due to divergent perspectives. Actors, playing the part of a character, recognise the elements of the external situation which affect behaviour, whereas observers just look to the behavioural aspects to determine understanding.

The difference is in the use of the imagination!

The actors actually place themselves in the middle of the issues. Because of the emotional connection, they remember situational information alongside the perspective training.

The paper states:

An alternative strategy for social maneuvering involves the active consideration of alternative viewpoints, framings, hypotheses, and perspectives.

Perspective-taking is an effective reinforcement of contemporary admonitions to consider previously ignored or submerged perspectives as a routine part of social interchange and inquiry.

The paper lists statements from other researchers:

(Piaget 1932) Marked the ability to shift perspectives as a major developmental breakthrough in cognitive functioning.

(Kohlberg (1976) Recognized its importance in his classification of moral reasoning.

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(Batson 91/98) The presence of perspective-taking can inspire great gestures of altruism.

(Richardson 1994) Its absence can incite the devastations of social aggression.

An Answer?

During TPP, the students were operating on peak-imagination and perspective taking. Any signs of Us/Them categorization in the classroom disappears. What replaces it is two distinct groups, team 1 and team 2. These teams have to come together and work in close quarters for around a 4-6 week period, spending many hours debating, discussing, and forging strong bonds.

At subsequent projects, teams rearrange and then contain students who you were just working against in the previous project. The 'them' becomes an 'us.'

There are many examples of social situations dividing communities. The U.K. is now divided on the decision and implementation of leaving the European Union. Strong opinions can be heard from both sides of the fence.

A TPP would create a space in the fence and install a buffer zone, somewhere which could serve as a place to listen to both sides, to come to an understanding, that doesn't mean to agree with each other, it means to respect an alternative point of view. Groups always believe they are on the 'good' side and their opponents on the 'bad,' rather than seeing that there are always positives and negatives from both viewpoints.

An awareness of human psychology helps the students see what is taking place when they assign 'Them & Us' categories.

An interesting study was published in 2014 in "The Proceedings of the National Academy of Science." The study relates to "motive attribution asymmetry," and puts forward:

We predict and observe that people often attribute their out-group's actions during conflict to hatred. This attribution occurs despite evidence that intergroup aggression stems at least as much, if not more, from ingroup love. We hypothesized that whereas people can clearly identify ingroup

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love as the source of their own group's engagement in conflict, when attempting to explain their outgroup's actions, people focus on dislike and "why they hate us." Expanding on prior research, we propose a previously untested hypothesis: People will attribute ingroup engagement in conflict to love more than hate, but they will attribute outgroup engagement in conflict to hate more than love. We term this pattern the "motive attribution asymmetry"

In exploring the consequences of hating others, we talked with the students about which emotion a feeling of hate triggers, the most readily available answer was anger. We then discussed feeling angry towards the opposing team during TPP. Was it okay to feel anger? It turns out anger, if controlled, can be a productive emotion, it can signify passion and cause you to be motivated to action. However, there is an emotion that we should be very wary of - contempt.

A 2015 study from the University of Amsterdam is entitled, 'Contempt: Derogating Others While Keeping Calm.' The researchers reviewed findings about contempt and the emotions which are most closely related - anger and disgust. They present arguments which claim that contempt differs from hate, anger or disgust.

They say that disgust tends to be "directed at events or objects more than other people," and if someone feels disgusted by another person, then it has "more of a dehumanizing quality."

The researchers found that people who experience the heat of anger will look to engage their opponent in discussion and debate – whereas those who feel the coolness of contempt will disdainfully push their opponents away and ignore them or exclude them from discussion and debate.

They also put forward:

Contempt is similar to anger in that it may occur after (repeated) social or moral transgressions, but it differs from anger in its appraisals, actions and emotivational goals. Unlike anger, contempt arises when a person's or group's character is appraised as bad and unresponsive to change, leading to attempts to socially exclude the target.

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Both emotions involve blaming another for intentional, unfair wrongdoing. But contempt also involves the appraisal that the other is inferior, maybe not even worth one's energy or attention, because he or she has a bad character. In the case of anger, we blame the other for doing wrong and blocking our goals. However, in contempt we despise the other as stupid, incompetent, or immoral - deriding their disposition more so than their act.

It would seem there is a psychological reason for the emotion of contempt, it composes and regulates the anger, often elevating it to position of cool superiority. But this happens only after feeling that all hope is lost, that the issue is not worth talking about anymore, that you have no influence, that you have tried and failed to come to an understanding, the paths of communication have closed - the relationship is devalued and there will be no reconciliation.

The researchers point to a study by Gottman and Levenson (2002), which found that the biggest predictor of a marriage resulting in divorce was the presence of contempt. They also speculate that contempt might be used as a response towards personal and social rejection.

Therefore, issues which are emotive and elicit passionate responses, but are ultimately situational, and should be depersonalised - through contemptuous application, become accusations of moral transgression, and begin to question the character and ethical stance of a persons views. This is something which the students come to learn is a very dangerous and dark trajectory to embark upon.

The authors include a study of students in their report:

In student settings, for example, those who displayed contempt were judged to be of higher status (Keltner, Young, Heerey, Oemig, & Monarch, 1998). It may be that this increased self-esteem is not only in the eye of the perceiver, but also in the eye of the contemptuous person.

The students at our school were encouraged to find the buffer zone. They knew that displays of controlled anger is acceptable, cold contempt is not. To counteract the possible introduction of uncontrolled anger and contemptuous behaviour, using TPP, the

students focused on perspective taking and the presuppositions of NLP.

A reminder:

- People respond to their experience, not to reality itself.
- People make the best choice they can at the time – given their map of the world.
- All actions have a purpose.
- The meaning of communication is not simply what you intend to convey, but also the response you receive.
- There are no unresourceful people, only unresourceful states of mind.
- Mind and body form a system. When we think differently, our bodies change. When we act differently, our thoughts and feelings change.
- We process all information through our senses – developing those senses gives more information and clarity.
- Modeling successful performance leads to excellence.
- If you want to understand: act – the learning is in the doing.

I had always known that perspective taking, putting yourself in the shoes of others, was a really beneficial exercise for students to undertake. However, just recently, I watched an interview with Robert Sapolsky which completely laid out how the neurological mechanics of perspective-taking plays out. More about this in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

The Voice of Reason and the Pre-Frontal Cortex

Inner Speech

Imagine walking down the street, and all of the chatter that is going on in your head, was actually words coming out of your mouth. It might sound something like this:

I really need to get a move on, I'm going to be late. Should I get the bus or the train? I'd love to jump in a taxi, but it'll be too expensive. I wonder when I'll be able to not worry about money? That's a nice car, I wish I had a car. That guy in the car looks like my cousin, I wonder how he's doing, I wonder if he's got a nice car. Then again, maybe it's for the best I don't have a car, look at all this pollution, you can actually smell it in the air. The planet is doomed, it'll all probably end before I can afford a nice car anyway.

If I act out this stream of consciousness, this "inner voice," or "inner speech," as psychologists call it, in front of the students, they think it is hysterical, and embarrassing and sounds like it is happening to someone with a serious mental disorder.

However, they then realise that the ongoing chatter is also occurring in their heads and they are then relieved to find out that everyone's mind is like that. They think it might have been just them that is tuned into the never-ending commentary about anything and everything.

There are people who hear voices, and who are then labeled as schizophrenic. These people claim to hear "auditory verbal hallucinations."

An interesting study took place in Finland which compared auditory verbal hallucinations with regular inner speech. When the researchers scanned the brains of both participants, they found brain activity in the same areas - with one exception. With the hallucinatory-voice participants, there was a decreased level of activation within the supplementary motor area (SMA). The SMA is part of the medial frontal cortex and scientists are not clear about the exact function of

this brain area, other than it tells our bodies to move. This showed the researchers that signals from the SMA might help you to recognise that actions, and voices are your own, and if the signals are weak or non-existent, the voices would appear to be coming from someone else.

Durham University has a research programme running until 2020, called *Hearing the Voice*. Their website says:

In addition to shedding light on the relations between hearing voices and everyday processes of sensory perception, memory, language and creativity, we are exploring why it is that some voices (and not others) are experienced as distressing, how they can change across the life course, and the ways in which voices can act as important social, cultural and political forces.

If I ask students to pinpoint when they became aware of the commentary, they are not sure, but can say it wasn't there in their younger carefree days. That is if their younger days were carefree.

The voice is often trying to drive you to the edges of sanity. It can get snarled up with bitterness and blame, towards ourselves or towards others. Many people believe that the voice is who they are, that is is their personality. But if that were so, then you would have to ask who is the person listening to the voice?

It turns out that we are programmed to be on the look out for danger, from our days when we had to watch for every movement in case of a physical attack from another person, or an animal. Now we are on the lookout for verbal attacks, we are constantly monitoring for our safety. Hence the ongoing chatter in our brain.

We have to overcome this voice with the "voice of reason." We have to talk ourselves down off the ledge of brutal language. If we are self-attacking, it can help to ask if a friend was talking to us in the same way, would we still classify them as a friend.

If it is someone else whom we are silently attacking, we have to ask ourselves if we are overreacting or seeing something that isn't there? Sometimes there is something to be wary of, but most of the time we have just built up a story in our head.

How can we tell if the voice in our head is just telling us made-up stories or if it is relaying a reasonable assessment of our emotions or of an external situation. Is there anything we can do about it?

Many people have found techniques to silence the voice, through meditation practices. This is definitely helpful, but what can we do to bring more understanding of the neurological mechanics of this phenomena?

If the voice is what we listen to, if it forms our thoughts, our emotions and therefore our behaviour, we need know how to regulate it, not just silence it.

The Pre-frontal Cortex

In trying to understand the internal voice and if there are ways to regulate it, we should look at what is happening neurologically. To answer this, let's turn again to Robert Sapolsky who provides huge insight.

He writes about the Pre-frontal Cortex (PFC) which, he says, is the "most human part of the brain." It is the most recently evolved part of the brain and "makes you do the harder thing, when it's the right thing to do. It makes you do what is difficult, when that is what you should be doing."

The PFC is responsible for logical thinking, long-term planning, controlling impulses and emotional regulation. What is the PFC regulating? That would be the amygdala.

The amygdala is part of the limbic system, an almond shaped set of neurons, and the fear centre for the brain. If it is the fear centre, does it generate or contribute to the production of fearful emotions which we give voice to in our head? Or create fearful messages, which then affects our emotions?

Whichever way it works, Sapolsky says it is the PFC's job to dampen down the amygdala and control the fear-based emotions before it lashes out and does something regretful. In an interview, he says: "Judgment goes down the tubes when the amygdala is running the frontal cortex, rather than the other way around."

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In Sapolsky's book *Behave*, one chapter is entitled, *Adolescence; or, Dude, Where's My Frontal Cortex?* In it, he tells us:

The final brain region to fully mature (in terms of synapse number, myelination, and metabolism) is the frontal cortex, not going online until the mid-*twenties*.

Sapolsky also tells us that the PFC is the part of the brain which shapes adolescence, all other parts of the brain are fully matured and going at full throttle, whilst the frontal cortex is “still working out the assembly instructions.” He says this is the reason adolescents are “so frustrating, great, asinine, impulsive, inspiring, destructive, self-destructive, selfless, selfish, impossible and world changing.”

He also says that this is the time that brings the most risk-taking and novelty-seeking behaviours. This is the time when young people will make huge decisions which will affect the rest of their lives. This is the time of “peril and promise.”

In posing the question why it would take so long for a crucial part of the brain to mature, Sapolsky proposes that it is nature's way of “getting it right.” It seems Mother Nature will provide you with genes to get you started, but wants you to really develop your persona through experience.

Sapolsky says: “Ironically, it seems that the genetic program of human brain development has evolved to, as much as possible, free the frontal cortex from genes.”

So, if the voice of reason, and therefore reasonable emotions and behaviour are reliant on a quiet amygdala and a fully functioning and mature PFC - and if the PFC is developed through external experiences – what are those experiences, and where exactly, are those experiences to be found?

It turns out there are two places we can find those experiences, the first is through play, and the second is through perspective-taking.

Play

An article from NPR entitled *Scientists Say Child's Play Helps Build A Better Brain*, includes the views of Sergio Pellis, a researcher at the University of Lethbridge in Alberta, Canada:

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When it comes to brain development, time in the classroom may be less important than time on the playground.

The experience of play changes the connections of the neurons at the front end of your brain. And without play experience, those neurons aren't changed.

It is those changes in the prefrontal cortex during childhood that help wire up the brain's executive control center, which has a critical role in regulating emotions, making plans and solving problems. So play is what prepares a young brain for life, love and even schoolwork.

Pellis also says this play should not be overseen, and that it shouldn't have rules:

Whether it's rough-and-tumble play or two kids deciding to build a sand castle together, the kids themselves have to negotiate, well, what are we going to do in this game? What are the rules we are going to follow? The brain builds new circuits in the prefrontal cortex to help it navigate these complex social interactions.

A YouTube animation shows play as a mechanism for learning, to live in social groups and to navigate complex hierarchies. It states that we have to incorporate play into our culture and should make sure our kids get plenty of play.

The video tells us:

Jaak Panksepp witnessed what might be the best anecdotal evidence for his theory when he watched what happened in the lab when two male rats were put in a room with a single female rat. The one male rat who had had lots of play growing up was basically the rat version of George Clooney, the other guy didn't stand a chance.

In a paper entitled 'The Function of Play in the Development of the Social Brain,' the authors studied the behaviour of rats. They pose the question "Why do animals play?" Their findings show that play is multifunctional and how play early on in life helps you in later life. From the paper:

We think it important to note that because play fighting is an inherently social behavior, when juvenile rats do *not* do it, they

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become socially incompetent as adults.

If they do not engage in play fighting, they overreact to social contact, they are hyper defensive, and are more likely to escalate encounters to aggression. They fail to act appropriately, may be humble in the presence of other, more dominant rats or don't have the strategies to avoid annoying the more dominant rats.

Another finding showed that rats who'd been reared with adults as juveniles and had experienced fewer social interactions and fewer, if any, play fights – had neurons that differed from rats that had been reared with peers as juveniles and had experienced play, in addition to other forms of social behaviour. A rat didn't have to have multiple friends to rough and tumble play with, one was sufficient to develop their brain. Brain development and refinement also benefited from social interaction with multiple peers. If rats have the opportunity for play they show more resilience and have an ability to “restrain their emotional response” by modifying the neural circuitry: prefrontal cortex over amygdala.

The authors also report that the patterns of play in rats changes with age, there is a reorganisation of play in their juvenile stage. The findings suggested that a specific neural switch causes the play to move from one rat holding another rat down with its front feet, whilst stabilising itself with its back feet on the floor, to the more risky approach of holding down a fellow rat by standing on him with all four feet, which made it more likely that he would be ‘thrown’ over. The authors of the paper say “These findings suggest that play fighting in rats is designed to ensure that juveniles frequently experience an unpredictable loss of control.”

A really interesting observation about this “loss of control” comes from another paper entitled ‘Mammalian Play: Training for the Unexpected.’ This paper reveals the results of observing rats for the specific identification of noting how rats will “put themselves into disadvantageous positions and situations.” Apparently they will deliberately engage in risky maneuvers during play (such as standing on another rat with all four feet) to “increase the versatility of movements used to recover from sudden shocks such as loss of

balance and falling over, and to enhance the ability to cope emotionally with unexpected stressful situations.” This practice of control in stressful or surprising situations allows them to practice for real-life situations in the future, where a big emotional overreaction could increase and inflame a dangerous situation or an interaction of conflict. The paper says these include locomotor shocks such as falling over, being knocked over, pinned down etc., or psychological shocks, such as facing threatening stimuli or experiencing a sudden reversal in dominance.

The information in this paper aligns with the Theory of Positive Disintegration, I wrote about at the beginning of the book which puts forward the theory that anxiety and tension, which are often viewed as negative states, are actually positive and necessary elements of healthy development. And that behaviour and character transforms through emotional growth, which is a process beginning with instinctual egocentrism and culminates in self-awareness, empathy and compassion.

Perspective Taking

Going back to the work of Professor Sapolsky, I recently watched him being interviewed, where he fully explains the neurological mechanics of perspective-taking. He is asked how the frontal cortex can be supported for healthy functioning, and is also pushed to reveal if there are any “life hacks” in which this could be achieved. The following was his response:

What could make for a stronger frontal cortex?

When it comes to doing the harder thing, when it comes to being decent to people...what the studies show are, force your brain to take someone else’s perspective. I'm not asking you to agree with them, but if they had to say why they are so upset about what's been done to them and their people, what would they say? Force your brain to individuate other people. Individuation, perspective taking - focusing on the fact that other people are malleable as well, induces malleability of our own views. This is not knee-jerk, this is research that has been done, there are exercises that make your frontal cortex stronger.

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I replayed the video to make sure I had heard him correctly, did Sapolsky just say “*there are exercises that make your frontal cortex stronger?*” I immediately emailed him to ask about the research relating to the exercises which caused the pre-frontal cortex to strengthen. He kindly responded right away, saying that most of the studies in this area have been produced by Susan Fiske, a professor at Princeton. His email also said that most of the neuroimaging work relates to the amygdala, the brain’s fear centre. This work revealed how individualising a person, rather than seeing them as part of a group, will cause the amygdala to be less responsive. The biological mechanism changes from thinking the person is frightening to identifying with the person as a separate individual. And, that this individualising and perspective-taking are classic frontal cortex tasks which overrides the easier pull to dismiss “them” as less than “us,” attributing negative assumptions such as “they’re not rational, they’re crazy,” etc. He concluded his email by saying practicing these individualising and perspective-taking exercises “*has to reflect the strengthening of the frontal cortex*” Whoa!

An Answer?

Something suddenly dawned on me.

It was the first time I actually realised what was happening with our students whilst engaging with TPP. I knew the projects proved an excellent way to develop their characters, to help them think critically, to look at situations and people in a different light. I knew the play element, with the Disrupters, challenged them and enhanced their ability to emotionally cope with unexpected and stressful situations. But I didn’t know if this was a temporary response.

This was when it hit me how these experiences were literally strengthening neural connections in the PFC and restraining fear-based messages from the amygdala. These changes would *forever* shape the structure of their brain and therefore their attitudes and behaviours!

This is probably the most important finding I have written about in this book: Straight from Sapolsky, one of the most brilliant minds of our time, from his words, to me, to this page - in order to evolve into

a fully functioning mature adult, you *have* to practice perspective-taking.

And, there is also something else to consider. For maximum effectiveness, perspective taking has to be done as the young person reaches adolescence, and definitely before adolescence is over.

Time Limit For Strengthening PFC

It is now well known that the brain is not static, but elastic, capable of developing until our last breath. However there are two major developmental phases, the first is from birth to three, and the second is during adolescence.

Nurseries and pre-schools and even some primary schools put a lot of work into the social interaction between children. Teaching them to share, listen, include others in games and to be kind. However, this focus generally shifts to academic attainment in primary and secondary schools. Secondary school teachers are inundated with targets and assessments and building social skills is generally absent in the curriculum. This is a serious fault in our education system as secondary school age is when the brains of young people are strengthening - and weakening.

I was always keen to show our students TED talks. One of those talks was entitled ‘The Mysterious Workings of the Adolescent Brain’ by Sarah-Jayne Blakemore, who is the professor of Cognitive Neuroscience at University College, London. She tells us that the brains of adolescents are adaptable and malleable, primed for learning and creativity. However, they also begin an important developmental process of “synaptic pruning.”

Grey matter in the PFC peaks at around twelve for girls and fourteen for boys.

Right after the peak - the pruning starts to take place. The synaptic connections are eliminated if under-used, to make way for the strengthening and fine-tuning of frequently used synapses. Blakemore says that this important process is partly dependent upon the surrounding environment, including the teaching environment, which can and does shape the developing adolescent brain.

Therefore, secondary education is a perfect time to provide an environment in which the students can be immersed in multi-dimensional perspective analysis projects, which will allow them to create and maintain strong connections and healthy communication with adults and with their peers.

Blakemore tells us that we now have a good picture of how the human brain develops thanks to brain imaging technology. Neuroscientists can see that the brain continues to develop right throughout adolescence and into the 20's and 30's. She also says: "Adolescence is defined as the period of life that starts with the biological, hormonal, physical changes of puberty and ends at the age at which an individual attains a stable, independent role in society." She says, "It can go on a long time."

As I wrote about in an earlier chapter, studies show that TPP discourage cliques and feelings of isolation. They also, flatten hierarchies and build community spirit. TPP focus on the Big 5 character traits, bringing quiet students out of their shell and restraining arrogant students. They encourage critical thinking, inculcate good character building and leadership skills, create anti-fragility and instill humility.

And, TPP develop and mature the pre-frontal cortex through perspective taking.

This brings up many questions:

- How important is it for young people to leave school with a well-developed PFC, able to undertake long term planning, control impulses and regulate their emotions through displaying a voice of reason?
- Where in education, is the Perspective, Unexpected and Play training?
- What are the consequences of an immature prefrontal cortex?
- Can an immature PFC be compared to a damaged PFC?
- What do we do if a teenager does not control their impulses, shows poor judgment or cannot regulate their emotions?
- How do we help them when they "cannot do the harder thing, when it is the right thing to do?"

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- Who do we blame if the amygdala is the part of the brain running the show?
- Should we punish harshly or provide a restorative response to those young people exhibiting signs of an underdeveloped PFC?

Restorative Reform

This last question has serious implications for how we treat young offenders, Professor Sapolsky is now working with the Judicial Department in the U.S. in trying to address this issue.

A scientific paper entitled ‘Damage to ventromedial prefrontal cortex impairs judgment of harmful intent,’ points to work which shows damage to the ventromedial prefrontal cortex (VMPC) resulting in responses to moral dilemmas which are abnormal. The authors say:

This prediction was confirmed in the current study: VMPC patients judged attempted harms including attempted murder as more morally permissible relative to controls. These results highlight the critical role of the VMPC in processing harmful intent for moral judgment.

The authors go on to say how in judging someone’s actions, especially if they caused harm, we are likely to ask “did they believe they would cause harm, did they intend to cause harm?”

The studies showed that the VMPC patients had deficits about emotional processing.

In Professor Sapolsky’s book, *Behave*, he argues that we are sending people to prison, or in other countries maybe to their death, based on evidence which can be uninformed and incomplete. These decisions are also based on a belief in mitigated free will which sees biology as an influencer in our behaviour, but not the ultimate decision maker. Sapolsky says:

The current criminal justice system needs to be abolished and replaced with something that, while having some broad

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features in common with the current system, would have utterly different underpinnings.

Sapolsky published a paper in 2004 entitled: 'The frontal cortex and the criminal justice system.' In the paper he says that our personalities are starting to be explained by neurobiology, and that it is important for neuroscience to be understood within the realms of the criminal justice system. He tells us that it is possible for a person to seem like they are able to distinguish right from wrong verbally, but they will then go on to be unable to, in practice, make the harder decision, when it is the right thing to do.

Because the criminal justice system relies on the fact that a person is able to distinguish right from wrong, they then use this to determine if an insanity plea is acceptable. Sapolsky wants to show how contemporary neuroscience reveals how a person can sound like they know right from wrong, but in actuality have little impulse control. He says to do this we have to take into consideration the function of the prefrontal cortex, as it is the job of the PFC to override an easier, habitual behaviour for a more complex and measured one.

If you think about teaching a young child to put a toy in their toy box, rather than just dropping it on the floor, the child will have to engage the PFC to suppress the impulse to do the easiest thing, and drive them to do something which is the more difficult thing to do. As the behaviour becomes more of a habit, the need for the involvement of the PFC decreases until the new behaviour is automatic.

The PFC is also responsible for sorting information into categories, this is difficult to do for people with damage to the PFC. Other functions which can be affected by a under-functioning PFC is moral reasoning, empathy, forgiveness and regret.

Sapolsky says that the connection between the PFC and the amygdala, the brain's fear and aggressive centre, offers insight into violence:

Elevated metabolic rates in parts of the PFC predict low rates of amygdaloid activity. This neuroanatomy is important in trying to understand the biology of violence.

So, we can accept that if the PFC is damaged, it is unable to control impulses of aggression and violence. And, if the PFC shows no damage but still has a measurement of less volume, this will also indicate behaviours which are aggressive and antisocial. Other elements which affect the functioning of the PFC include alcohol, even in small quantities, stress, lack of sleep and ageing.

However, there are people with damaged PFC's who are not violent, and there are also people who are violent who don't appear to have damage to the PFC. For the latter group, should we then jump to different conclusions and attribute the problem to something else? Sapolsky thinks we should be wary of doing this:

It must be emphasized that most of the neurobiological techniques used to demonstrate PFC abnormalities in humans (predominantly structural and functional brain imaging) did not exist a decade or two ago. It would be the height of hubris to think that we have already learned how to detect the most subtle ways in which PFC damage impairs volitional control.

There is now an emerging field of study entitled "Neurolaw." This field will merge legal processes with new discoveries from neuroscience. It is interdisciplinary involving practitioners from neuroscience, criminology and psychology.

An Answer?

The most important question of all - if the PFC is low functioning, can it be trained, can we increase the level of control the PFC has over the amygdala? Sapolsky thinks so, as he says, "practice in perspective-taking can strengthen the PFC."

In our schools, we practiced perspective taking throughout The Portal Projects, and witnessed the maturation of the students.

This is of monumental importance – to develop and mature the brains of children and young people so they can regulate their

emotions and behaviour – it should be in place in all schools.

The Bi-Hemispheric Brain & The Arts

Both Sides of the Brain

If the PFC/amygdala connection is a look at one relationship within the system of brain function, another interesting relationship is to explore how our brains are connected from side to side.

Our brain is separated into two halves, or hemispheres, like two halves of a walnut and is connected by a thick nerve tract called the corpus callosum (“tough body” in Latin). These nerve fibres allow communication to pass from one side of the brain to the other.

In the 1960’s, surgeons started to successfully operate on people who suffered from intractable epilepsy by severing the corpus callosum and separating the brain’s hemispheres – a life-saving procedure. Then scientists were naturally interested in other effects the separation might incur. They created a way to deliver information to just one side of the brain and then found bizarre responses which caused them to think that there were two spheres of consciousness, independent from each other.

This led to a new view of the two hemispheres being responsible for completely different tasks: the left was seen as the rational side, and the right the creative side. This information then became in vogue and even advertising agencies stepped into the ‘two minds’ mentality. Volvo wanted to appeal to the ‘left brain’ safety aspects and the ‘right brain’ emotional appeal.

Then neuroimaging arrived on the scene, which had the capability of mapping the brain and illustrating that, in fact, both hemisphere’s are used in everything we do. This sparked a new debate about partial brain functions and, in frustration, the science world and the marketers walked away.

Any interest in how the two hemispheres affect our thinking and our behaviour disappeared.

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However, the interest did not disappear for British psychiatrist, writer, and former Oxford literary scholar, Iain McGilchrist who has written a ground-breaking book entitled, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*. In the book, McGilchrist tells us that, yes, it has been proven that emotion and reason occur in both sides of the brain - however the difference between the hemispheres is not in what they do, but in how they do it. He says: "It's a difference that makes all the difference."

McGilchrist points out:

Ultimately I believe that many of the disputes about the nature of the human world can be illuminated by an understanding that there are two fundamentally different 'versions' delivered to us by the two hemispheres, both of which are hugely valuable: but that they stand in opposition to one another, and need to be kept apart from one another – hence the bihemispheric structure of the brain.

Those differences are:

The right hemisphere:

- Is curious, looks out for what might be different from our expectations, is future oriented and welcomes change and the concept of evolving.
- Reads body language and emotional facial expressions. Is emotional, but not responsible for anger, that is in the left hemisphere's domain.
- Is intuitive, self-aware and empathetic, is flexible, takes risks and finds solutions.
- Displays insight, imagination, visualisation and experimentation.
- Understands nuance, 'gets' the joke, understands metaphor, is playful.
- Is interested in individual concepts, not categories and is attuned to living things rather than mechanical objects.
- Sees the whole interconnected picture.

These attributes sound amazing, what else would a human being need?

Well, to apply these functions we need a different mental process,

which is more specialised. That's where the other hemisphere comes in to play:

The left hemisphere:

- Is responsible for some aspects of language, and the voice in your head.
- Manages some aspects of logical and rational thought.
- Is analytical.
- Is narrow, sharp and pays attention to detail.
- Needs mechanical perfection.
- Wants tangible categories and coding.
- Is contained in an enclosed system, an echo chamber, a hall of mirrors.
- Is static and decontextualized.
- Demands clarity and precision.
- Does not see the whole, only fragmented parts.

The design of the brain allows the movement of communication to travel back and forth across the corpus callosum. If this system works how it was designed to work, it would provide a full power, running on all engines, access to rationality and creativity in beautiful synergistic harmony. However, this is mostly not the case.

I think we could look at it as though there is an artist in residence in the right hemisphere and an accountant in residence in the left. They are supposed to help each other out, share the workload. However it seems the power has shifted to the accountant and he thinks he is the one in charge because he is keeping the books. He forgets that it is the artist putting on the show.

As the title of McGilchrist's book tells us, this "at odds" brain environment is similar to a fable he attributes to Nietzsche. This is the story of a spiritual master, devoted to his people and to the security and peace of his domain. But when he couldn't manage the expanding responsibilities, he entrusted his gifted and ambitious (but bureaucratic and self-interested) 'emissary' with taking on a bigger role. The emissary relished the new prestige but then unfortunately began to see himself as the one in charge. He thought his master weak, unwise and eventually unburdened him of his role. Of course

the domain fell into chaos under the new rule and never recovered.

In referring to the left hemisphere as a “hall of mirrors,” McGilchrist tells us that, in the past, we had doorways to escape out of the hall, which led us towards religion, arts and nature, but now, for many people, those escape routes, have been closed off.

The routes out of the hall of mirrors are obvious when you stop to think about it.

Religion - generally contains ceremonies which have a meditative aspect built in through different elements such as the use of prayer beads. The repetitive chanting of prayers closes down the ability of the left hemisphere to interrupt.

Arts - allow you to get lost in the flow of the creative process such as writing, music, dance, painting and drawing. However, many of the creative pursuits are now resigned to the label of “soft skills,” especially within education, and are not deemed worthy of time or investment.

Nature - is known to alleviate anxiety, walking in forests, swimming in oceans, all pursuits which take you outdoors and outside of yourself, free you from the internal noise.

McGilchrist believes it is important to challenge the left hemisphere’s domination of the brain. He says:

An increasingly mechanistic, fragmented, decontextualized world, marked by unwarranted optimism mixed with paranoia and a feeling of emptiness, has come about, reflecting, I believe, the unopposed action of a dysfunctional left hemisphere.

McGilchrist says the effect his book has on many people is to bring about an awareness of the workings of their own brain, what he calls “the brain cognising itself.” And if this impacts the way they look at the world - he says, he couldn’t ask for more.

I travelled to the Isle of Skye to interview Iain McGilchrist last year. I wanted to ask him about his views on education. The transcribed interview amounts to almost twenty A4 pages. I attempted to pull out

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the main messages he expressed, but it was difficult, all of his thoughts are worth hearing or reading. So I have included the full interview in Appendix I. At some stage I will upload the videos to this book's website.

A new documentary highlights McGilchrist's work. From the trailer:

The world is in crisis.

But this scientist thinks the real problem is inside our heads.

We act like people with right hemisphere brain damage.

Treating people like things to be sorted, used and thrown away.

But there is an alternative.

A more balanced way of thinking.

We need to relearn how to use our brains before it is too late.

TheDividedBrain.com

If you are interested in McGilchrist's fascinating work, visit his website: <http://ianmcgilchrist.com>

There is an RSA animation, "The Divided Brain," which is a helpful introduction to his work: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dFs9WO2B8uI>

(More on right/left hemispheres in Part II, Chapter 4)

Artistic Creativity and the Right Hemisphere

My interest in Iain McGilchrist's work initially stemmed from the fact that when I lived in Los Angeles, whilst running the primary school, I also trained at the OTIS College of Art and Design, learning about an art technique which took advantage of the bi-hemispheric brain.

Creativity had been a priority in the primary school. I found that the younger children were confident in their creative pursuits including drawing, painting and model building. They would just follow where their inner artist led them. It was wonderful to see a class immersed in their artwork. They were definitely getting lost in the moment of creating. It was meditative, not in the sense of emptying minds (which we had tried with the students with mediocre success) but in a sense of active meditation. They would finish their artwork in their own time and their mood would be Zen-like.

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However, something quite distressing started to happen. As the students became older, they started to back away from any opportunity to draw. They would say it was silly, or that they couldn't draw. I thought this was a hugely important thing to lose, and set out to see what I could do about it. I wanted to find a way of learning to draw which would be easily transferred to the students.

When I found the art course at OTIS entitled 'Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain' I was intrigued. When I read more about Betty Edwards, the founder of the programme and her approach to teaching and learning, I enrolled on the course right away. The programme was based on her book, which was published in 1979.

Before she retired, in the late 1990's, Betty Edwards was an artist, educator, author and researcher. Her research and teaching took place at the California State University where she founded "The Center for the Educational Applications of Brain Hemisphere Research." This revolutionary approach towards drawing instruction was praised by artists, art educators and psychologists. Edwards also led workshops for large corporations such as IBM and General Electrics.

At the first session of the art course, I was intrigued to see that my classmates were a mixed professional group and included architects, costume designers, game designers and animators. Many of them had already taken some sort of art class or design course, but had not learned how to draw properly, so they were there to start from scratch. However, the course was designed for people who had no drawing skills whatsoever, myself included.

The practical part of the course included 'Skill Building.' The following five skills were covered in the course, they are not just drawing skills, but skills of perception, relating to how you actually see:

1. Edges
2. Spaces
3. Relationships
4. Lights and shadows
5. The whole, or gestalt

As with all new things the perception skills are not easy to master,

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they just take practice. But before long, you are drawing very presentable pieces of work. You initially focus on one component, maybe edges, “seeing” how the edge of one thing is automatically the edge of another. Then a focus on the relationships, how one edge or line or shadow exists in relation to something else. The whole or the gestalt is not a skill, it is not something that is specifically taught, but an integration of the other perceptions, once you have the practice in place, the whole appears. Once you have mastered the initial skills, there is not another set of skills to develop, there is only more practice.

The instructor told us that the key to learning to draw is in the seeing - it is the eye that needs to be trained, not the hand. If you have normal eyesight and if you can write your name legibly, you can easily produce beautiful drawings.

I know there are many who think that art is not as important as other subjects, but if you look deeper into the skills, you will find that to produce good art, you have to observe things in different ways, shift your viewpoints, it is a process of how you see, and it is a skill of perception.

This ‘seeing’ is different from your regular day-to-day seeing. This type of seeing is to determine relationships between one line and the next, looking for where the light is falling. It is wholly absorbing and all-consuming.

Because language generally dominates our minds, the natural tendency of the brain is to align with the left hemisphere. The first goal is to learn how to overcome this alignment and utilise the powerful function of the right hemisphere.

But how do you do that? Studies suggest that there are a couple of deciding factors as to which hemisphere goes into action first. Which one gets to the job the fastest and, which hemisphere feels the task is important, and which one doesn’t.

The trick is to bypass the “Left-Hemisphere Accountant” who is ready and waiting to pounce with a verbal onslaught. The Accountant does not like to turn tasks over to the “Right-Hemisphere Artist,” unless it seems really boring and slow, or it seems more than they can handle.

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This was the core of the technique, to focus in on the detailed minutiae of where one line meets the next is too boring for the Accountant so he gives up and goes quiet. There is no room for any logical left brain chatter, the non-verbal right brain Artist is now running the show.

You can experience the brain shifting from left to right with the “Rubin’s Vase/Face Drawing” exercise, which is available on the official website of Betty Edwards: <http://www.drawright.com/try-an-exercise>.

It is more effective to print out and complete with a pencil, but if you can’t print the image, just click on it which will enlarge it and you can then follow the outline, even with your finger.

We completed this exercise at our first lesson. It is an optical illusion which can be viewed as a vase or as two profiles facing each other. Danish psychologist and philosopher Edgar John Rubin, discovered the illusion and published it in his doctoral thesis in 1915.

The exercise shows an image, one side of a profile drawn on a page and asks you to complete the other side. It is interesting to note what happens to your brain whilst drawing the outline. If you feel a shift, and a sense of disorientation, congratulations, you have just experienced the right/left brain battle.

When I first did the exercise, my brain went into conflict and it seemed confused. I had to stop often, not knowing how to continue. The initial tracing of the outline is accomplished using the left hemisphere, naming the parts of the face, separating out, classifying and detailing. The attempt to then draw the profile calls in the right hemisphere as there needs to be something created.

Naming the parts of the face as you draw, seems confusing, it keeps the brain in left-hemisphere language mode, it is more effective to think of just drawing a wavy line and not parts of a face. It also seems easier to use the space in between as a guide, where the profile indents, your drawing would also indent.

This back and forth, between naming and classifying and then

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actually drawing using non-verbal directives, causes the feeling of confusion, it's a mental shift. You start to instruct your brain to change its strategy, saying to yourself, do it this way, or don't think about it like that, which is a new skill to become conscious of. For most daily tasks, the two hemispheres are in play, unconsciously.

The exercise shows, to create a good drawing, you have to surrender to the visual, right hemisphere. You have to turf the Accountant out completely and allow the Artist full reign. It is quite empowering, to have the ability to control how the brain absorbs information, and a huge mental health benefit to know how to shift consciousness and access flow states.

Whereas the first exercise is a battle between the Accountant and the Artist, the next exercises leaves the Accountant quivering at the door, there is no way he can apply any of his knowledge, so he gives up and goes home. This is an upside down drawing exercise which completely bypasses the left hemisphere and allows you to access the right hemisphere. The results are very rewarding and produce an exceptional drawing. You can find all of the exercises in Betty Edwards book. There is also a DVD available which illustrates the techniques really well. This immersive drawing technique allows you to leave behind the usual panicked pinball mode of thinking. You feel lighter, calmer and in a different frame of mind, shifting to a more balanced cognitive state.

I despaired at the fact that children would turn away the opportunity to both experience this peaceful state of mind and produce wonderful art pieces. I was wondering why the childhood passion for drawing disappears. In talking to my art instructor about it, she offered an explanation. She talked about young children using symbolic representation in their drawings, almost cartoon like, not what they actually see. As the child becomes older, they realise that the symbolic drawings do not match what they see in real life and they become frustrated and do not want to continue drawing.

This symbolic drawing is still used frequently by adults, so they are generally not too keen to embrace drawing either. A few people in my class were worried about this, admitting to their own cartoon-like drawing style. The instructor assured us that she would lead us out of

symbolic drawing and into the world of “seeing.”

After my course finished, the instructor was then going on to do a weekly workshop for children aged 8-14. I told her about wanting to take the skills back into our school, and she kindly allowed me to attend the junior class, and observe her teaching as she delivered the slightly adjusted amazing art course. With the skills I learned from my course and from observing the junior course, I was able to easily teach many elements of the course to the children in the primary school, and then later to older children in the secondary school. The results were always wonderful and discouraged the students belief that they were not creative. It made them feel like artists. This drawing course should be taught in all schools.

One of our secondary students was skeptical about learning to draw. He would say he was not creative, and would never be able to complete a piece of art. He was a proficient maths student, and so I talked to him about how to learn from a mathematical perspective. I showed him how creating a drawing was all about measurement and relationships from one point to another. He really liked this approach and would then carefully measure out, with a ruler, where each pencil mark would go. His final portfolio includes incredible pieces of artwork which although he doesn't admit to it, I can tell he is really proud of.

Every time a student benefits from the art course, I am grateful to have found and attended the art programme in Los Angeles where I learned that anyone could create art. This is beneficial for learning the actual skill, but it also teaches the students how develop openness traits and develops right-brain function, which is also the home of intellectual creativity (more information about intellectual creativity in Part II, Chapter 4).

Drawing and Memory

A scientific report was published in August 2018 from the University of Waterloo, entitled, *The Surprisingly Powerful Influence of Drawing on Memory*. The paper puts forward that drawing is an effective way of remembering because it utilises multiple ways of processing information such as visually, kinesthetically, and grappling with the meaning or the interpretation.

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Drawing is active not passive and doubles the rate of recall. This is even the case when remembering complex science concepts.

The benefits do not rely on having high levels of artistic talent.

The studies revealed drawing to be a “reliable, replicable means of boosting performance”

A Civil Rights Issue?

In acknowledging the benefits of drawing classes, is it then negligent to keep them from children and young people?

Should every child have access to a wide selection of arts education?

Anthony Brand, Music composer and co-author of *The Runaway Species: How Human Creativity Remakes the World*, thinks that they should. He thinks that the provision of arts education is a civil rights issue.

Brand believes that arts education is becoming something which is only available to those who can afford to pay for it. Because it is being removed from the classroom, parents now have the responsibility to ensure this aspect of creativity is included in their child's education.

He states: “every child is creative and therefore deserves equal access to quality arts education, regardless of means.”

Brand points to brain science to explain how we have two behaviours: automated behaviour which is unconscious and focuses on reliability and efficiency (left brain?). And mediated behaviour which is consciously aware and is about flexibility and innovation (right brain?). Mediated behaviour also causes the brain to undertake internal networking to come up with solutions. Brand says that to develop complex human behaviour, we need both automated and mediated.

In education the automated side is concerned with rote memory tasks which require a single correct answer. The mediated side however, asks for reasoning skills and might not have one correct answer.

Brand says: “The role of the arts in the curriculum is to encourage and develop mediated behavior.”

Drawing from Mark Turner and Gilles Fauconnier's model of

creativity, Brand offers the concepts of “Bending, Breaking and Blending.” Bending is to transform something from the original, Blending is to merge two different sources and Breaking is to obliterate the original and recreate.

Brand says that our brains are always looking to automate and look for the same answer or mediate and look for options and novelty. To reduce or eliminate the arts from the classroom is to settle for automated behaviour for most students. He says:

That is why access to arts education is a civil rights issue. It's about freedom of thought, about giving every child the opportunity to thrive with the full measure of human capabilities. We need to train the whole brain. We need communities of richly mediated minds.

Our future as a thriving, productive society—and species—depends upon it.

An Answer?

The students in the secondary school had just finished their exams, they had four weeks to go until the summer break. They were tired and stressed and when the teachers talked to them about beginning the coursework for the following year, you could see them groan in frustration and misery. I made a decision and told the teachers we wouldn't be doing that; they could begin the coursework for the following term, the following term. How much information were they likely to remember after the summer holiday anyway?

Instead, I planned an immersive art course. One of the parents kindly arranged for a local artist to come and work with the students every day for a week. He did a “history of art” course, and along with practicing drawing skills, the students learned about early cave drawings, and Greek philosophy.

After the week was over, I extended the art course, and the students completed another three pieces of art:

- The Buddha piece, this piece was copied from an image of Buddha which inspired the student. We also had discussions about the philosophy of Buddhism.
- The Japanese piece, this was a more intricate process, and we looked at the delicate detail of Japanese artwork.
- The Environmental piece, this saw the student find two

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images relating to threats to the environment and blend them together to create an original image.

The students used charcoal to create their art pieces. With charcoal, there is an ability to smudge any mistakes and re-create an image as often as needed until they feel it is right. One student re-drew the eyes on a portrait piece over and over, maybe ten times before he felt he'd created the look he wanted.

The students spent hours in the art studio, or outside in the yard drawing on huge easels in the sunshine. The course was rigorous and demanding, but the atmosphere was serene, charged with concentration and absorption. No doubt, this was a form of active meditation, you could see it on their faces, their minds and bodies were relaxed and gone was any post-exam anxiety.

All of the students built an amazing art portfolio. They then went off for their summer holidays looking refreshed, relaxed and happy.

Samples of the art pieces they created can be seen at aturas-art.com.

Could this be an answer for access to quality arts education? Every June, immersive arts programmes could take place in schools across the nation. Volunteer artists could be asked to help. Art galleries would be freely open to schools. Just four weeks out of the year, dedicated to help students feel like artists, feel like they are creative, and encourage openness traits and right brain function. Who knows where the seeds of a programme such as this would grow.

The stories in the following chapter, will hopefully illustrate how we achieved successful results in the secondary school

All names have been changed.

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CHAPTER 6
Student Stories

The Story of Sophie

Sophie was fourteen when she arrived for her first day with us. She had arrived from another school where she had faced a really challenging social situation.

Sophie looked towards the floor and her hair shielded her face, so you could never quite see what was going on with her expression. As with many young people who feel wounded, it is really difficult for them to look into anybody's eyes, especially people who are unfamiliar to them. So I never demanded eye contact. I talked to Sophie as I kept busy straightening up the room or sorting out a box of pens. Sophie talked in very quiet hushed tones, I quickly realised that she needed to re-build her equilibrium to feel stable in a classroom setting. Fortunately she loved to draw, and so I provided a large drawing book and some pens. I told the teachers not to call on her in lessons. The other students invited her to join in with various activities, but she always declined. Any time she wasn't in lessons she could be found huddled over her art book.

We were in-between The Portal Projects, so I wanted to introduce something which would connect Sophie with the other students. I told the class I wanted to produce a communal art piece. We stacked the tables against the walls and laid large sheets of white paper on the floor. I told the students we would be re-creating a Jackson Pollock piece of art. Armed with a paint brush and a pot of paint the students started to drop spots of paint onto the paper. At the beginning, everyone stayed in their own place, but before long they realised they would have to mix it up to get something interesting on the paper and they started to move around. Somebody called Sophie over to add some of her yellow paint to their blue. Before long the classroom looked and sounded like it contained a group of five year old kids. It was fabulous. The results looked really good, and the painting was placed on the wall of the classroom.

The activity removed several layers of the wall Sophie had installed around herself; it was a really good start.

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The following week we were testing soil samples as we wanted to make an earth structure. We had an expert come to give a class on how people still make habitats out of earth clay and water. It was a messy job and the students hands were covered with the wet earth mixture. Sophie suggested we put our hand prints on the wall and create a cave painting look to the classroom. Rather than put them on the wall, I quickly taped up sheets of paper, the students then lined up opposite the wall and placed their prints on the paper, all at the same time. I have a photo of them which looks like a vertical game of Twister.

Things were improving for Sophie. I had become used to seeing a sort of veil across her eyes, which made them disappear. Then one day, I walked into class and Sophie looked up to say hello. I felt myself draw backwards as I met her eyes. For the first time the veil had lifted and I could see bright green sparkly eyes, full of light and life. The change seemed so dramatic, I talked to her mum later that day to tell her what I had seen, and asked her if she had noticed the same thing. She had, all of Sophie's family had noticed the change, it was as if she had "come alive again." Sophie soon became comfortable in her own skin, she was able to mix with the other students and she was a lovely warm and thoughtful girl. I talked to Sophie before she left our school to go on to college, she told me how she was so happy to have had the time to get back to herself and how being at the school had brought her back to life.

It is not anything we do specifically to achieve these results, it is more of what we don't do. We don't coerce the students into learning, we don't treat them as if they are inferior and less intelligent than adults, we don't pretend we've got all of the answers. We want them to feel excited for their future and free to pursue their own ideas for their life.

In watching this "coming to life," with many students, it was always initially visible in their eyes. It always brought to mind a few of the lyrics from the words of the song "Blackbird," by Paul McCartney:

Blackbird singing in the dead of night
Take these broken wings and learn to fly

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All your life
 You were only waiting for this moment to arise
 Blackbird singing in the dead of night
 Take these sunken eyes and learn to see
 All your life
 You were only waiting for this moment to be free

The song has a deep meaning. McCartney had this to say about writing the lyrics:

I was sitting around my acoustic guitar and I'd heard about the civil rights troubles that were happening in the sixties in Alabama (and) Mississippi...so that was in my mind. And I just thought it'd be really good if I could write something...if you ever reached any of the people going through those problems, it might kind of give them a little bit of hope. So I wrote Blackbird. In England, a bird is a girl. So I was thinking about a black girl going through this...now's your time to arise...set yourself free.

The Story of John

We had a guitar-playing student join us at the secondary school.

John's parents come to visit the school, and they tell me about their fifteen year old son. I have heard the story many times before from other parents. They tell me how John is a good person, and talk about his interests, his love of music and guitar playing, but their cheery facade hides a underlying message of despair. I have also seen this look many times before, a shadow in the eyes, one of hurt and concern and confusion. John's parents, who couldn't be more lovely, eventually tell me that John is really not doing well at school, he has tried several schools and none of them have been a positive experience. His current school has him sitting in the 'base' most of the time (a base is a room far from everyone else where students go to sit and stew in their predicament, a total banishment from the community). We talk for around an hour and a half, I tell them about our school and they chat to some of the students. Then they arrange to have John visit the next week.

John ambles into school on the morning of his visit day. He is a big

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guy, about six feet tall, and has quite an intimidating, serious “don’t mess with me” look. He doesn’t smile and has no eye contact with anybody. His whole body language announces how awkward he feels in this new environment. The other students read the language clearly, instinctively respecting the ‘no go’ area radiating around him and give him space. Towards the teachers, he is respectful, but wary. School and teachers have caused him to arrive at the point in his life where he is closed down and distrustful.

John spends the morning in English class, where he struggles. After lunch we go for a walk in the local woodlands. He hangs back, walking slowly, and I fall into step with him. He glances sideways, wondering what I want, waiting for some sort of teacher talk. “So, I hear all is not going too well at school” I say. He lightly nods his head and looks down. “I hated school” I say. His head does an involuntarily micro-swivel in my direction before he looks back at the ground. “Do you know what I hated most?” I ask him. He shrugs and edges away from me, “All of the rules” I say. “That’s why we don’t have any rules at our school, well only the ones the students put in place.” John says nothing, but his pace quickens. He either is feeling better about the walk or the school, or is trying to get away from me.

We stop at a stream and the students go to their usual sitting spot. John looks to me and I point to a tree stump for him to sit on. I tell them to quiet down their minds by initially taking a few deep breaths, and then to focus on the sounds of the woodlands. Can they hear birds? A rustling in the long grass? The idea is to not start a story about the sounds in your head, but just to simply be aware of them, without judgment. This is a way for teenagers to access the benefits of meditation without feeling self-conscious, or ‘getting it wrong.’ What could be easier than listening for sounds? The benefits were obvious and the walk back to school is always quieter and more reflective.

It is muddy in the woodlands and John hasn’t brought boots, I’d forgotten to tell his mum to pack a pair. He was offered spare boots before the walk, but had declined. When we get back to school, his trainers are caked in slushy mud up to his ankles. Some of the kids

express their horror at his messed up trainers. “It’s okay, they’re easily cleaned” he says quietly. It is the smallest interaction, but it is enough. We’ve managed to put a tiny crack in the armor, just enough to let in a sliver of light, to see there is hope for John, loads of hope. We can definitely pull him back.

I talk to John at the end of the day and tell him about how the school works, I also tell him that classes are optional, there is nothing he ‘has’ to do. If he wants to join in, the structured classes are for English, maths, physics and computer classes, all other subjects are integrated into projects.

I ask one of the students to run through the current project with John, who sits looking bewildered. I remind him, if he doesn’t want to do the lessons or the projects, it would not be a problem, he could do something else, something he was interested in instead. He nods his head and looks like he just doesn’t know what to say.

John enrolls in the school the following week. It is a slow process, the students try to banter with him, in an attempt to prize him out of his shell. He is very defensive and responds biting, asking what is meant by a particular comment. The banterer backs off for a while, unfazed and recognising the need for patience. John is an observer for many weeks, flickeringly watching and furtively listening to this new culture, unsure of what to make of it, wondering where his place in the set up is. He is assessing the situation, minute by minute, hour by hour and day by day. You can tell he is confused about the hierarchy, who are the leaders, who are the nerds, who are the “base” kids. Many of the usual classroom classifications don’t seem to exist and it confuses him. He struggles to find his place, how to be, who to be. The other students, skilled at communication tactics have a way of including him without confronting him. It fills me with a sense of pride and love for them all, to see the attempts they make in

trying to gather him into the group.

Me and the other teachers take time to talk to John, giving him loads of feedback and encouragement on anything he attempts. Another student and the maths teacher also play guitar and they all often bring their guitars into school and have a lunchtime jamming session. Everyone tells John how good he is.

The new project is part of a series about land ownership. The two groups are tasked with selecting a country to illustrate what happens when there is a disagreement about land ownership. One group

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selects the Falklands in 1982 and the other group, which John is part of, selects America in the mid 1800's. John's group focus on one character in particular, Sitting Bull, who totally captures the imagination of the teenagers as they put together the story of how the chief put up a fight for his land when the U.S. government tried to take it.

John works well within the small team and is given specific areas to research on and report back to his team. Part of the project brief is to create a mini documentary complete with voice overs. This is presented to the rest of the group. John finds this quite challenging but the competitive bantering between the two groups about who will produce the best presentation introduces an element of excitement and fun which he enjoys. The kids are always trying to outdo each other, make a better video a funnier presentation, more elaborate visuals. John gets caught up in the action and he is away.

We see his confidence grow as he becomes more comfortable within the group. Gradually over the following months, his head lifts and his shoulders straighten as he relaxes and softens. Three months later, John is a different boy. He walks in to school in the morning with a smile, crinkly blue eyes lit up, full of intelligence and fun, he asks how everyone is doing, did they have a good weekend?

He applies for a placement at a music college, and easily secures it. He is sad to tell us he is going, saying he has really enjoyed his time with us. We've loved having him at the school and he is talked about fondly for a long time afterwards.

His mum sends a lovely email after he leaves:

John's time at your school has had a really positive effect on his confidence. He has matured since attending and met really lovely people there. It was very much what he needed at the time and has given him self belief and the ability to express himself which will put him in very good stead as he embarks on his new journey. We/he will never forget and always appreciate the time he spent there.

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John had needed a place to feel safe, people to trust and time to connect back to himself.

Part III Connection To Their Future

CHAPTER 1 Educational Disconnection

In asking the question of what type of education young people will need for their future, we first need to question the quality of education in the present. We need to know if the current educational offering is responding to the needs of the students.

This is difficult to deconstruct as education is a constantly shifting pawn on the political chessboard. Just when you think you're beginning to understand the layout of the board, it's checkmate and the beginning of a new game brings along new players with new moves.

Knowledge of the historical moves might help bring awareness. If you are so inclined, a chronicle of the history of education in England can be found at educationengland.org. The author of the site, Derek Gillard, an ex head-teacher, has put together an impressive body of work reporting on each educational stage from the 16th century to 2018. It is a huge task to unravel the history of educational policy, it can leave you feeling as if you're missing the bigger picture.

A YouTube video shows people passing a basketball around. The narrator in the video asks you to count the number of times the people in the white shirts pass the ball. At the end of the video he tells you, it's fifteen passes, he then asks if you – if you've spotted the gorilla! Whilst you've been busy keeping your eye on the ball, counting the moves, you've totally missed the guy in the gorilla suit walking into the middle of the group beating his chest and walking off.

There is also a website: theinvisiblegorilla.com, and a book of the same name. Daniel Gilbert, Professor of Psychology at Harvard University and author of *Stumbling on Happiness* says the book “shows how

psychological illusions bedevil every aspect of our public and private lives.”

Author Russell Revlin in his book, *Cognition: Theory and Practice*, says: "We must be selective in our attention by focusing on some events to the detriment of others. This is because attention is a resource that needs to be distributed to those events that are important."

Whilst we are watching the play of educational politics, focusing on the balls being passed around, we are not seeing the big picture of the game. This is how education is played, we get distracted by the “in the air” comparative arguments. Which are the best schools: comprehensives, grammars, academies or independents? Do we need to adjust performance scales? Where do we allocate funding? How do we address social mobility?

It’s a psychological illusion.

We have to be selective in our attention towards education. We have to ignore the balls flying about in the air and wrestle with the guy in the gorilla suit.

So, how do you wrestle with a guy in a gorilla suit? Firstly, you need someone who understands his moves.

In an attempt to do this, and for some answers on uncovering the psychological illusions within education, we will look across the pond to the wisdom of John Taylor Gatto and Charlotte Thomson Iserbyt.

John Taylor Gatto

Gatto, who sadly passed away last year, wrote extensively about what was, and still is, happening in too many classrooms. His writing taught me so much about how we are damaging children.

Gatto was an American teacher, author and lecturer. His books include: *Dumbing Us Down*, *The Underground History of American Education*, *Weapons of Mass Instruction* and *A different Kind of Teacher*. He also has many videos on YouTube.

But be warned, I have talked to many parents who have taken their children out of mainstream education after becoming aware of

Gatto's work.

The development skills, which we focused on in both schools through Project Based Learning and Portal Projects, included: connection to the world, maturity, curiosity, attention, ability to plan for the future, kindness, compassion, independence, confidence and open to new challenges. These are the qualities, which Gatto claims are being stripped by the mainstream school experience.

Allow me to lead you into the world of Gatto. He says:

- The children I teach are indifferent to the adult world. This defies the experience of thousands of years. A close study of what big people were up to was always the most exciting occupation of youth, but nobody wants to grow up these days and who can blame them? Toys are us.
- The children I teach have almost no curiosity and what they do have is transitory; they cannot concentrate for very long, even on things they choose to do. Can you see a connection between the bells ringing again and again to change classes and this phenomenon of evanescent attention?
- The children I teach have a poor sense of the future, of how tomorrow is inextricably linked to today. As I said before, they have a continuous present, the exact moment they are at is the boundary of their consciousness.
- The children I teach are ahistorical, they have no sense of how past has predestined their own present, limiting their choices, shaping their values and lives.
- The children I teach are cruel to each other, they lack compassion for misfortune, they laugh at weakness, and they have contempt for people whose need for help shows too plainly.
- The children I teach are uneasy with intimacy or candor. Because they are not who they represent themselves to be the disguise wears thin in the presence of intimacy so intimate relationships have to be avoided.
- The children I teach are materialistic, following the lead of schoolteachers who materialistically "grade" everything - and television mentors who offer everything in the world for free.

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- The children I teach are dependent, passive, and timid in the presence of new challenges. This is frequently masked by surface bravado, or by anger or aggressiveness but underneath is a vacuum without fortitude.

Gatto was named New York City Teacher of the Year three times, and was then awarded the New York State Teacher. He resigned from teaching, and announced it in the Wall street Journal in the following article on July 25th, 1991:

I Quit, I Think

I've taught public school for 26 years but I just can't do it anymore. For years I asked the local school board and superintendent to let me teach a curriculum that doesn't hurt kids, but they had other fish to fry. So I'm going to quit, I think.

I've come slowly to understand what it is I really teach: A curriculum of confusion, class position, arbitrary justice, vulgarity, rudeness, disrespect for privacy, indifference to quality, and utter dependency. I teach how to fit into a world I don't want to live in.

I just can't do it anymore. I can't train children to wait to be told what to do; I can't train people to drop what they are doing when a bell sounds; I can't persuade children to feel some justice in their class placement when there isn't any, and I can't persuade children to believe teachers have valuable secrets they can acquire by becoming our disciples. That isn't true.

Government schooling is the most radical adventure in history. It kills the family by monopolizing the best times of childhood and by teaching disrespect for home and parents.

An exaggeration? Hardly. Parents aren't meant to participate in our form of schooling, rhetoric to the contrary. My orders as schoolteacher are to make children fit an animal training system, not to help each find his or her personal path.

The whole blueprint of school procedure is Egyptian, not Greek or Roman. It grows from the faith that human value is a scarce thing, represented symbolically by the narrow peak of a pyramid.

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That idea passed into American history through the Puritans. It found its “scientific” presentation in the bell curve, along which talent supposedly apportions itself by some Iron Law of biology.

It’s a religious idea and school is its church. New York City hires me to be a priest. I offer rituals to keep heresy at bay. I provide documentation to justify the heavenly pyramid.

Socrates foresaw that if teaching became a formal profession something like this would happen. Professional interest is best served by making what is easy to do seem hard; by subordinating laity to priesthood. School has become too vital a jobs project, contract-giver and protector of the social order to allow itself to be “re-formed.” It has political allies to guard its marches.

That’s why reforms come and go without changing much. Even reformers can’t imagine school much different.

David learns to read at age four; Rachel, at age nine. In normal development, when both are 13, you can’t tell which one learned first — the five-year spread means nothing at all. But in school I will label Rachel “learning disabled” and slow David down a bit, too.

For a paycheck, I adjust David to depend on me to tell him when to go and stop. He won’t outgrow that dependency. I identify Rachel as discount merchandise, “special education.” After a few months she’ll be locked into her place forever.

In 26 years of teaching rich kids and poor, I almost never met a “learning disabled” child; hardly every met a “gifted and talented” one, either. Like all school categories, these are sacred myths, created by the human imagination. They derive from questionable values we never examine because they preserve the temple of schooling.

That’s the secret behind short-answer tests, bells, uniform time blocks, age grading, standardization, and all the rest of the school religion punishing our nation.

There isn’t a right way to become educated; there are as many ways as fingerprints. We don’t need state-certified teachers to make education happen—that probably guarantees it won’t.

How much more evidence is necessary? Good schools don’t

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need more money or a longer year; they need real free-market choices, variety that speaks to every need and runs risks. We don't need a national curriculum, or national testing either. Both initiatives arise from ignorance of how people learn, or a deliberate indifference to it.

I can't teach this way any longer. If you hear of a job where I don't have to hurt kids to make a living, let me know. Come fall I'll be looking for work, I think.

Later that year Gatto was the subject of a show at Carnegie Hall called "An Evening With John Taylor Gatto," which launched a career of public speaking in the area of school reform, which has taken Gatto all over the U.S. and to many countries around the world.

Gatto pointed out that, historically, parents didn't accept that strangers could teach their children:

Our form of compulsory schooling is an invention of the state of Massachusetts around 1850. It was resisted - sometimes with guns - by an estimated eighty per cent of the Massachusetts population, the last outpost in Barnstable on Cape Cod not surrendering its children until the 1880's when the area was seized by militia and children marched to school under guard.

I wonder how many more centuries we have to see this playing on in front of our eyes before we say there's something crazy going on here. Is there an idea, more radical, in the history of the human race than turning your children over to total strangers who you know nothing about, and having those strangers work on your child's mind, out of your sight, for a period of twelve years? Could there be a more radical idea than that? Back in colonial days in America, if you proposed that as an idea, they'd burn you at the stake you mad person. It's a mad idea.

In his book *A Different Kind of Teacher*, Gatto tells us that the U.S. (and evidently also the U.K) borrowed their teacher training practices from Prussia, based on three premises:

- The state is sovereign, the only true parent of children.

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- Intellectual training is not the purpose of state schooling – obedience and subordination are.
- The schoolroom and the workplace shall be dumbed down into simplified fragments that anyone, however dull, can memorize and operate.

To understand how educational training practices travelled from Prussia to the U.S. in the mid 1800's, it turns out to be a flukish occurrence which took place during Horace Mann's honeymoon. Mann, a student of law, tutor of Latin and Greek and Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, was fascinated when he witnessed the newly implemented style of education in Prussia.

In Eugene Anderson's book *Nationalism and the Culture Crisis in Prussia*, he tells us about Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814). Fichte was a German philosopher who was humiliated by his homeland being invaded by Napoleon's armies. The main source of his frustration was because he had supported the French Revolution which took place in 1789, seeing the monarchy replaced by a dictator, Napoléon Bonaparte. Fichte then turned his revolutionary ideals towards his own nation and gave a series of lectures between 1807 and 1808. In these lectures, he promoted an education which would be designed to raise standards, and eliminate the shame felt by his fellow Germans due to being defeated by the French. He wanted every German boy between the ages of 7-14 to be trained in obedience. He also wanted to separate classes by subjects, age and ability.

Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) was a British philosopher, mathematician, historian, writer, essayist, social critic, political activist, and Nobel Laureate. In his book *The Impact of Science on Society* (1952), he writes about Fichte:

It is to be expected that advances in physiology and psychology will give governments much more control over individual mentality than they now have even in totalitarian countries.

Fichte laid it down that “education should aim at destroying free will, so that, after pupils have left school, they shall be incapable, throughout the rest of their lives, of thinking or acting otherwise than as their schoolmasters would have

wished.”

This was the educational system which so impressed Horace Mann that he took it back to the U.S., where it attracted the attention of Ford, Carnegie, Vanderbilt and Morgan. These business magnates, industrialists and bankers thought this system was just the ticket to educate the young and prepare them to fill their factories, businesses and banks with efficient and compliant workers.

The system also filtered out to “The Committee of Ten,” who were heads of universities, brought together by The National Education Association to provide order in the days of competing academic philosophies.

In 1892 the representatives recommended the standardisation of the high school curriculum, including lesson plans, ubiquitous text books, graded instruction and teacher training. They also arranged for universities to implement subject education courses and put forward that "leading teachers could show other teachers...by precept and example, how to [teach] better."

Those standards are basically still in the same format in much of the Western world.

In *Weapons of Mass Instruction* Gatto tells us about William Torrey Harris who was the US. Commissioner of Education from 1889 to 1906. In *The Philosophy of Education*, 1906, Harris writes:

Ninety-nine (students) out of a hundred are automata, careful to walk in prescribed paths, careful to follow the prescribed custom. This is not an accident but the result of substantial education which, scientifically defined, is the subsumption of the individual.

The great purpose of school (self-alienation) can be realized better in dark, airless, ugly places... It is to master the physical self, to transcend the beauty of nature. School should develop the power to withdraw from the external world.

In *The Underground History of American Education*, Gatto says:

In case you hadn't noticed, schools aren't safe places for

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the young to guess at the meanings of things. Only an imbecile would pretend that school isn't a pressure-cooker of psychodrama. Wherever children are gathered into groups by compulsion, a pecking order soon emerges in which malice, mockery, intimidation of the weak, envy and a whole range of other nasty characteristics hold sway.

Article "I Quit, I Think" re-printed in full with kind permission from John Taylor Gatto (1935-2018)

Thanks John, for your life's work in education.

For more information: johntaylorgatto.com

I eagerly read Gatto's book *The Underground History of American Education*, a tome of a book, A4 in size and almost 400 pages long. It took him almost ten years to write. I read it like you would read a novel that pulls you in and doesn't let you go, even when the clock is screaming 2am. It poured salve on my churning desire to understand what was going on with education, how did we get here?

Reading Gatto leaves a heavy heart. I discovered him when my sons were in their second primary school, a private school in the south of England. I carefully chose the school and moved my family hundreds of miles away, because of the school's claim of focusing on a socially strong culture, with conflict resolution sessions to manage any difficulties. It also claimed to be a school which valued creativity. Non of the claims were true.

I found a note I had scrawled in the margins of the *Underground* book: "Finding Gatto is like being lost in a foreign country and finding someone who speaks your language."

I'm sure Gatto's views don't fit in with everyone's experience, thankfully. However it was my experience in many schools – small village schools, big suburban schools, private schools and Steiner schools. They did not provide encouragement for children to practice self-discipline, to regulate emotions or to develop intellectually.

That might sound like heavy demands on a system set up for the delivery and testing of information, and is no way a critique of those teachers who are doing their best to work with masses of children who don't want to be consumers of information. However, I think it is what education should be. It is the right of every child, even at

primary level, to pursue their potential, develop their intellect and learn to socialise.

Another strong voice from across the pond is that of Charlotte Thomson Iserbyt, author of *The Deliberate Dumbing Down of America*. The book is available to download for free from her website www.deliberatedumbingdown.com. The front cover of the book contains a note which reads: “This book will change forever the way you look at your child’s education.”

Iserbyt was a senior policy advisor in the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the US Department of Education during the time of President Reagan. From the chapter headings entitled, “The Sowing of The Seeds” in late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, through the “Sick Sixties,” and the “Noxious Nineties,” Iserbyt chronicles the history of American education from her own documentation.

Iserbyt begins her book with a quote from a speech given in 1973 by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn:

Coexistence on this tightly knit earth should be viewed as an existence not only without wars, but also without (the government) telling us how to live, what to say, what to think, what to know, and what not to know.

It is in this vein of freedom of thought that Iserbyt illustrates what she has witnessed as the real purposes of American education - rejecting individualism in favour of collectivism, and rejecting truth and absolutes in favour of tolerance, situational ethics and consensus.

In the introduction to the book, Sarah Leslie tells us that the main message is to expose the conditioning in education which has a purpose of creating a “robotic child – one who cannot make connections, repeat an act, nor recall a fact unless provided with the necessary stimuli and environment.” The conclusion is for the reformers to create a “dumbed-down global workforce.”

In a presentation, Iserbyt claims that corporations don’t want educated people, they want drones. Little workers who they can move all over the planet. Iserbyt goes on to say: “They (corporations) have to create moral and academic chaos.”

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Iserbyt suggests looking up the “Salina Kansas final exam” for eighth grade (age 13-14) from 1898. What you find is a list of questions, relating to grammar, arithmetic, orthography, U.S. history and geography. The questions include:

- Write a composition of about 150 words and show therein that you understand the practical use of the rules of grammar.
- What is meant by the following: Alphabet, phonetic orthography, etymology, syllabication?
- Name and define the Fundamental Rules of Arithmetic.
- Give the epochs into which U.S. History is divided.
- Give an account of the discovery of America by Columbus.
- Relate the causes and results of the Revolutionary War.
- Show the territorial growth of the United States.
- Tell what you can of the history of Kansas.
- What is climate? Upon what does climate depend?
- Name and locate the principal trade centers of the U.S.
- Name all the republics of Europe and give capital of each.

Alongside these open-ended questions, the paper also asks for memory specific tasks such as: Name events from the following dates: 1607, 1620, 1800, 1849, and 1865.

Here in the U.K., there are also claims that educational standards have been dumbed down. A Guardian article entitled “Victorian exam tests modern standards,” tells us:

David Thomas, the chief executive of the Careers Research and Advisory Centre, an education charity, said the exam paper - published in *The Spectator* magazine - highlighted the present level of dumbing down examinations. Most of the questions could not be attempted today even by A-level students. He says:

At the high level at which this paper is aimed we have certainly dumbed down. But significantly more people at least achieve some level of learning today than ever did in 1898.

It's a very challenging paper. If I'm criticising, it's heavy on factual knowledge and mechanical exercises, and low on analysis and understanding, and the creative side.

But it's a fascinating picture of what they were asking candidates to do just over 100 years ago.

The Cambridge Assessment website points to exams from the mid-1800's saying that learning large amounts of information was the expected norm from students:

The examiners looked for detailed and accurate knowledge, and they would not have apologised for 'training the memories' of students. But they also were quick to encourage the students not simply to cram facts to pass. However, in the examination system the pressure to perform created its own dynamic. Examiners' reports began to express disappointment that students did not demonstrate that they actually understood what they had learnt.

From exams taken in 1858, examiners commented:

Their answers, even when accurate, showed a general uniformity of expression which seemed to imply that meagre handbooks had been placed before the Students to be 'got up' and that little attempt had been made by their instructors to excite the interest of their pupils by questionings or remarks of their own."

If Gatto and Iserbyt have provided a chronicle of educational sub-standard provision, who can we look to for an overview of what our children and young people will need from education to connect to their future with optimism and confidence?

The views of the people in the next chapter could start the conversation.

CHAPTER 2

The Imagination Society

Dr. Yong Zhao

Dr. Zhao is the Foundation Distinguished Professor in the School of Education at the University of Kansas. He has published over 100 articles and 30 books about the future of education

I read his book *World Class Learners – Educating Creative and Entrepreneurial Students* in 2012, in which he proposed two paradigms of education:

- Employee-oriented: a prescribed offering and a defined path in response to authority and economics producing a compliant and willing workforce.
- Entrepreneur-oriented: an aim to cultivate individual talents and enhance individual strengths producing diverse, creative individuals who are ready to define their own path.

Zhao's ideas offer a fresh, innovative and inspiring view of how we could be educating our children. His book talks about the need for entrepreneurs and what nurtures the entrepreneurial spirit. He also writes about the 'Achievement Gap versus the Entrepreneur Gap.' The book also includes a call for de-standardising schools in the chapter – 'The Wrong Bet: Why Common Curriculum and Standards Won't Help.'

I met Dr. Zhao when he was a speaker at the Scottish Learning Festival in 2016. Also a keynote speaker was John Swinney, the newly placed Education Minister for Scotland.

Swinney bounded on stage first, all bold and promising. He talked for about an hour and sounded convincing, as politicians usually do. He told a story of visiting a school whilst the students were opening their exam results, and although many of the students were pleased with their findings, a group of parents pulled him to the side to tell him how difficult the process had been for their children, such a large workload had produced high levels of anxiety and misery.

He stated that upcoming exams will see a removal of several units

and National 5 qualifications and Highers will see a reduction in assessment time.

Swinney went on to say that Scottish education has been "cluttered", and promised that guidance for teachers contained "literally thousands of pages" which would be removed. His talk focused on tweaking the system, making things a bit better, a bit easier for teachers and students.

Then Dr. Yong Zhao came onto the stage. No tweaking for him, he put forward the need for radical reform, claiming that schools around the globe are mostly neglecting to provide preparation for a future that will require working in a completely new way. He also said that most schools fail to create environments which recognizes students as individuals, with creativity, passions and unique skills.

He was an excellent speaker entertaining the audience with a story about his early childhood growing up as a peasant in a small village in China. He wasn't very good at riding oxen so his father sent him to school, he said he was really pleased his father didn't send him to remedial oxen riding classes, but recognized that it wasn't his thing.

It was an inspiring, informative and entertaining talk, which centered around the following points:

- Entrepreneurship-Oriented Education (desperately needed).
- Correlations between PISA* and Entrepreneurship Indicators (there aren't any) .
- Decline of Creativity by Age (an alarming fact).
- The Future of Education and Work (neglected).
- The Fourth Industrial Revolution (eye-opening, more later).

*PISA - Programme for International Student Assessment, countries that have higher PISA scores have lower entrepreneurship activities.

Fourth Industrial Revolution

One of Dr. Zhao's focus points, "The Fourth Industrial Revolution" is a term coined by German engineer and economist, Klaus Schwab who is the founder and executive chairman of the World Economic Forum. The industrial revolutions began with the mechanisation of production through water and steam power. The next revolution

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introduced electricity. Then next came information technology, electronics and automation.

Schwab says the fourth revolutions will see:

New technologies, merging the physical, digital and biological worlds in ways that create both huge promise and potential peril. The speed, breadth and depth of this revolution is forcing us to rethink how countries develop, how organizations create value and even what it means to be human.”

Information from the World Economic Forum website states:

We stand on the brink of a technological revolution that will fundamentally alter the way we live, work, and relate to one another. In its scale, scope, and complexity, the transformation will be unlike anything humankind has experienced before. We do not yet know just how it will unfold, but one thing is clear: the response to it must be integrated and comprehensive, involving all stakeholders of the global polity, from the public and private sectors to academia and civil society.

A video from the same site brings us some messages ringing an ominous sounding bell, references to super humans and the ability to access people's thoughts and emotions. Artificial Intelligence elicits mistrust from many. However there are other powerful messages in the video:

We need a different economic model, a shift in the system that will allow us to meet the basic needs of every human on the planet, that will live within planetary means, that will be fairer and that will be focused on its key goal, not on growth, per se, but on maximizing human wellbeing. History tells us that a value shift is triggered by the creation of a new story about how we want to live.”

Stewart Wallis, New Economics Foundation, UK

The prediction of five million jobs lost by 2020 to technology is serious but it is not the main question. Construction, manufacturing, services, public health

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and education – these industries will still exist. The main question is, what will be the future of work? How will we define work? How will we share the wealth?
 Sharan Burrows, International Trade Union Confederation

We need a different economic model, a shift in the system that will allow us to meet the basic needs of every human on the planet, that will live within planetary means, that will be fairer and that will be focused on its key goal, not on growth, per se, but on maximizing human wellbeing. History tells us that a value shift is triggered by the creation of a new story about how we want to live.

Steward Wallis, New Economics Foundation, UK

It's really about a diverse safe, healthy and just world with clean air, clean water, clean soil, clean energy.

William McDonough, Stanford University

The reason we live in cities is no different today than it was 10,000 years ago. Even if we have networks connecting us, we still want to have places where we meet in person. This means that the places where we work and live are much closer to each other. A city where we don't need to have big supply chains to produce things, where many things can be sourced locally, thanks to 3D printing and robotics. If we are able to do something to transform cities, to make them more efficient then the impact can be huge.

Carlo Ratti, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Now we dearly need new education or new training.

Hiroaki Nakanishi, Hitachi, Japan

I have just given an award to a kid who is 18 years old. He discovered something very unique. He came up with an idea of how to get better yields of seeds of corn - perforating the seeds will produce more food. He didn't go to university, how does he get all of that knowledge?

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He told me "I've been watching YouTube since the age of 12. I am so interested in everything about it."

The world is really open to learning. The thing is how do you give the incentive to your kids to do that?

Carlos Moeda, European Commission, Belgium

When the mind knows itself A potential new renaissance that restructures itself in terms of our relationship to life, to the planet and to work.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, University of Massachusetts

The Importance of the Humanities in the New Revolution

Many great messages to consider: a shift in the system, Maximizing human well being, A new story of how we want to live, locally sourced, transformative, efficient, defining the future of work. These are the messages which will give students incentive and call them to action. These are the messages Dr. Yong Zhao is shouting about.

However, maybe one of the most important messages came from Jon Kabat-Zinn "When the mind knows itself...." He studied with Buddhist teachers and integrated what he learned with science. He created a stress reduction programme which is used in hospitals throughout the U.S.

Knowing their own minds, and why they and other people think and behave the way they do, is predicted to be a valuable skill for young people to manage their future.

Tony Wan from EdSurge, wrote an article about the 2018 World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE) which took place in New York. The article's heading was "The Most Important Skills for the 4th Industrial Revolution? Try Ethics and Philosophy."

The focal point for the summit was to ask how society should prepare the students of today for the workplace of tomorrow.

Wan reports that, although there has been a push for STEM skills,

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panelists at the summit put forward alternative educational skills that we need to strive towards such as philosophy, ethics and morality. Wan also writes about a Dr. Alan Goodman, whose achievements include:

Author of books on international affairs published by Harvard, Princeton and Yale University.

Executive Dean of the School of Foreign Service.

Professor at Georgetown University.

Served as Presidential Briefing Coordinator for the Director of Central Intelligence in the Carter Administration.

The first American professor to lecture at the Foreign Affairs College of Beijing.

Helped create the first U.S. academic exchange program in Moscow.

Developed the diplomatic training program of the Foreign Ministry of Vietnam.

Has a Ph.D. in Government from Harvard.

Has a M.P.A. from the John F. Kennedy School of Government.

Has a B.S. from Northwestern University.

Holds honorary degrees from Chatham, Susquehanna, and Toyota universities, the American International University in London; Dickinson, Middlebury, Mount Ida, and Ramapo colleges; The State University of New York; and the University of York.

Has received awards from Georgetown, Johns Hopkins, South Florida, and Tufts universities.

Received the Légion d'honneur from France, and the Royal Norwegian Order of Merit.

Awarded the inaugural Gilbert Medal for Internationalization by Universitas 21.

I list those achievements to show that the man might know a thing or two. One of Dr. Goodman main concerns about education is the drop in the proportion of humanities majors at colleges. He says:

Moral judgment and ethics could be as revolutionary as artificial intelligence in this next revolution, just as the internet was in the last revolution...We're entering a time when schools are eliminating programs in humanities, and philosophy departments are becoming an endangered species.

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Why are the humanities an important part of our technological future? Goodman answers that question by saying that the transformation of societies will involve creating new technologies and those who build the technologies will need a solid grounding in morals and ethics.

Wan finishes his article by saying that panelists highlighted the importance of right mindset in education, how children need to be equipped to face whatever changes are in their future.

The Imagination Society

The World Economic Forum listed some of its “Key Moments” from its January 2019 Annual Meeting on its website.

Two items looked really interesting. Firstly:

A budget for wellbeing from New Zealand:

The Prime Minister of New Zealand, Jacinda Ardern announced a new “wellbeing” budget to focus on the quality of people’s lives and how the long-term impact of government policies affect lives.

Then, a second item: Inspirational speeches from Entrepreneurial advocate and Chairman and co-founder of Alibaba Group, Jack Ma:

There are no experts of tomorrow, only of yesterday...How can we teach kids to be more creative and do things that machines cannot do? Machines have chips, but human beings have hearts ... Education should move in this direction.

However, a third item was, in my opinion, the most intriguing. News from Japan reported on their plan for a transition to the “5.0 Society.” Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced that the Fourth Industrial revolution would bring about this new 5.0 Society, which is defined as the “Imagination Society.”

The Imagination Society! What does that entail?

A report from the Japan Business Federation “Keidanren” states that the 5.0 Society will require humans to be imaginative and creative in

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order to materialize their ideas and make the necessary changes within politics, culture and the economy.

The report lists the previous four societies as:

#1 (from the beginning of human existence) The Hunting Society. Co-existence with nature.

#2 (from 13000 BC) The Agrarian Society. Cultivation of the land and the creation of settlements.

#3 (from the end of the 18th century) The Industrial Society. Invention of steam, mass production.

#4 (from the end of the 20th century) The Information Society. Invention of computers and distribution of information.

#5 (from 21st century) The Super Smart Society. The ability to co-create.

Comparisons are then made between the constraints of the current “Fourth Society” which consists of: efficiency, suppression of individuality, vulnerability, anxiety and high environmental impact.

The new vision is one of liberation and a societal shift:

- People will be liberated from focus on efficiency. Instead, the emphasis will be placed on satisfying individual needs, solving problems and creating value.
- People will be able to live, learn and work, free from suppressive influences on individuality, such as discrimination by gender, race, nationality, etc. and alienation because of their values and ways of thinking.
- People will be liberated from the disparity caused by the concentration of wealth and information.
- People will be liberated from anxiety about terrorism, disasters and cyber-attacks, and live with security with strengthened safety nets for unemployment and poverty.
- People will be liberated from resources and environmental constraints, and able to live sustainable lives in any region.
- In short, we will make Society 5.0 a society in which anyone can create value any time, anywhere, with security and in harmony with nature.

In order to achieve this vision, the report says there are five walls to break through:

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1. The wall of the Ministries and Agencies – National strategies and integration of government systems.
2. The wall of the legal system – Development of laws toward implementation of advanced techniques.
3. The wall of technologies – Cyber-security, commitment to R&D.
4. The wall of human resources – Education reform, towards dynamic engagement of all citizens.
5. The wall of social acceptance – Man-machine implications on society, ethical and philosophical issues on an individual and humanistic level.

Additional information about breaking through the wall of human resources includes a wish for citizens who think independently, and for education to foster creativity, improve digital skills and promote lifelong education.

Japan's Education Minister, Yoshimasa Hayashi has ideas about the reforming of education to ensure readiness for the super-smart future:

- Remove the barriers between subjects and disciplines.
- Merge humanities and social sciences with math, hard science and data science - and vice versa.
- Basic educational requirements should include philosophy, law and ethics.

Hayashi says there are now plans in place to reform Japanese universities to meet the needs of this new society. He says, "The key will be to focus on human strengths...the emphasis must be on human skills such as communication, leadership and endurance as well as curiosity, comprehension and reading skills."

Additional information about breaking through the wall of social acceptance includes taking advantage of the knowledge from the humanities and social sciences.

Also on the list is the request for promotion, from industry, academia and government to incorporate Ethical, Legal and Social Implications (ELSI) in their company vision and mission statements. To include the relationship between humans and machines (AI and robots) and

the philosophical issues to define individual happiness and humanity.

The main areas of change are listed as: Technological, Economic and Geo-Political and Mindset. And how change also brings opportunities, and the key to shaping this future lies with imagination.

The report concludes by saying that Society 5.0 is not something to come, but something to co-create:

People will be expected to exercise rich imaginations to identify a variety of needs and challenges scattered across society and the scenarios to solve them, as well as creativity to realize such solutions by using digital technologies and data.

In the following chapter we will explore the future of work, and if we are readying our children to face it.

The Future Workers

Yuval Noah Harari,

Yuval Noah Harari, is a Professor in the Department of History at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Harari is also the author of international bestsellers *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* and *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*. His most recent book *21 Lessons for the 21st Century* puts forward a call to think about how we are to “prepare ourselves and our children for a world of such unprecedented transformations and radical uncertainties.”

An interview with Harari:

Harari:

The AI revolution will likely be a cascade of ever bigger disruptions, so you will have to reinvent yourself repeatedly. The biggest problem may be psychological. Will people have the mental ability to reinvent themselves at age 40 and 50.

Interviewer:

You say we are not teaching, we are not preparing kids for this at school?

Harari:

No, not at all, we don't really know what to teach them because nobody knows how the job market or the world will look like in 2050. It's maybe the first time in history, we have no idea whatsoever, the best bet is to focus on emotional intelligence and mental stability, mental resilience.

Interviewer:

And how do you suggest people do that?

Harari:

I don't know. It's much more difficult to teach emotional intelligence or mental resilience than to teach physics equations or to teach history. We don't have the tools at present to scale up this kind of teaching. So most of what we see in most schools is just inertia, information is the last thing

the kids need, they have far too much of it anyway.

In another interview with Russell Brand in front of an audience of students, Harari said that the coming automation revolution will not be a “one-time event,” where we will all scramble to get used to new technology and then things will settle down. It will be a “cascade of ever-bigger disruptions.” This is due to AI becoming more and more advanced.

Harari thinks that the main obstacle to surviving the changes will be psychological and to equip ourselves, in order to deal with constant change, there will need to be a constant reinvention of skills. This, he says, this will require a development in emotional intelligence and mental resilience. He tells the students this information is not to scare them, he thinks that humans are adaptable, and that if they are aware of the challenges, they can rise to them.

Brand asks Harari for suggestions on how to implement this advice. Harari says he thinks this is “the big question,” that it is a more difficult undertaking within education than teaching traditional subjects. Ultimately, he proposes that it is about “getting to know yourself better.”

If we knew more about the future of work, Harari thinks, we could identify the necessary skills and prepare children, but we don't know. Mental robustness and learning to deal with failure are two character traits which Harari thinks will be useful.

Brand puts forward that maybe our role in society might not centre around being workers, we might not be defined by what we do for a job or a career. Harari imagines that what might not be deemed as valuable work today such as looking after children or helping people in society might be elevated and compensated.

Brand says that spiritual, intellectual, emotional or mental advancement has not kept up with the technological advancement we have witnessed and that some of the character traits, which will help us in the future, such as the “ability to endure,” at one time would be held in in the “realm of the spiritual,” and that we should be concerned with evolving “other aspects of our nature to keep up with the capacities of technology if we are to have any chance of surviving.”

Harari agrees, and thinks spirituality and philosophy are now playing a more central role in our need to think about “what is humanity?”

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And “which kind of qualities do we want to enhance?” An important element of asking these questions Harari says, is to determine who it is asking these questions. If it is the army or big corporations, they may not be interested in human traits such as compassion, spirituality or the Arts. He warns of leaving the questions to the free market to answer. We might actually end up with “downgraded humans.”

However, Harari points out that many big companies such as Google or Tesla are suddenly faced with these new challenges and says, “they actually need philosophers for the first time.”

The people making many of the important decisions, says Harari, are software engineers. Whilst they may have been educated for science, engineering and mathematics skills, they have no education nor experience relating to ethics, law or sociology. So this is a problem. However, it should not just be in the hands of the engineers, regulations should be put in place by governments.

Harari thinks before we vote for a political candidate, we should be asking them to tell us their thoughts on the coming automation revolution. What will they be doing to prevent an irrelevant and “useless class” of society. And if they don’t have a plan, then they shouldn’t get the job. Even if governments do have a plan to protect their own citizens, Harari says that “the poorer nations of the world will be completely left behind and we need to think very carefully about a global safety net.”

Harari says technology, specifically artificial intelligence, could lead to a “dystopian scenario, in which a tiny elite of superhumans controls all the resources and power, and most people are economically useless and politically powerless.” However, he also wants to make clear, that this is a bleak view of the future, and it is not inevitable, we can use technology to “create a much, much better world that ever existed before, humans will have more opportunity to develop themselves, to engage in art or community activities, instead of working so much.”

He thinks this would be wonderful!

Ted Dintersmith

Ted Dintersmith has a PhD in engineering, he was a professor at Stanford, and is the author of *What School Could Be*, and co-author (with Tony Wagner) of *Most Likely To Succeed: Preparing Our Kids For*

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The Innovation Era, and is the film producer of the documentary *Most Likely To Succeed*. He was appointed by President Obama to represent the United States at the United Nations General Assembly, where he focused on education and entrepreneurship.

He says on his website:

I have an unusual vantage point on the future of our children and our nation. I spent my career in the world of innovation, and my track record there suggests I might know a bit about it. And over the past decade, I've immersed myself in the world of education. I don't claim to have the expertise our classroom teachers have, and I respect their insights — celebrate them, actually. But I have some insights into the world our children will live in as adults, and the ways this world ought to affect the way we educate children. I fight every day to do what I can to help give children the kind of education that will prepare them for their futures, and let them lead lives of purpose. Make no mistake, the challenges are serious. But so are the opportunities.

Dintersmith had questions about education, about how schools could transform themselves. He also wondered what was going on in schools throughout the U.S., so he decided to visit every state and find out. He travelled for an entire school year, to all fifty states, visiting two hundred schools and taking part in a thousand meetings. He says the trip was “like drinking from a fire hose.”

In his book *What School Could be*, he says he found common principles which allowed students to thrive, he calls them the PEAK principles: *Purpose*, which is all about overcoming challenge. *Essentials*, which focuses on skill sets and mind-sets. *Agency*, which is about students becoming self-directed learners and being intrinsically motivated. And *Knowledge*, which should be deep and retained.

Dintersmith found these PEAK principles in preschools, kindergartens and Montessori schools, but sadly didn't find them in most elementary schools, high schools, or colleges.

Instead, he found that the students are pushed to jump through hoops and outperform peers, that they simply cover content and retain little information (including the top-performing students). He says most schools are “Anti-PEAK.” He says that the purpose of education today is to “rank human potential, not develop it.”

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However, that was only in *most* schools. Fortunately, there were promising practices within some schools and there were also schools which had totally reimagined education providing a unique and developmentally superior experience for their students.

One of these schools is High Tech High in San Diego, which is featured in the *Most Likely To Succeed* documentary.

We were fortunate to have two teachers from High Tech High visit our school in Aberdeen to talk about they approach project based learning. More information about High Tech High later.

On Dintersmith's website he includes an "Innovation Playlist," a series of videos which encourage you to take "small steps, leading to big change." It is a call from him to individuals to come together to initiate those steps needed for educational change.

One of the most remarkable videos is entitled "The Future of Work," which illustrates some of the scary, but inevitable technological shifts which are already happening. Such as the automation of whole businesses, driverless lorries, cars and agricultural vehicles and equipment, 3-D printers which are building houses in 24 hours and laying bricks for high-rise buildings, retail stores with zero employees, delivery drones, automated restaurants, (McDonald's stock hit an all time high as more kiosks replace cashiers), perfect-precision robotic surgery, algorithms replacing lawyers. Robots doing back-flips, and holding doors open for each other.

The speed of change is ever-increasing, the last message of the video is: Will Our Children Be Ready?"

Business Ready

Young people face a future which contains many employers who are not impressed with their lack of ability in the areas of creativity, collaboration, and problem solving:

A third of companies are unhappy with graduates' attitude to work, blaming their lack of resilience and self-management skills.

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Graduates also lack cultural awareness, according one in three employers, while 40 per cent said that new graduates lack customer awareness.

Telegraph.co.uk 2017/07/11

Professor Cary Cooper of the Manchester Business School said that some graduates lack social skills and the ability to conduct face-to-face conversations. "They have been raised on Facebook and texting."

Telegraph.co.uk 2017/07/11

Half of employers don't think graduates have the skills to start work.

The Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR) spoke to 174 organisations about the quality of candidates straight out of university.

Chief executive of the AGR, Stephen Isherwood, says people skills and a "fundamental understanding" of the world of work are often lacking.

He says more need "the ability to work with people and get things done when things go wrong".

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/article/39268144/graduates-arent-skilled-enough-say-employers>

The Cambridge News spoke to employers about what they look for in graduates: The vast majority of employers consider qualifications a second priority, with the main focus being on finding the right person with the perfect set of skills, ranging from their general work ethic to the strength of their communication skills.

<https://www.cambridge-news.co.uk/business/what-employers-think-hiring-graduates-13310691>

An interesting study was carried out which might illustrate the clash of higher educational provision and business requirements - by looking at the mission and vision statements from educational institutions around the world.

Professor Julián David Cortés-Sánchez undertook a study to determine, "What Do Universities Want To Be?"

He says that both mission statements and vision statements are

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“public pronouncements of their purpose.” Along with his colleagues, he undertook an analysis of 338 mission statements and 291 vision statements from universities throughout the world to try to find common purposes and what those statements actually revealed.

Cortés-Sánchez says the differences between mission and vision statements are as follows:

Mission statements should explain:

- Why an organisation exists.
- What it believes in.
- The policies and behavioural patterns that guide its operations.
- The strategy for achieving its purpose.

A vision statement should express:

- A declaration of interdependence.
- A determination and publication of what makes the organisation unique.
- Values and principles.
- A “puller” into the future.
- The headwater for the organisation’s priorities, plans, and goals.

The research looked to find keywords, most and least frequently used terms in universities and the similarities and differences between the statements of universities and businesses.

The main findings showed:

- An absence of quantitative elements.
- Public universities were more focused on individuals (students) while private universities were more focused on process (teaching).
- No similarities between terms used by private firms and universities

Private firms used terminology such as:

Excitement/sincerity/competence/safety/security/social responsibility.

None of the terms from private firms were listed on the university statements.

If the unsaid agreement is not to build character, but to build knowledge and ready young people for the world of work, shouldn't it follow that the same institutions have similar missions and visions as the world of work?

Lord Digby Jones

Lord Digby Jones, is a British politician and businessman, he served as the Minister of State for Trade and Investment, and was the Director General for the CBI (Confederation of British Industry). He is also an author, publishing his first book in 2011, *Fixing Britain: The Business Of Reshaping Our Nation*. In which he writes:

Britain should be in the game of maximising individual talent, not subordinating it to a common standard that excuses poor performance by both pupil and the system.

His second book was published in 2017, *Fixing Business: Making Profitable Business Work For The Good Of All*. In this book Jones tells us that young people are being taught outdated skills. He quotes UNICEF's Global Head of Education which describes this type of education as "static knowledge."

Lord Jones also writes about the worrying levels of social exclusion and says young people falling behind, and falling out of the system. He believes that:

These problems are evident not just in what we teach but also how we teach. Our schools and colleges are already struggling with a generational learning gap, so how do we ensure that today's digital natives make sense of the cold formality of classrooms and lecture halls? There is a crisis of relevance, not only in educational subject matter but also with the educators themselves.

We are failing our children just at a time when we need them to be the most versatile and resilient generation in history.

I interviewed Lord Jones last year. He was very generous with his time and I was really impressed with his openness and common sense views on education, which included: the importance of linking businesses and schools, the need to invest in the human infrastructure as well as the physical infrastructure of the country,

and how it helps students to come out of school with confidence and an aptitude to be creative, not in a ‘good at drawing’ sense, but in a sense of asking if there is a better way of doing something.

On the back of the *Fixing Business* book, the broadcaster Nick Ferrari says:

How refreshing...an expert who writes precisely the way he talks: with candour, professionalism and wit. This should be required reading in every boardroom and for every politician. It wouldn't harm to put it into sixth forms, colleges and universities too!

I couldn't agree more.

Lord Jones was kind enough to send a signed, personalised copy of his business book to all of our students. It was an excellent tool for them to read about business in an accessible and interesting way.

I asked him about implementing his ideas about vocational education and whose governmental remit would that be under, or would he put it in the hands of the government?

He replied that he considered education so important that he would create a cabinet position called “Vocational Training,” and that he would provide a Minister with a budget, statutory power, and a whole department to sort it out.

As we've read, one of the complaints from many employers is that young people lack creativity. This is often a huge concern, especially when you hear about the “decline of creativity” put forward by Dr. Zhao. That decline has actually been proven, and the results, as you will see in the next chapter are shocking.

CHAPTER 4

Teach Them Creativity

Like character education and leadership training, creativity is a difficult concept to pin down. It is especially difficult to grasp, if you want to expand beyond the realm of creativity within the arts.

How do we define the creativity which will be so valuable in our future of automation and change? Let's hear from a few voices who all have something interesting to say about creativity.

Tom Hulm

Tom Hulm earned a first class bachelor's degree in physics from the University of Bristol, and an MBA from Harvard Business School, where he received the Baker Scholar Award of high distinction. He also received an honorary doctorate from University of the Arts London. He founded Open IDEO, to solve challenges for social good.

Tom has also angel-invested in more than 20 companies, including as the founding investor in Mile IQ (sold to Microsoft). Tom has been recognized as a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum, and has been featured in WIRED UK's Top 100 Digital Power Brokers list every year since the list was established. He has also been included in the Evening Standard list of London's 1000 Most Influential People. He is now a general partner at Google Ventures (GV).

In a 2018 article for 'Wired' entitled, *Teach kids creativity. Ultimately, machines will be better at coding*, Hulm says:

Deep machine learning will likely automate the writing of code relatively quickly. Creativity is going to be far more important in a future where software can code better than we can.

We need to rethink the way we teach our children and the things we teach them. Creativity will be increasingly be the defining human talent. Our education system should emphasise the use of human imagination to spark original ideas and create new meaning. It's the one thing machines won't be able to do.

George Land

George Land, (1932-2016), was an author, speaker, consultant, and general systems scientist. In 1965 he founded a research and consulting institute to study the enhancement of creative performance.

He developed a creativity test which was used to select the most innovative engineers and scientists to work for NASA. The assessment was very successful, and he decided to test the creativity levels of children. “What we have concluded,” wrote Land, “is that non-creative behavior is learned.” Land’s conclusion was based on his research which he conducted in 1968. The research study tested the creativity of 1,600 children ranging in ages from three-to-five. He later re-tested the same children at age 10, and again at age 15.

The test results showed that creativity drastically lessened:

- 4-5 Years Old - 98% (Genius Level)
- 10 Years Old - 30%
- 15 Years Old - 12%
- Adults - 2% (based on 280,000 adult, average age of 31)

The bulk of the percentage drop, 68%, occurs between 5 and 10 year-olds. There is a further drop of 18% between 10 and 15 year-olds. That amounts to a whopping creativity disintegration of 86% during the years children are in school!

In the video, Land calls schools “human being factories.”

He then puts forward the theory of “convergent” and “divergent” thinking, introduced by the psychologist J.P. Guilford in 1956. Convergent thinking is to converge, to come together and find a single answer to a problem. The answer is already known and requires thinking to be speedy, logical and accurate, to spiral down and recall that one unambiguous answer from stored memory. Convergent thinking is what is generally used in school and is necessary, but to only use convergent thinking misses out on divergent thinking.

Divergent thinking, develops in different directions and focuses on spiraling up to explore and generate multiple free-flowing ideas. This information is then used to create new connections which were not

previously considered.

In our schools, we approached complex cognitive challenges, by initially spiraling up to find a wide range of open-ended and unexpected questions, and then spiraling down towards the best solutions.

Whilst there are no personality traits, from the Big 5, which is aligned with convergent thinking, divergent thinking is associated with Openness and Extraversion. Openness in particular is strongly tied to curiosity, imagination and creativity.

In his talk, Land says that “we ask children in school to do both kinds of thinking at the same time. Come up with ideas but start looking at them immediately.”

This amounts to a closing down of the openness factor necessary to think creatively. The closing down plays out through various responses including: time restrictions, impatience of the teacher (due to time restrictions), evaluating too quickly, the need to conform to prescribed answers and a fear of failing.

Land finishes his talk by encouraging us to believe we can re-learn to be as creative as we were as a five-year old.

Sir Ken Robinson

I first heard about George Land’s study from Sir Ken Robinson who in 2006, presented a Ted talk entitled *Are Schools Killing Creativity?* Over fifty six million people have watched this talk and it is the most viewed in TED’s history. He is obviously hitting a nerve about education. I showed the video to our students once a year, they always sat engrossed in every word.

In the 1980’s Sir Ken was the director of the Arts in Schools Project. He has been a professor of education at the University of Warwick. The list of his awards for services in education is long, and in 2003, he was made Knight Bachelor by the Queen for his services to the arts. In 2011 he was listed as “one of the world’s elite thinkers on creativity and innovation” by *Fast Company* magazine, and was ranked among the ‘Thinkers50’ list of the world’s top business thought leaders.

His much-watched video is a must-see if you are in anyway interested

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in education or creativity. *Vanity Fair* had this to say about the talk:

If there was a moment when our crisis in education hit critical mass it may well have been the date Sir Ken Robinson's TED talk went up on YouTube. In just 19 minutes his wry but eviscerating presentation gave voice to what so many of us are living through: our schools are failing to recognize creativity; we're failing to prepare the next generation for the challenges that lie ahead.

The video's general message:

If you ask about their education, they pin you to the wall. Because it's one of those things that goes deep with people, am I right? Like religion, and money and other things. So I have a big interest in education, and I think we all do. We have a huge vested interest in it, partly because it's education that's meant to take us into this future that we can't grasp. If you think of it, children starting school this year will be retiring in 2065. Nobody has a clue what the world will look like in five years' time. And yet we're meant to be educating them for it. So the unpredictability, I think, is extraordinary.

Suddenly, degrees aren't worth anything. Isn't that true? When I was a student, if you had a degree, you had a job, but now kids with degrees are often heading home to carry on playing video games, because you need an MA where the previous job required a BA, and now you need a PhD for the other. It's a process of academic inflation. And it indicates the whole structure of education is shifting beneath our feet. We need to radically rethink our view of intelligence.

We have to rethink the fundamental principles on which we're educating our children.

Why does this talk resonate with so many people? What nerve is it hitting? It is an entertaining video, speckled with humour and wit which always helps to engage an audience and get a message across. But why so many viewers?

I believe his talk taps into distant memories, hazy and vague shadows of feelings and emotions - it makes you think about the last time you felt free, creative and brave.

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I think, for many people, it is the memories of those dream-crushers that flutter in the gut when Sir Ken talks about schools killing creativity. It doesn't take much to make a child retract and retreat, to lose faith in themselves. It can then take a long time to build up again, to pull back the pieces and reattach layers of courage and trust and self-worth. Years, decades, a lifetime, maybe never.

Sir Ken lives in Los Angeles and when I was setting up the primary school, I decided to contact him and ask if he would like to be involved in the school. We had a really good talk and he was really supportive of the idea of the school, so we planned to set up a meeting. However, soon after our phone conversation, his popularity went through the roof and he was in constant demand for talks all over the world. I became really busy with the school, and sadly our meeting never took place.

Sir Ken co-wrote a book in 1977, *Learning Through Drama*, which put forward the argument for the importance of drama within education. The book asks "What kinds of learning can be achieved through drama?"

The writers put forward their main argument:

We have argued that drama should be seen as an arts process; that experience in the arts should be considered a basic part of every child's education. Its value lies in that it gives children opportunities to explore, interpret, express and communicate feelings and ideas by representing them in a variety of symbolic forms. Through active exploration, it allows a deeper understanding and experience of a vast range of human feelings and perceptions which otherwise may not be dealt with in the rest of the curriculum....In drama, people are themselves the main medium of expression. The whole person – voice and body (speech and movement) – is used symbolically to represent meaning. Patterns of meaning are explored through the interrelationship of imagined roles. This is usually done by and through social interaction. The process can include finding areas of exploration, selecting, rejecting, modifying, elaborating ideas and feelings, organising them into patterns or forms and communicating them to others.

Sadly art, drama and most creative outlets have been reduced, not elevated in most schools, and four decades later Sir Ken is still pushing for reform, for discussion, for evaluation of creativity in education.

Sir Ken's thoughts on divergent thinking have been illustrated in an RSA animation video where he talks about the creativity test from George Land's study.

He also says that the problems of culture and habits within our schools, such as not allowing collaboration and judging students separately, are in the "gene pool of education" these problems have to be overcome by:

...thinking differently about human capacity. We have to get over this old concept of academic, non-academic, abstract, theoretical, vocational – and see it for what it is – a myth.

Creativity Myths

R. Keith Sawyer is an American Psychologist and author. He is an expert on creativity, innovation and learning. His book entitled, *Explaining Creativity: The Science of Human Innovation*, looks at the concept of creativity and the individual. Sawyer writes about "The Beliefs" we have around being a creative person. It turns out our knowledge about creativity is entwined with many mythical beliefs:

Creativity unconsciously bubbles forth from a moment of insight.

Not usually, there are rare flashes of insight, however, Sawyer says they are "embedded in a lifetime of hard work, collaboration and expertise."

Creativity occurs when you reject convention.

Sawyer tells us that "formal training and conscious deliberation are essential to creativity." However "rote memorization isn't sufficient – creativity is based in deeper understandings that result from a focused and active form of learning. Many schools deliver domain knowledge in a way that encourages rote memorization and doesn't foster creative thinking."

An outsider is more likely to provide creative

contributions.

Not really, the people who have the most creative ideas are “deeply familiar with a domain and immersed in it. However, “cross-fertilization” from a different area can bring new perspectives.

Being alone is the most effective way to be creative.

It can be useful to spend some time alone, however, people need others to exchange ideas with. Sawyer says: “It’s the alternation between social and solitary time that maximizes creativity.”

The most creative ideas are often ahead of their time.

Even though there is often initial resistance to original and disrupting ideas the “unrecognized-genius” view is usually not supported by research. Sawyer tells us that: “creative works are almost always recognized in their own time.”

There is a particular personality trait which is creative.

Although there are certain personality dispositions which are indicative of creativity, such as openness, these are not fixed and can be learned. Sawyer tells us: “Research has proven that creativity is not hereditary.”

Sawyer also tells us creativity is viewed as extremely valuable in the Western cultural model. However, when it comes to investing in creativity, that doesn’t always follow through.

He points to various sources:

- Studies have shown that most teachers associate creativity with undesirable student behaviours, like being stubborn, critical, rebellious, and nonconforming.
- Teachers rarely reward creativity in classrooms.
- Teachers’ least favourite students tend to be the ones who score highest on traits associated with creativity.
- Most eminent creators say that they disliked school, many dropped out or skipped grades, and some were schooled at home by parents or tutors.

According to Sawyer, even if teachers do appreciate creativity in their students, there is a possibility that they are unable to nurture it. He points to a study which states that over half of the teachers surveyed say that “the school climate and curriculum guidelines prevent them from fostering student creativity.”

Even with a negligent educational system, people have found a way to be creative. We have progressed as a species beyond all expectation. We have developed global connections, collaborated on new technologies, almost eliminated famine throughout the world and more people now die from old age than from disease.

We have been busy creating more healthy, wealthy and lengthy lives for most of the planet's population. Yet, for many, our satisfaction with life, our mental health and our connection to each other still leaves room for improvement. Maybe a part of our cleverness and propensity for progress has omitted something we crave on a more basic human level.

We can only imagine what could be achieved if creativity and innovation for the development of the human psyche, and the evolvement of society, were nurtured throughout the educational process. What is holding us back?

In her book *Daring Greatly*, Brené Brown, tells us about presenting a talk at a retreat, where there were fifty CEO's from Silicon Valley, one of the speakers was Kevin Surance. Inc. magazine had named him as Entrepreneur of the Year in 2009. Brown asked Surance what he thought was "the most significant barrier to creativity and innovation." After he pondered the question, he told Brown that he thought it was the "fear of introducing an idea and being ridiculed, laughed at and belittled." He went on to tell her that innovative ideas do often invite ridicule, because they are seen as 'out-there' or 'crazy.' He then went on to say:

Evolution and incremental change is important, and we need it, but we're desperate for real revolution and that requires a different type of courage and creativity.

Brian Eno

Eno was half of a famous band, Roxy Music along with Brian Ferry. He then went on to produce music with musicians such as, U2, David Bowie and Coldplay. He also invented a creative card system which he called "Oblique Strategies." The system includes a box of cards which have different instructions printed on each one, to use in times

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when a creative impasse has been reached. The cards are designed to create new ideas through an external disruption, such as telling musicians to swop instruments. Many musicians have used the cards, including Coldplay when working on 'Viva La Vida.'

When asked about the cards in an interview, Eno said, "The cards are a way of throwing you out of the frame, of breaking the context a little bit... It's a way of breaking the tendency to get the screwdriver out.

Eno also created a new word for the genius of a group – "scenius." He says that scenious is the word he uses to describe the intelligence and the intuition of a whole cultural scene. It is the communal form of the concept of the genius.

An article in Wired writes about Eno, and his definition of scenious and puts forward that it is nurtured by the following factors:

- Mutual appreciation — Risky moves are applauded by the group, subtlety is appreciated, and friendly competition goads the shy. Scenius can be thought of as the best of peer pressure.
- Rapid exchange of tools and techniques — As soon as something is invented, it is flaunted and then shared. Ideas flow quickly because they are flowing inside a common language and sensibility.
- Network effects of success — When a record is broken, a hit happens, or breakthrough erupts, the success is claimed by the entire scene. This empowers the scene to further success.
- Local tolerance for the novelties — The local "outside" does not push back too hard against the transgressions of the scene. The renegades and mavericks are protected by this buffer zone.

An Answer?

I was passionate about re-introducing the students to their creative internal world, believing that it would open them up to more confidence and a stronger belief in their abilities.

In her online Masterclass in writing, Margaret Atwood says this:

Creativity is one of the essential things about being human. So you don't have to apologize for it. It's something human beings do.

From George Land's work we can see that it is entirely human and natural to be creative, all five year olds show a genius level of creativity, but then non-creative behaviour is learned. He advises to add the time for the use of divergent thinking as well as the more traditional convergent thinking which is used in schools. But the nuts and bolts of divergent thinking is open to interpretation.

Also there are two distinct elements to divergent and creative thinking – the artistic and the intellectual.

The artistic side was fairly simple to provide in our schools - teach them the techniques of Drawing from the Right Side of The Brain (from Part II, Chapter 5), let them paint, create music, produce videos, do woodwork. It was important to find the one area of artistic creativity which the student could relate to.

The cross-fertilisation of artistic and intellectual ideas was also important.

In the Young Enterprise Scotland programme in which the students were directors of a business, (more information in the next chapter), a product had to be created to centre the business around. The experience the students gained from setting up the business was so valuable, and in some respects it didn't really matter what the product was, it could have been re-selling something simple like candles. However, for our students, I decided to make the process more difficult and insisted that we wouldn't be downscaling the creativity aspect of the product, we would be engaging in a period of creatively thinking about producing something which had never been seen before in the YES programme. We would also be including an ethical element to the product.

This brought a lot of difficult and frustrating work. Presenting new products and rejecting most ideas, it was a slog. But eventually, products were thought of which were original in the sense of bringing two ideas together to produce a third element. The beanie hat business brought together up-cycling, the re-use of materials, and a fashion item. The ethical element would see the students give one beanie away to a good cause for every one sold. The following year, the silk scarves business brought together a desire to create a unique pattern on a silk scarf, which was a piece of art and a wearable fashion item. The ethical element of this business would provide free

public workshops. It worked well, both products impressed the judges and won awards.

Intellectual creativity does include convergent critical thinking and the Three Stages of Story, but it also needs the divergent element, which is a more complex requirement.

The projects were really beneficial for creative thinking, not being bound by one subject, or text-book content, which allowed the students to stretch into areas they would normally never visit. Areas such as, what is it like to run a political campaign? How do you deal with opposing views? How would you convince people to invest money into moving to Mars?

So these projects were an effective foundation for thinking critically and creatively. But they were not the key to ‘next level’ creative and intellectual thinking. The key to that was - The Disrupters.

The Disrupters

“There is no reason to be creative unless you have a problem to solve.”

Jordan Peterson

The Disruptors within TPP were the troublesome knowledge, the problems to solve, which the facilitators would inject into the project as a major disrupting force. This force would throw the student’s plans into chaos and had an effect on the students, which was similar to the reactions that the researchers found in the behaviour of rats, the “sudden shocks to enhance the ability to emotionally cope with unexpected stressful situations.” And, like Dabrowski’s Theory of Positive Disintegration, the ensuing anxiety tension and loss of control, do not cause the student to retreat, but to face the challenges and burn away old ways of thinking and behaviour, culminating in emotional growth, self-awareness, empathy and compassion.

If the students had faced those challenges totally alone, there would have been a chance that they would have struggled and admitted defeat. However, they were able to turn to those around them, their teammates, for help and advice.

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As the facilitators, who have the responsibility of injecting the challenges, you begin to sense how much each student can shoulder and push them a little further each time.

The Disrupters were also like Eno's Oblique Strategies, except the instructions were not abstract or general and they didn't come on a card. They were specific to the project, to the character and they arrived by rolled up scrolls sealed with wax, or by private and confidential letters, or from a special envoy sent by a royal official.

The messages or notifications or warnings could inform the characters that:

- They'd lost a witness, because they had been kidnapped.
- A new witness has come forward bringing new evidence.
- Their current evidence has been found to be false and cannot be used.
- They have suddenly received support and funding for their campaign - or have lost it.
- Someone has been falsifying documents, so they are eliminated from the process.

Sometimes the Disruptors brought good news, which still required a change of plan. However, it was mostly bad news which required a massive change of plan. They always brought frustration and disappointment, and could even make the students angry and defensive. It is difficult, as the facilitator, to stand back and watch them deal with the challenges, and not jump in with solutions.

However, underpinning the challenge, is a culture of psychological safety. Nobody will be making fun of mistakes, or belittling efforts to get the plan back on track. Fear of failing is not an option.

Now is the time to work alone and work in a team: exploring options, selecting, rejecting, modifying, elaborating, organising, communicating, perspective taking.

Now is the time to be stubborn, critical, rebellious, and nonconforming. To be an anarchist. To be intellectually creative.

Soon, a team consciousness kicks in, the group genius - the scenious, and the students bond under the pressure, and support each other to design a new plan.

The ensuing awareness of a person's ability to face failure and emerge

with renewed motivation, optimism and having created a new scenario, was really powerful for every one of them, life changing even.

Another Answer?

In re-reading this book, I was looking at the information I had collected on creativity, I then had my own small flash of insight about creativity, which merged ideas from two of the different areas I had researched: the Bi-Hemispheric Brain and The Big Five Personality Traits.

This flash doesn't happen very often (to me anyway) and when it does it initially causes you to think you have just hosted an introduction of two separate ideas, who have never met each other before, and they seem to be getting along quite well - and you feel pretty good about it. But then, almost immediately afterwards, it causes you to think you have made a mistake. Maybe the two ideas have already met and you didn't know about it, or that the two ideas have only just met but are merely pretending to get along, and really want nothing to do with each other, and it is you who is forcing the connection. Then comes the trickling sense of dread that if you tell people about the meeting of ideas, they will at best think it is trivial and unimportant, or at worst, that it is ridiculously stupid and then you will be "ridiculed, laughed at and belittled."

However, in the spirit of what I used to tell the students, "just throw it out there and see what happens..."

The idea started, as ideas often do, with a question, or in this case with two questions:

1. Are the Left Hemisphere Attributes aligned with the Big 5 Conscientiousness Character Traits? A reminder of the attributes and traits:

CONSCIENCTIOUSNESS

LEFT HEMISPHERE

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Organised, Productive and Diligent	Analytical, Logical and Rational
Focused, Industrious	Narrow Thinking
Rigid and Inflexible	Attention to Detail
Compulsive, Risk and Change Averse	Mechanical Perfection
Conformist, Conventional	Demands Precision
Compulsive and Stubborn	Needs Tangible Categories

2. Are the Right Hemisphere Attributes aligned with the Big 5 Openness Character Traits? A reminder of the attributes and traits:

OPENNESS

Creative, open to new ideas.

Adventurous.

Intellectual. Manipulates abstract concepts.

Love of variety and novelty.

Risk takers.

RIGHT HEMISPHERE

Curious. Looks out for what might be different from our expectations

Future oriented. Flexible. Finds solutions. Intuitive. Self-aware. Empathetic

Displays insight imagination, *v i s u a l i s a t i o n* and experimentation. Sees the whole interconnected picture.

Is interested in individual concepts, not categories.

Welcomes change and the concept of evolving. Takes risks.

As parents and educators, we would like to encourage our children and young people to develop a balanced personality. From the Big 5 and the Right/Left Hemispheres, we want to help them maximise the positive and useful traits and attributes, and minimise the negative and not useful ones.

However, if students have been educated “successfully” within a mainstream school, they will have well cultivated the Conscientious Character Traits, and the Left Hemisphere Attributes. Unfortunately, they will have neglected almost all of the Openness Traits and Right Hemisphere attributes – creativity being the main one.

In order to realign educational provision, would it be helpful if we had a balanced “personality” within our systems, specifically our educational system?

As it stands, this is mostly a conscientious system (C-System), heavily weighted with all of those traits and attributes. Why is that? Could it be that schools and universities are places where conscientious-type (C-Types) people succeed and go on to higher education, and then are part of the educational establishment who teach and produce educational policies?

In an article entitled: ‘The Big Five personality traits, learning styles, and academic achievement’ the authors tell us:

Personality and learning styles are both likely to play significant roles in influencing academic achievement. College students (308 undergraduates) completed the Five Factor Inventory and the Inventory of Learning Processes and reported their grade point average. Two of the Big Five traits, conscientiousness and agreeableness, were positively related with all four learning styles (synthesis analysis, methodical study, fact retention, and elaborative processing)

Instructors who are sensitized to the importance of these personality traits as predictors of academic achievement could design course assignments and testing methods that foster:

- conscientiousness (e.g., requiring drafts of assignments to be submitted in small parts),

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- agreeableness (e.g., supporting and rewarding cooperative behaviors), and
- openness (e.g., capturing students' imaginations by linking concepts to current events).

The educational system is effective at delivering the first two requirements, conscientiousness and agreeableness, but often lacks the third ingredient: openness.

How are high openness-type students (O-Types) to thrive if there isn't an openness system (O-System) in place to capture imaginations?

O-Types often fail in the C-System, which insists on conformity and convention. It can be a difficult requirement for students, from the earliest days of school through secondary school, as studies suggest conscientiousness is naturally low in young people and only begins to emerge in late teenage years.

The ensuing consequences of not providing a route for O-Types are serious: Low conscientiousness has been linked to criminal behaviours including, anti-social activity unemployment, homelessness, or serving prison sentences.

Obviously, the C-System has valuable traits and attributes, but an O-System is desperately needed to create balance and offer an educational provision for O-Type students.

In the documentary 'The Divided Brain,' which highlights Iain McGilchrist's work, the narrator tells us:

As children get older, their left hemisphere matures, it starts showing it's talent for spoken and written language. The school curriculum moves away from areas where the right hemisphere excels.

In universities the left hemispheres way of thinking becomes even more dominant. As students specialize in narrow fields, theories and categories become important.

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In the same documentary, Dr. Guy Claxton talks about technical Western education and says:

Your life trajectory is determined by how good you are at that type of learning. The imbalance is institutional, it's in the bone marrow of our educational system.

Iain McGilchrist's says:

When I began to look at the main movements of the history of ideas, a pattern emerged, which was quite extraordinary, and so much more interesting than I could have possibly imagined. What I could see was that, three times in the west, there had been a period of a flourishing of a civilization: Athens of the 6th century, the beginning of the empire in Rome, and once again in the early Renaissance. And that this civilization, in each three cases, showed a marvelous balance of right hemisphere and left hemisphere modes of thinking, but in each case, it ended up with a movement further and further towards that of a left hemisphere, after which the civilization collapsed.

There is controversy around McGilchrist's theory, which is pointed out in the documentary. Dr. Onur Güntürkün, in speaking to McGilchrist about his book, says:

We life scientists, we read the papers, come up with a working hypothesis, that is one step ahead of what we know, but not two steps, two steps are punished. I think there are two options – one option is in thirty years it could be the bible of neuroscientists, or it could be forgotten. I think there is nothing in between.

Paralleling the Right/Left Hemispheres with the Big 5 Personality Traits of openness and conscientiousness, brings a deeper understanding to McGilchrist's theory. The Big 5 has been thoroughly tested over decades by multiple researchers and though it has been criticised due to not including all aspects of human personality, is widely accepted by those in the psychological arena as a clear indication of personality types.

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How can we bring balance to education? The Portal Projects with the provision of a Liberal Arts programme has proven to deliver a balanced 'C&O' system of education.

Another approach is the provision of non-exam subjects which I will cover in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

Non-Exam Subjects

I developed project based learning in the primary school. The students never took worksheet tests and were never given a graded mark. The projects were only used for discussion about the individual student's progression. The projects tried to connect to the outside world as much as possible.

I will illustrate the type of projects we undertook, and then explain how I implemented Non-Exam Subjects within the secondary school.

Connect To The Real World – Primary School

A project at the primary school in Los Angeles was based on the Amazon rainforest, exploring the unique plant and animal species in the surrounding ecosystem. We decided to build a replica rainforest in the corner of the room. There were exotic animals (stuffed toys or made of paper maché), towering trees (tall plants), and a dense live canopy (green strips of material). The children would go inside to sit quietly or wear headphones and listen to the sounds of the rainforest. There was a loud protest from the children when it was time to remove the rainforest, so it ended up becoming a permanent feature for a year and became the talk of the surrounding community.

I looked for someone we could bring in who had some connection to the rainforest. I found an amazing film producer, Sylvie Rokab, who was in the early stages of working on a documentary entitled *Love Thy Nature*.

The following is from the documentary's website:

Narrated by Liam Neeson, *Love Thy Nature* is a cinematic immersion into the beauty and intimacy of our relationship with the natural world. With mesmerizing artistry and fascinating details, the film explores how nature nourishes us.

Neeson is the voice of Homo Sapiens – our collective humankind – who, in the past few thousand years, has come to believe that we are separate from nature. This mind-set has

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caused us to disrupt billions of years of evolution, causing a mass extinction of species and threatening the survival of the human race.

Experts have discovered that just spending time in nature promotes healing, emotional stability, connectedness, and even neurological health in children.

I contacted Sylvie and ask if she would come into the school to talk to the children about her film, and was delighted when she agreed. Her visit was inspiring, she showed the trailer for the film and interviewed the children to ask them how they felt about the issues and the challenges around the world's rainforests. Because of the rainforest project they have a good amount of knowledge and a huge amount of passion and interest in what would happen in the future.

The following excerpt is from an article from the *Love Thy Nature* newsletter, Sylvie writes about her visit to the school.

A Crash Landing

I have to admit that, at times, I felt like I was flying high, meeting with some of the most important people in the wildlife filmmaking and environmental fields. But my ego soon came to a crash landing after I screened the *Love Thy Nature* trailer at a school in Santa Monica, to an engaged - but very concerned - audience of 6 to 12 year-olds. When I rolled the camera on them, a boy got me choked up as he shared that he's afraid he'll never be able to manifest his dream to visit the rainforest in Brazil. He said, "By the time I'm old enough, the forest might be gone..." I was reminded that in the realm of human evolution and connection with nature, the young ones are really the important people. May you be embraced by the gorgeous and fragrant wet canopies of the Amazon when you grow up!

The visit made a huge impression on the children. Some of them would come in having filmed wildlife in their back garden. Others wanted to become involved in wildlife conservation. To witness what Sylvie was creating was a valuable and enjoyable experience for everyone in the school.

The documentary is wonderful, it has now received numerous awards and has such an important message to listen to.

LoveThyNature.com

The primary school also became involved with 'Peace One Day' an organisation founded by Jeremy Gilley in 1999. From the 'Peace One Day' website:

Jeremy Gilley is an actor turned filmmaker, who in the late 1990s became preoccupied with questions about the fundamental nature of humanity and the issue of peace. He decided to explore these through the medium of film, and specifically, to create a documentary following his campaign to establish an annual day of ceasefire and non-violence.

In 1999, Jeremy founded Peace One Day, a non-profit organisation, and in 2001 Peace One Day's efforts were rewarded when the member states of the United Nations unanimously adopted the first ever annual day of global ceasefire and non-violence on 21 September – Peace Day.

Inspired by a 70% recorded reduction in violent incidents on Peace Day in Afghanistan (source: United Nations Department of Safety and Security), and in order to build a strong foundation for 2012, Jeremy launched the Global Truce campaign that involved the creation of a series of Peace One Day coalitions.

I visited the POD London office during a trip home, Jeremy wasn't there, but I met with his staff and picked up promotional material including hundreds of badges. I also arranged a Skype call for Jeremy to introduce POD to the pupils.

The Skype call was a big success, the pupils asked many questions, and Jeremy was really patient, funny and informative.

After the call, the pupils decided they wanted to create something, they wanted to bring awareness of the organisation to local residents in Santa Monica, on the day it would be celebrated throughout the world. A walk through the streets was planned and work began on

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making placards and banners, the excitement of the children grew stronger by the day. The walk took place on a farmers market day in Santa Monica, so many of the main roads was closed to traffic, which worked out really well. The streets were packed and everyone stopped to watch the line of children walking through the market, banners held high, shouting “PEACE ONE DAY.” A few of the older children passed out leaflets and badges. There was lots of interest from people who said they’d never heard of Peace One Day, and wanted more information. A photographer from the local paper came to take photos. The pupils were still buzzing about it months later.

The more connected to the ‘real world’ the pupils were, the more motivated they seemed to be to bring creative ideas into to classroom.

Secondary School

At most secondary schools it is difficult to extract creativity out of coursework designed to only memorise information for exams. At our secondary school, I introduced Non-Exam Subjects, which were designed to keep the student’s creativity alive, provide the skills they would need in the world and to help them find out where their interests lay.

The TPP were part of this programme, the students did not sit an exam, but their was an assessment. This allowed non-academic students to succeed within the school framework and leave school with an interesting and diverse portfolio.

The other areas of study included: Digital Literacy, The Profession Project, The Enterprise Project, The Sustainable Living Project, The Arts Award, The Building Project and The Life Design Project.

The following is an overview of each one:

Digital Literacy

TPP provided an excellent platform on which to become familiar with capturing and mastering online information. The deep level of research and the necessity for accuracy saw students evaluating facts

from various historical authorities, and identifying trustworthy sources.

TPP called for a strategic approach to how students navigate online information.

The best source I found, was from Mike Caulfield who is currently the director of blended and networked learning at Washington State University Vancouver, and head of the Digital Polarization Initiative of the American Democracy Project, a multi-school pilot to change the way that online media literacy is taught. Currently rolling out at 12 U.S. universities, the project's pilot involves over 80 course sections, 40 faculty, and thousands of students.

Caulfield provides a free online guide entitled, *Web Literacy for Student Fact-Checkers*, showing how to:

- Use date filters to find the source of viral content.
- Assess the reputation of a scientific journal in less than five seconds.
- Find pages that have been deleted.
- Figure out who paid for the website.
- Check a Wikipedia page for recent vandalism.
- Search the text of almost any printed book to verify a quote.
- Parse URLs and scan search result blurbs so that you are more likely to get to the right result on the first click.
- Avoid baking confirmation bias into your search terms.

The Profession Project

The Profession Project started with a visualisation; imagine you get on a bus and sit down behind two people who are just beginning a conversation:

“It’s great to see you.”

“It’s great to see you too, what are you working on these days?”

Whatever the answer is, it makes you lean forward to listen. Whatever they start to talk about, it makes the hairs on the back of your neck stand on end. They are talking about what you want to work on, what you dream about doing.

The students closed their eyes and played out the scene in their

imagination.

After a few minutes they opened their eyes and we went around the group to find out what they had overheard. All of the students had heard something. A few said, “well, this sounds silly, but...”

Those ideas were then explored and developed into the focus of the Profession Project. Each student designed a presentation board including an essay about the profession, a piece of artwork and the transcript of an interview held with someone from that profession. The students worked on their boards with such motivation, it brought the whole school alive with discussion and conversation. Parents, family and friends then spent an evening at the school looking at the boards and listening to the students talk about their chosen profession. There was quite a variety of professions from the world of: Law, Fire Service, Cricket, Pediatric Nursing and Film Directing.

At the beginning of the second year the students were once again asked to complete a Profession Project. Some of the choices were completely different from the first year, and had morphed into different areas, such as lawyer to politician and cricketer to actor. Others stayed with the central theme, but evolved into a different aspect, such as pediatric nurse to kindergarten teacher. This exploration into the real world gives the students time to profession-play. This play is not all about getting a job, or securing a career, it is more connected to dreams and wishes and passions. The creative aspect of this process is to match those skills and passions to marketable skills. One student's passion was contemporary art and music. She knew a local band, her brief was to meet with the band and to offer to design t-shirts for one of their tours.

The student who was interested in law and then in politics was able to go and work in the office of a political party. We re-arranged her classes so she was able to take part in beneficial and enjoyable work experiences.

The Enterprise Project

I walked into a sea of activity. In one room students were either sitting in front of sewing machines or cutting up pre-owned sweaters.

The student in charge of quality control passed a hat back over the table “this one is coming apart, you need to re-do it.” In the other room, flyers were being printed amidst heated discussions about changing the promotional text, one student waving a flyer in the air “you know, this is actually going out to the public.”

The classrooms were chaotic and I’m sure most heads, teachers or parents, used to an orderly classroom, would be horrified at the scene. But this was just our latest project. However, it reached another level of intensity due to it being an actual business, a Companies House registered business. All of the students who were sixteen or above were the official directors and were automatically enrolled in the “Young Enterprise Scotland” (YES) programme.

Most students at age sixteen are swamped with exams and have no time for anything else. But we only offered exams in maths, English and physics. (We would go on the following year to increase the exam offering to English, maths, physics, history, music and German). This left time to pursue projects. Because of the experience the students had encountered through the other projects, they were all, without exception, ready to take on the responsibility of being a business owner. Each student was assigned a role within the business including: product design and development, quality control, finance, marketing and promotion.

In creating the company it was important to the students that the product be ‘green’ and that the business contained an ethical element. After much discussion, they chose to purchase woolen sweaters from charity shops and to use the fabric for ‘beanies’. The hats were made by the students who worked long hours on borrowed sewing machines to produce an initial collection. The hats were then sold at various events put together by YES. The company was chosen for “Best Product” by the YES judges, which was a huge accolade for the students.

The refugee crisis was at its height and the students wanted to do something to help. They decided that the ethical side of the business would be to offer customers a free hat for every one purchased. The free hat would be posted to a refugee centre in Greece. The YES judges were also really impressed by the ethical element of the company.

The experience provided valuable lessons for the students. The main one being how to get a business off the ground. This included communicating with customers, securing good prices for the original materials and working together to make things happen. Ethical manufacturing was explored including an awareness of how clothes are made, mostly by people, including young children, working long hours in clothing factories. This brought up discussions about job creation versus exploitation. Sending the hats to refugees also brought up discussions about immigration and a nation's humanitarian responsibilities versus the need to protect borders. Alongside discussions, newspaper articles were brought in and pinned to the info board, various TED talks were watched and students brought in opinions from people outside of school.

The business owners also mentored their younger peers who played a big part as volunteers, they helped at every step of the way, all motivated by making the business successful. This was a really good grounding for them as they would be the next group of business owners who would go on to create an arts business the following year. This business saw customers able to create a painted design on a silk scarf using the ancient Ebru method of water surface printing. They had the busiest stall at the Christmas Fair and also won an award from the YES judges.

The YES programme culminates in the students sitting an exam through the Business School at the University of Strathclyde. To pass the exam, the students had to answer questions pertaining to their business, such as what challenges they had faced, how they had performed in their specific roles and how they had worked within a team. Because the students had lived and breathed the experience, they were easily able to answer the questions and they all passed with flying colours, some with distinction. The great thing about the exam is that the student is not judged on the quality of writing, the questions can be answered with bullet points. It is the information which is important. This certification can then be used to show future employees that they have been responsible for running a viable business venture. They are also able to talk about this experience - working in teams, overcoming challenges etc.- during job interviews

or when applying for college or university courses.

During the setting up and the running of the business there were two main areas of educational and emotional development:

Firstly, students looked out into the world and saw some of the challenges the world faces, and also what needs to be done. This was the beginnings of global citizenship. Secondly, the students had to rely on each other when times were tough, when they didn't feel like sitting at the sewing machine anymore, or delivering any more flyers, or going over the finances, or standing for another few hours at a stall. They saw each other exhausted, stressed and anxious but also excited happy and proud. Because of this dependency on each other, including the younger volunteer students, there were no signs of loneliness or isolation they were a fully functioning community.

This community had gelled long before they embarked on the business. In fact, I think we would have been skeptical about the success of the students working together had they not been through many TPP. The skills, peer-connection and confidence the students had developed throughout the projects then rolled right into the demands of running their own business.

As a class, we also watched episodes of the television show "The Apprentice" and the students would call out when they saw glaring errors the contestants were making. There would then be energised discussions about how they would do things differently. The Enterprise projects, along with TPP and traditional classes, provided the theoretical and the practical experience which resulted in the students feeling equipped for the next stage of their lives.

The Sustainable Living Project

Much of our educational system focuses on individualistic self-advancement, with a promise of material success. The Sustainable Living Project encourages the study of improving the lives of others, taking care of the earth and its resources and how to work together to move humanity forward.

The secondary school's sustainable classes expanded beyond recycling and environmental awareness, they focused on the big issues facing humankind – safety, shelter, food & water security,

health, poverty, inequality.

We also tied in a TPP, which was entitled ‘Earth – A Good Place To Live?’ and focused on humanity’s need for shelter. The first part of the study looked at land grabs in history beginning with Native Americans and ending with a study of the Highland Clearances in Scotland.

We secured a partnership with the Environmental Department of Aberdeen University and arranged for a year-long Sustainable Living programme. One of the university’s students came to the school once a week to work with the students, which was also part of her course-work.

The modules for the programme included:

- Shelter: How to create low cost environmentally sustainable buildings
- Food: How to grow our own food and avoid buying food with high air miles. Agriculture, new ways of farming.
- Health & Wellbeing: Alternative ways of caring for our physical and mental health.
- Energy: Looking towards alternative energy sources to supply our need for energy.
- Environment: Local, national and international environmental challenges.

The programme was a great success. The students spent a lot of time talking about university life to our weekly visitor, which provided a good insight.

Another area of the Sustainable Living Programme involved the study of how certain people have influenced, or have attempted to influence, how to live sustainably. This was not to blindly agree with the ideas put forward, and many of the students had strong opinions and often disagreed about the ideas.

One of those people was Hans Gosling and his work on making statistics more accessible to understand what was happening in the world, including poverty levels. Discussions about capitalism was a frequent topic within the school, some students saw it as the cause of all evil, others thought it had benefited many societies, and talked about the huge decline in extreme poverty. We studied the book by Rosling, *Factfulness: Ten Reasons We’re Wrong About The World – And Why Things Are Better Than You Think*. We also watched his TED

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video, and explored the gapminder.org website which contains a documentary entitled 'Don't Panic – End Poverty In 15 Years.'

Another person was Jacque Fresco who passed away in 2017, aged 101. A New York Times obituary wrote: Jacque Fresco, a self-taught and passionate industrial designer who envisioned an alternative society where money would be eliminated and resources distributed equitably by computers.

Fresco wrote and lectured extensively on his views concerning sustainable cities, natural resource management, energy efficiency and the future of technology.

A few of his quotes -

On technology:

With the observable fact that scientific knowledge makes our lives better when applied with concern for human welfare and environmental protection, there is no question that science and technology can produce abundance so that no one has to go without.

On systems:

If our system continues without modification involving environmental and social concern, we will face an economic and social breakdown of our outdated monetary and political system.

On democracy:

You can play a role in the shaping of tomorrow's world by asking yourself questions like, 'What kind of world do I want to live in?' and 'What does democracy mean to me?'

Fresco founded the Venus Project, based around the vision of a "resource-based economy."

From the Venus Project website:

The Venus Project proposes a system in which automation and technology would be intelligently integrated into an overall holistic socio-economic design where the primary function would be to maximize the quality of life rather than profit.

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Another person we studied was E. F. Schumacher (1911-1977). He was a German environmentalist and economist who moved to England before World War II. He worked for the British National Coal Board for twenty years as their Chief Economic Advisor. He also worked for the British government and was sent to Burma in 1955 as an economic consultant. However he soon realised that they didn't need his advice about Western style development. During his time there, he wrote an essay, published in 1966 entitled "Buddhist Economics." The essay was based on economics from the standpoint of human development. Schumacher was also an author, and his books include, *Small Is Beautiful: A study of Economics As If People Mattered*, published in 1973. It was listed as one of the most influential books published since World War II, by the Times Literary Supplement. An article in *The Economist* describes the book:

The book's subtitle is the less engaging "A Study of Economics as if People Mattered," but it is more true to its content. For the book is not a paean to smallness. It is more a polemic against industry's brutality and (among other things) its despoiling of the environment and of the human spirit.

In the book, Schumacher names one of the chapters 'Buddhist Economics' and writes:

The New Burma sees no conflict between religious values and economic progress. Spiritual health and material wellbeing are not enemies: they are natural allies.

He also says that Buddhist economics are based on non-violence, renewable resources and self-sufficient local communities. As opposed to, what Hazel Henderson describes in the book, the 'Reptilian Brain Economics,' which are based on fear of scarcity and survival.

In 2011, his daughter-in-law, Diana Schumacher wrote a book entitled *Small is Beautiful in the 21st Century: The legacy of EF Schumacher*. She tells us:

Schumacher understood that the various aspects of human activity had become too divorced from spiritual values and their associated disciplines to be able to effect the behavioural changes that are needed. We must now abandon the long-

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cherished idols of acquisitiveness, unrestrained growth, power, economic globalization and so forth, and replace them with the more permanent ideals of humility, frugality and responsibility for the wellbeing of future generations and of the environment. The necessary changes in human behaviour still include drastically reducing our expectations as consumers of the Earth's resources, and a willingness to place the needs of the poor and powerless alongside our own.

In his *Small Is Beautiful* book, Schumacher names chapter 6, "The Greatest Resource – Education," and writes:

If Western civilization is in a state of permanent crisis, it is not far-fetched to suggest that there may be something wrong with its education.

A quote written in the book by Professor of Environmental Studies and Politics, David Orr, reads:

Most people now associate Schumacher's name with problems of economics and the scale of technology, not with education. But the most incandescent pages in the book have to do with education because there he probed the origins of the crisis. All of the rest he regarded as symptoms arising from a disorder in our basic convictions propagated by formal education.

We still train far more young people to be technicians in service to that great scam called the global economy than we educate whole persons capable of building the kind of decent and human-scaled world he described.

Schumacher college is in Devon, U.K. I always dreamed of our school (or any school), incorporating the ethos of the college's curriculum and message to young people (more information in Part IV, Chapter 2 under Alternative Education).

The Arts Award

Being creative means being unique, this does not always lend itself to the narrow confines of art or drama or music exams. Students should

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be free to study whatever creative endeavors they choose – any type of music, drawing, painting, photography, drama, filmmaking, poetry, creative writing or script writing.

Our school became an ‘Arts Award Centre,’ because this programme responds to the freedom of creativity by allowing students to study any creative area in a structured and supportive way, which then leads to certification.

Managed by the Trinity College, London, in association with the Arts Council, the Arts Award was developed to support young people who want to explore a creative path which veers away from the traditional exam offering. Along with building confidence, resourcefulness and leadership skills the award prepares students for further education or employment.

The Award has three levels for secondary students - Bronze, Silver and Gold. The Gold level earns 35 UCAS points and is equivalent to an ‘A’ level in England. One day it will hopefully be equivalent to a ‘Higher’ in Scotland.

From the Arts Award website (<http://www.artsaward.org.uk>):

Our mission is to support young people who want to deepen their engagement with the arts, build creative and leadership skills, and to achieve a national qualification.

Through the Arts Award's five levels, children and young people up to age 25 can explore any art form including performing arts, visual arts, literature, media and multimedia. The award builds confidence, helps young people to enjoy cultural activities, and prepares them for further education or employment.

You'll end up with a portfolio or arts log that shows off your creativity and gives you a recognised national qualification or award. You'll need to:

Take part in different arts activities.

Be inspired by artists and arts organisations.

Experience arts events.

Share your arts skills with others.

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- Put together a portfolio.
- Set yourself arts challenges.
- Organise your own projects.
- Research arts careers and the arts sector.

This award allows students to work autonomously and independently and is a more flexible provision than the usual exams. It was a huge success at our school.

Film School

This programme included classes from a local filmmaker, who came into the school once a week for a term. He is a film studies teacher at the local college and showed the students the basic techniques of filmmaking. The students used one of TPP, The Evictors Trial, to make a film trailer. This was supposed to lead to making a full film, but became difficult to produce, due to time restrictions with exams.

You can watch the trailer at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tRNQTTiujHk>

The Film School provided the students with many skills such as creative process, technical expertise, learning to use the camera and editing software, organising work schedules, collaboration within the team and communication of ideas.

Another rich learning experience was the online “Masterclass” from German screenwriter and film director Werner Herzog. The course included the process of making feature films, narrative, writing, financing, locations, cinematography, sound, editing, and working with actors. Herzog is a self-taught filmmaker and believes you can create films without doing a four year degree at college. He says that you learn about film-making through trial and error.

The students also created videos and films for the “Move to Mars” project, the “Clinton Versus Trump” project, and also produced individual short films. It is an amazing learning experience which they all loved.

The Building Project

The students began the process of building a canoe. They were

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unable to finish it due to time pressure and taking upcoming exams, but the benefits of working in a team on such an amazing project was wonderful to witness. One of the parents kindly financed the project and gave their time to come every week to put the wooden canoe together.

A boy of thirteen came to our school totally disinterested in any academic work, but he was totally committed to building projects. He ended up bringing in most of his tools and working in the workshop every afternoon.

The Life Design Project

Many of the students were starting to fret about what they would be doing after school, they had vague ideas but what to do with the next 70 odd years stretching ahead was causing them some grief. I spent time thinking about how to approach this problem. I knew through my NLP training that you could reframe how you think about situations, so I started having discussions with the students about certainty. I think it looks to many young people that once you are an adult you are certain about life choices, decisions you make relating to everything you do. I break it to them gently that most adults don't feel that sense of certainty, and generally are not saying to themselves "I love my job and my life and nothing will be a problem, ever, as long as I live." There will always be challenges, just when one part of life seems to be running smoothly, another part will wobble or collapse, sometimes everything collapses at the same time. It's tough but doable as long as you have built up resilience

I also came across a really interesting book by two Stanford professors, Bill Burnett and Dave Evans, entitled *Designing Your Life: How to Build a Well-Lived, Joyful Life*. The book is an outline of a course which began in Stanford university in 2010. The main message of the book is based on design thinking and the fact that you wouldn't design a product on only one idea, there would be multiple ideas which you would prototype. Also, designers don't think their way forward, they build their way forward. This is what should be applied when planning your life.

I found a fascinating video of Burnett and Evans discussing this philosophy and showed it to the students. In the video the professors asked the audience what they were going to do with the rest of their

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“wild and wonderful lives.” They talked about vague messages that young people receive such as ‘live the dream and ‘be your absolutely best self’. But these messages are not cohesive as there are more than just one version of you, there are many great versions of you and if you are striving to get to that one best you in the one best place, you are going to be unhappy.

They go on to say:

The challenge is figuring out the future, how do we do that? Designers have been inventing the future for years, they have a way of inventing the future, they look around and find the right problem. Problem finding is more important than problem solving, if you’re working on the wrong problem, you’ll get the wrong answer every single time. The wrong problem is trying to figure out the perfect strategy to become absolutely the perfect best you. The reason that’s the wrong problem is it mistakenly perceives that your life is a tame problem that can be solved when it in fact it is a wicked problem that needs to be designed. A tame problem is a technical term designed by urban planners back in the seventies, a tame problem is a well-behaved problem, it may be a hard problem but it is well-behaved problem, once I solve it, the solution will keep working. In wicked problems, which are intrinsically human problems, the solution criteria keeps changing over time, you don’t know what the answer is until you find it, and once you find it you can’t reuse it again. What we need is an adaptable, flexible approach to figure it out, and that’s where design thinking comes in.

Design thinking can be boiled down to Odyssey Plans and Prototyping. Odyssey Plans are three completely different documented versions of your life. These are experiences, journeys, not problems to solve. Then you should play with those versions to see which one you are really curious about, curiosity will lead to the next step. The plans include a wild card version, whereby you don’t consider making money and don’t worry about people thinking it’s crazy or funny.

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Prototyping is about trying on those plans for size, researching, talking to people asking them for their story. Then trying to experience the plan in reality by arranging to visit or volunteer where people are doing the things that feed your curiosity. It's a way of getting a sneak peak on the future.

The video ends with Burnett telling us:

The message is you can't engineer your life, it's not a team problem and you can't plan it because no plan of action is going to survive first contact with reality. But you can design it, design is an adaptable process that allows you to continue to change the outcome when you get more data and the data in the future you get through prototyping.

The dysfunctional beliefs and reframes listed in their book are very similar to NLP practices, and are probably in the same vein as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy:

Dysfunctional Belief #1: Your degree determines your career.

Reframe: Three quarters of all college grads don't end up working in career related to their majors.

Dysfunctional Belief #2 : If you are successful you will be happy.

Reframe: True happiness is designing a life that works for you.

There have been two PhD studies carried out on the Life Design programme, one from the School of Education and one by the School of Psychology. The studies demonstrate that people who apply these principles have increased self-advocacy, more and better ideas and feel they have the ability to design the life they really want.

The students were really interested in this topic and were really shocked to hear that a survey shows that 80% of students at Stanford University are unsure about what they want to do with their futures. I order the book and we start to work through the Odyssey Plans. The plans along with discussions about dysfunctional beliefs really helped the students start to feel more comfortable about the next stage of their life.

One of our students who had been through the Life Design process

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had three different plans laid out for her future. Her first choice was to further study art, when this didn't play out due to not being accepted onto the art programme, she moved to her second plan which was to work with animals. She stayed positive and applied to go to college to study animal care, and was accepted onto that programme.

The Life Design Project gives the students a plan of action to take into their future.

Other Projects

I tried to create as many connections to the outside world as possible. For the YES programme, the students met with members of the public and also worked closely with a business advisor. If a student expressed an interest in a particular area, such as politics or working with children, I would look to secure a work placement for the student in that area as an intern or volunteer.

We had a weekly newsletter which went out to families and friends. Each student was responsible for writing an article about the week's events, from the projects or the business, it was great for everyone to read what was happening in the school and it developed the students writing and communication skills.

We also cooked a lot, both in the primary and secondary schools. It was mainly soups pastas, vegetable curries and baking bread. It was a really good experience for the students to sit together peeling vegetables and talking about what foods they liked – or didn't like, and they would often try foods that they wouldn't eat at home.

I wanted the students from the secondary to know what was going on in the real world. Some of them watched the news, but the micro flashes of mainly negative news cycles do not provide a balanced view. When we first started the school, I had the students watch a BBC Newsnight video of Jeremy Paxman interviewing Russell Brand about his disillusionment with politics and the fact that he doesn't vote. An extremely interesting conversation about the issues ensued between the students after the video had finished. The video is really popular, racking up almost twelve million views on YouTube.

Russell Brand now hosts an online podcast, *Under the Skin*. From the website:

Under 'The Skin' asks: what's beneath the surface - of people we admire, of the ideas that define our time, of the history we are told. Speaking with guests from the world of academia, popular culture and the arts, they'll help us to see the ulterior truth behind our constructed reality. And have a laugh.

An ex-student recently told me that they still listen to Brand's interviews. This is a good thing to hear, these are in-depth long form discussions.

Other platforms, which the students watched or listened to, included:

The Dave Rubin Report. From the website:

The Rubin Report is the largest talk show about free speech and big ideas. Whether it's the debate surrounding religion and atheism, foreign policy issues like immigration and terrorism, or big ideas like the role of government, Dave Rubin goes one on one with thought leaders, authors and comedians.

London Real, hosted by Brian Rose. From the website:

Tired of being spoon-fed from the mainstream media, we've set out to offer a fresh, unscripted and unedited look into the world of real people. From activists to scientists, authors to fighters, politicians to drug smugglers – we present their real stories, uncensored and uncut.

The Joe Rogan Experience. This one has to be approached with caution and pre-viewed before recommending to students. Rogan is also a comedian and his podcasts includes some spicy language and topics. He interviewed Elon Musk whilst Musk was smoking marijuana – for example.

One of the richest sources of information and motivational guidance comes from Dr. Peterson who has taped most of his lectures from the University of Toronto. A gold-mine of knowledge, which can be

accessed from his website. One older teenage boy at our school was having difficulty in planning his next move and I suggested he watch some of the Peterson YouTube videos. He did, and his mum said he spent a lot of time listening to Peterson and it really helped him. I also gave some of our students Peterson's book *12 Rules* as a leaving gift.

Another student was studying biology and I introduced her to the online course by Stanford professor Robert Sapolsky entitled, *The Biology of Behavioral Evolution*. This course freely provides approximately 35 hours of top-notch lectures, which are hugely watchable, very informative and entertaining. At the beginning of the course, Saplosky says:

The general strategy for the course will be to resist categorical thinking. Not just because that's cool and nuanced and subtle – it's all of that. But fall into categorical thinking and you can do unspeakable damage in the realm of science. We will do so thinking constantly about ourselves as a boring species just like all the others out there. As a species that has the same boring physiology - but uses it in ways that are unrecognizable. As a species that does some things that are simply without precedent.

There are now so many ways for young people to engage with learning and deep discussion about meaningful issues taking place. They should be encouraged to access these veins of information. Once introduced, they will engage with the material, expanding their thinking and their views of the world.

Respectful Anarchists

I believe one of the most important messages I tried to get across to the students, to send them into their future, was to be a respectful anarchist.

The Oxford dictionary's definition of anarchy is, "A state of disorder due to absence or non-recognition of authority or other controlling systems."

However 'anarchy' also evokes feelings of independence and freedom, well suited to what I wanted to explore with regard to education. A quick research exercise uncovered that the word,

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originally Greek, is broken up into two parts, ‘an’ meaning ‘without’ and ‘archy’ - in ancient Greece an “archon” was an official person, the name given to bosses or rulers. So anarchy simply means “without rulers.” Nothing in the origin of the word means “disorder.” So how did this come about? Have we been tricked into loading meaning onto a perfectly useful word? Fearful to call something ‘without a ruler’ in case of reflected incitement of violence and disorder?

I never encouraged the students to be “disorderly,” to cause any social chaos, or to take to the streets, angrily waving banners about the latest issues. But I did encourage them to be individualistic, to stand their ground when they believed in something that was true for them. I suggested they always should put their point across to others in a respectful way, but not backing down if they were not hurting anyone or breaking any laws.

The students also made up the school rules, so these they could bend or break.

In a recent tweet (18/05/19), Alfie Kohn calls respectful anarchists “reflective rebels,” and says:

An essential challenge for parents and teachers - and it IS a challenge - is to celebrate kids who have the gumption to question what they're told and even to help them become reflective rebels. Instead, too many adults prefer the “child of least resistance.”

We had some top-notch teachers at the school, those who really understood what I was trying to achieve in relation to the students having the “gumption to question.” We also had teachers who held a certain mind set, and this caused interesting interactions. If a student wanted to give up a subject, these teachers would go into fear-mode, telling the student that they wouldn't do well in life without this particular subject, and I would meet with the student, the parents and the teacher to help reach an agreement calmly and respectfully.

I was always annoyed when I would hear fear-based messages from teachers in the school, or any form of coercive behaviour. They

don't motivate students, elevate their interest, or cause them to work harder, they usually just bring about alienation.

One incident, which illustrates this superbly, happened soon after we opened the secondary school.

It was around November and we had decided that we would celebrate Christmas by having a party and the students would sing a few carols. A teacher arranged the students into groups according to voice type. Once she had organised the males into mostly baritone or bass, she then turned to the girl students. As they were singing, one student, Lisa, needed encouragement from the teacher to hit the high notes. When the singing stopped, Lisa told the teacher she wasn't able to reach the notes and asked if she could sing lower. The teacher started to insist that she *could* sing the high notes, she had heard her do so, and she needed to as there were enough students to sing in the lower range. The singing started again, Lisa continued to sing in a lower note. The teacher stopped the group and stared at Lisa, asking her why she was being difficult. Lisa, reflectively rebelling, politely responded that she didn't feel she could consistently reach the notes, was worried about the performance, so, therefore, wouldn't be singing soprano. I was standing next to the door, leaning against the wall, watching the back and forth display, along with the rest of the students. The teacher became more flustered, Lisa calmly held her ground. Finally, the teacher threw up her arms in despair, turned on her heels and walked out of the classroom saying she refused to lead the group in singing. Ever again.

As the teacher stormed passed me, she slightly turned to check my response, probably looking for back up. I gave a small shrug, and said nothing. All eyes in the room watched this micro-interaction between us, they also waited to see what would happen next, what I would do? I didn't do anything, I told them to take a break and we'd start working again in ten minutes. I left the room. I was secretly satisfied with the outcome, not with a teacher angrily walking out of a class, that was saturated with all sorts of negative role-modeling, but the result of a student politely and calmly but insistently standing her ground. The teacher was annoyed with me, and wanted to know why

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I had not supported her. I tried to explain that Lisa's response was reasonable, she was allowed to decide what pitch to sing in, or if to sing at all – it was a democratic school, we were trying to help the students develop a strong character. The teacher obviously didn't agree, she didn't lead another singing class, and she also didn't stay at the school for much longer.

The incident was important, as it set the tone for how we ran the school.

I can't blame teachers for this power struggle, it is how they have been trained to think – that it is their job to tell the student what to do, and the students have to do it. No wonder there is so much misery in schools for all involved.

If the teacher in the story above would have turned the challenge over to the students, if she had asked them to come up with their ideas for a holiday celebration song, traditional or otherwise, and had given them permission to create the lyrics and compose the music, using any instruments they wished - then we would have had an amazing end of term performance!

In the next chapter, we will see how a physics teacher, professor Eric Mazur turned over his classroom to his students.

CHAPTER 6

Flipped Learning

About a year after the secondary school opened, the students were really engaged with TPP. They were learning about history, politics, philosophy sociology, and their English verbal and written skills were being honed through reading complex material, writing essays and giving presentations. However, the more structured lessons of maths and physics were still being taught in a traditional way. The maths and physics teacher was young, and seemed genuinely interested in the progress of the students. The students, who were good at maths, were progressing well enough, though not wildly enthusiastic about the subject. The concerning thing was the number of students who just were not engaging with the coursework at all. You would hear remarks such as “I hate maths, and physics, they’re so boring.”

Was there a way to subvert these traditional classes? For those students who had really turned away from maths?

Again, the answer came serendipitously.

The older students were involved in intensive maths and physics sessions as their exams were coming up. The teacher asked if I would oversee the younger students. He showed me what they needed to be working on in their text books. In the class, I repeated his instructions, but became really disheartened by how demotivated and uninterested they were. I told them that we would try something else.

I ordered a book entitled, *The Number Devil*, written by Hans Magnus Enzensberger, a German author, poet, translator and editor. The book is based on a character named Robert, who is twelve. He thinks maths classes are boring and the teacher, who he doesn’t like, won’t let the class use their calculators. Then, in his dreams, Robert meets the “Number Devil” who introduces him to number theory, showing him that maths is not boring and difficult, but simple and fun.

The number devil tells Robert:

Do you want to know something? Most genuine mathematicians are bad at sums. Besides they have not time

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to waste on them. That's what pocket calculators are for. I assume you have one?

Sure but we're not allowed to use them in school.

I see, said the number devil. That's all right. There's nothing wrong with a little addition and subtraction. You never know when your battery will die on you. But *mathematics*, my boy, that's something else again!

You're just trying to win me over, said Robert. I don't trust you. If you give me homework in my dream, I'll scream bloody murder. That's child abuse!

As the dreams progress, the number devil introduces number theory along with their assigned nick-names: "Prima donnas" (prime numbers), "rutabagas" (square roots) and "vrooms" (factorials). "Hopping" is raising a number to a higher power, "Hopping Backwards" is taking the root and "Hopping Twice" is squaring twice.

The students' favourite, and what captured their imagination most, was "Bonacci" numbers (the Fibonacci sequence) also known as the Golden Ratio whereby each number is the sum of the two preceding numbers. This simple pattern of 'phi' is a built-in numbering system which is found in nature.

This spilled out into a phi-project which saw the students discover the pattern in flower petals, pine cones, seed heads, shells, galaxies, hurricanes, faces, animals. Art projects ensued whereby they created amazing drawings. Maths looked different after that, Robert and the number devil's subversive-style attitude worked really well.

Those students were around fourteen/fifteen at the time, and would have definitely not been passing maths tests in a mainstream school. Now, a few years later, two of them received A's in their Higher maths exams, A's in their Advanced Higher exams, and are now off to university to study maths and engineering.

The September after the Number Devil book project, it was time for the younger students to get ready for their up-coming exams, to move on from interesting number theory to crunching numbers from the assigned curriculum. They reverted back to rote, text-book learning.

I didn't want them to lose their interest and motivation, I wanted to find a way to energise the maths coursework. Was there a subversive way to do this?

I found something else, very non-traditional, which I thought could work.

In a traditional lesson, the teacher of any subject delivers new content and moves through the material in a prescribed way, which works well for those students who absorb the information right away. For those who don't and have questions, the teacher can respond to them, which keeps the other students waiting, or the teacher moves on, leaving the struggling students lost. Then all students are asked to do homework, basically to work on a problem they might not understand, with nobody available to answer their questions.

However, there is a new way of turning the class upside down – it's called "Flipped Learning." Initiated in the U.S., this learning approach, like the projects, sees the teacher as a "guide on the side" as well as a "sage on the stage."

Students begin by watching a video of a maths concept (or any subject) before it has been introduced in the classroom. Either the teacher makes their own video, or the students access one of the many online classes like Kahn Academy. The video can be viewed as many times as is necessary to familiarise themselves with the information. At the next class, the teacher will ascertain where the students are still struggling and then use the lesson to deepen the understanding by either spending time with individual students or instructing in small groups. Interaction and discussion between students is a big part of the success of flipped classrooms, students who have just found a solution to a problem are best placed to then explain it to another student, as they know where the pitfalls are. This helps the struggling students and reinforces the knowledge of the explainer.

What was initially done in the classroom is now done at home online and what used to be done at home is now done in the classroom – Flipped Learning. Ideally, each student has access to the videos at home, if no computers are available at home, laptops can be borrowed from school. The student has to reflect on what they have learned by taking down notes and practicing the maths problems.

I really wanted to try this approach, however the maths and physics teacher did not support the idea, at all. He refused to even trial it.

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After a year, it became apparent that the students were not doing well with this teacher. The struggling students were not improving, and the students who were more receptive to the material were not being stretched. The fact that the teacher was not open to alternative ways of teaching and learning, helped me make the decision to ask him to leave a little easier. I didn't make the decision lightly, maths and physics teachers do not grow on trees. However, I was determined to find another teacher, the student's needs must be the only consideration. If a teacher isn't willing to try different approaches, especially with struggling students, they shouldn't be teaching.

Fortunately, we'd had a woman come to the school a year earlier to give a presentation about astronomy. She was really engaging, the students liked her and I remembered that she had previously been a maths and physics teacher. I contacted her and set up a meeting. She had left teaching some years before, unwilling to deal with the usual challenges many teachers face. I talked to her about what I was trying to achieve in the school, and she seemed very interested and enthusiastic, and was available to teach three sessions a week.

We introduced the flipped learning elements right away. At the beginning, the students felt that the weight of responsibility was resting on their shoulders and the initial introduction of concepts, was not easy. However, they did see the value of going into class having reviewed the concepts as often as necessary and with specific questions to be answered. The teacher would then meet with them in small groups or individually to cover what they didn't understand. There was also plenty of breakout groups whereby students would get together to go over the material.

By the end of the trial, for those older students who were not oriented towards maths and felt it "wasn't their thing," the implementation of the flipped classrooms seemed to have happened a bit too late, and they did not excel. For those younger students who initially didn't like maths but had enjoyed the *Number Devil* book, flipped learning worked really well.

To look at the beginnings of flipped learning, we will turn to Professor Eric Mazur who is a physicist and educator at Harvard University. He started teaching at Harvard in 1984. He says he didn't question how he was going to teach, he emulated his own professors and copied their lecturing approach.

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When he started teaching physics to pre-medical students, who were usually not particularly enamored with the subject, but had to take it for their coursework, he received high ratings for his teaching from them, which was not usual. He presented every teaching trick in his toolkit such as swinging a wrecking ball back and forth on a pendulum, just missing his face. He brought physics to life and said it was like a “Hollywood show.” He believed he was an exceptional teacher, maybe the worlds best physics teacher. However, after about seven years of teaching, he read an article which would make him see that his success as a teacher was a big illusion – and the show came crashing down.

The article reported on a study of thousands of students in the southwest of the U.S. who had taken a physics test, a multiple-choice questionnaire. The questions were not presented in the usual text-book style, instead they were word based, real world problems. The students did very poorly on the test, and it didn’t make any difference if the test was given before they had completed a physics course or afterwards, they still did equally badly. Mazur was sure his students would be different, but he was intrigued and wanted to test them to see what their results would be, so he gave them the same word-based test. When they only achieved slightly better results than the original students in the study, he was devastated. “That’s when,” he says, “my life as an instructor was changed forever.”

What was causing the poor results? It turned out that, to pass exams, students were learning about physics as though they were recipes, they were memorising the formulas they needed in order to answer the text-book style questions, not truly learning the concepts. Mazur did not know how to correct this block to learning, then something happened, “a solution presented itself serendipitously, totally accidentally.”

Close to their final exam, his students completed a test, the results of which were less than favourable. They were panicking and asked Mazur for an evening class to go over the material again. His detailed lesson still failed to bring understanding to many of the students, they couldn’t even articulate what they didn’t understand, or what confused them. In frustration, Mazur gave up and told them to discuss it between themselves. He said something then happened, which he had never witnessed before, all 250 students started talking. They turned their attention to each other, Mazur says he could have left the hall and nobody would have noticed. In a short period of

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time, the students who had understanding around the concept, who had recently experienced a flashbulb of clarity, explained to those who didn't get it at all. Soon, between them, they had figured it out.

Mazur points to the "curse of knowledge" written about by Steven Pinker, once you understand something, you can't see why it is so difficult for others not to. From then on Mazur tells us:

I changed my approach to teaching completely. I stopped lecturing, I stopped being the Hollywood performer in front of the students. Instead I gave them the book and my notes to read I asked them to read the book before coming to class not after class. In class I teach by questioning...students help each other understand...I call this approach peer instruction because students teach each other at the same level rather than teacher-student.

I, as the instructor, facilitated instead of being the sage on the stage delivering the wisdom, which I now know I can't do, I am their coach I'm the coach who guides them from the side. I've shown with this method that you can triple the learning gains.

Mazur is now a firm believer in the students learning by doing, not by listening. He says education is a two-step process. The first step is the easy part, the transfer of information. The second step is the thinking process, the understanding and processing of the information, which is more difficult. He advocates for teachers spending their time on the second step, overseeing classroom questions and discussions. Most teachers are preoccupied with the first step, information transference, then the student is left to figure out the second step, the all important understanding, by themselves.

Mazur also believes "Why You Can Pass Tests and Still Fail in the Real World." In a 2012 video he says:

I've been bashing lectures for twenty years. It's an outdated, medieval, monastic approach to teaching, which is not very effective because it mostly focuses on the regurgitation of information that is now readily available in books and on the internet.

It's true. In exams, you apply that regurgitated information in

formulaic fashion to a specific answer. In the real world it doesn't work like that, solutions are open ended, you have to try and fail, sometimes over and over again before you find the solution. But exams don't test for intellectual creativity or critical thinking or problem solving. So students don't have to develop those skills, they simply have to remember the formula. It is of no use in life.

Mazur criticises assessment techniques and finds them ineffective and just used for ranking students. He believes that deep learning is not achieved by cramming for an exam, which only stores information in short-term memory only to be forgotten soon after.

He allows students to bring books and a laptop to his tests and says he has to work harder to assess meaningful skills.

We know from the social constructivism perspective that it is effective for students to learn through experiencing understanding through interacting with each other. Back in 1962, Lev Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development showed, that "a range of tasks that are too difficult for an individual to master alone, but can be mastered with the assistance or guidance of adults or more-skilled peers."

Students at our school, often tended to use free time in school to gather around a computer and go over their "pre-work" material, which was assigned for them to review before their class. Or they would watch videos at home. Because it was a small group, the teacher would know if they had not completed the pre-work. However, it was usually not an issue, the project work helped with their self-motivation, and they wanted to do well in all areas of school work.

But what happens when the group is large? Mazur doesn't see this as a problem and can teach up to 250 students, how does this work? His plan ensures that the students put in the work at step 1, taking responsibility for the initial exposure to the material which prepares them for step 2. Step 2 resulted in the need for the process to be digitised.

The popularity of online interaction was then utilised to create "Perusall," an online, social learning platform "designed to promote high pre-class reading compliance, engagement and conceptual understanding."

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Books or articles are available on the site and students annotate their reading assignments by replying to comments or posting their own questions or comments. This happens in social chat-rooms and the student will receive an email if somebody has responded to their question or comment. All entries are logged and this forms part of the assessment criteria. They are not allowed to just post “I don’t understand,” they have to share their thinking about what they specifically don’t get. The grading algorithm uses four evaluating criteria: timeliness, quantity, quality and distribution.

If a class is large, say over twenty students, the program breaks the numbers down into smaller groups to foster familiarity and encourage interaction.

The instructor receives a “confusion report” which will highlight the most common areas of confusion. The philosophy is based on “Just-In-Time-Teaching” which allows teachers to target their next class towards the material which students find the most difficult.

In the U.S. flipped learning is gathering momentum. “The Flipped Learning Global Initiative” was created to “support the successful adoption and implementation of the flipped learning model.” Their goal is to help spread flipped learning’s best thinking, best practices and best technologies worldwide. The coalition includes educators, researchers and education leaders.

The Flipped Learning Network offers a formal definition of the term to avoid common misconceptions:

Flipped Learning is a pedagogical approach in which direct instruction moves from the group learning space to the individual learning space, and the resulting group space is transformed into a dynamic, interactive learning environment where the educator guides the students as they apply concepts and engage creatively in the subject matter.

The four Pillars are known as F-L-I-P: Flexible Environment, Learning Culture, Intentional Content, Professional Educator.

In the U.K., there seems to be an interest in flipped learning, but also some skepticism. A TES article from 2017 is entitled “Flipped learning leads to ‘small’ progress,” and reports:

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The first ever UK-based research into flipped learning in a school setting – exclusively shared with *TES* – shows that those who use the ed-tech intervention make about one month's extra progress.

However, with the intervention costing about £150 per pupil without taking into account hardware costs, critics have questioned whether the increasingly popular teaching technique represents value for money.

John Blake, head of education and social reform at the Policy Exchange think tank, said he did not believe that flipped learning offered value for money.

"Is this money, is this time, is this resource the best way to get this outcome? I would think the answer is certainly no," he said.

However, this skepticism is not evident amongst many schools throughout the world, who are convinced this is the future of education and are forging ahead to implement flipped learning. A 2018 press release states:

Today, the Flipped Learning Global Initiative (FLGI), a worldwide coalition of educators, researchers, technologists, professional development providers and education leaders, announced the first adopters of the Flipped Learning International Training Standards. Nineteen K-12 schools and higher education institutions signed agreements to adopt the standards including: Clintondale High School, the first fully flipped high school in the U.S.; MEF University, the first fully flipped higher education institution in the world; and the University of Adelaide, ranked in the top one percent of the world's universities. The first adopters include: high schools, middle schools, primary schools, colleges and universities in: U.K., Spain, Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, Portugal, Turkey and the U.S.

"These K-12 schools and higher-ed institutions have led the adoption of Flipped Learning around the world, and they are now leading the education community into the Flipped Learning 3.0 era," said Jon Bergmann, Chief Academic Officer at the Flipped Learning Global Initiative. "Each is led by visionary leaders who recognize that Flipped Learning has evolved far beyond the prevailing understanding and practices

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in the typical flipped classroom. We are delighted to recognize them as Flipped Learning 3.0 model schools.

For the students at our school the answer to deep and authentic learning was Flipped Learning. The classroom was set up in a conference style with tables arranged in a U-shape, conducive to peer-to peer discussion and one-to-one teacher to student conversations. They enjoyed the personalised attention, the interaction and discussion. They would talk to each other animatedly as in the projects, about what they found difficult or easy, they would help each other to understand.

In the final part of the book, we will look at how various organisations and schools have tried to make changes to the quality of educational practices. Some have succeeded, and some have not.

Part IV – Reform

CHAPTER 1 Global Education

When looking to reform any system, there is a tendency to examine how standards are set around the world and to compare these with other countries.

There is an organisation which measures and ranks these educational standards: The OECD (The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development). They test fifteen-year-old students throughout the world in an initiative entitled: The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

The OECD wanted a way to cross-compare student achievement with a view to tie together academic success with future economics. This optional process provides questionnaires, to be completed by the students and school heads every three years, and then the results are published a year later. The first test took place in 2000. The results from the 2015 tests list Singapore in first place out of seventy countries. Finland is fifth, UK is fifteenth, and U.S. is twenty-fifth. For the 2018 test, eighty countries took part, and over half a million fifteen year-olds were tested in reading, mathematics and science. These results will be released in December 2019.

In theory, this seems like a really good thing to do, to hold countries responsible for the standard of education they are providing for their citizens. However not everyone agrees on the value of the tests.

In a Guardian article entitled, ‘OECD and Pisa tests are damaging education worldwide – academics,’ around one hundred academics from around the world (including Yong Zhao, whom I wrote about earlier), sent a letter to Dr. Andreas Schleicher, the German data scientist and director of PISA. The letter stated that the view of the academics was that the PISA tests are harmful to students. They listed their concerns, including:

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- Pisa has contributed to an escalation in such testing and a dramatically increased reliance on quantitative measures. For example, in the U.S., Pisa has been invoked as a major justification for the recent "Race to the Top."
- The three-year assessment cycle, has caused a shift of attention to short-term fixes designed to help a country quickly climb the rankings, despite research showing that enduring changes in education practice takes decades.
- Emphasising a narrow range of measurable aspects of education, Pisa takes attention away from the less measurable or immeasurable educational objectives like physical, moral, civic and artistic development, thereby dangerously narrowing our collective imagination regarding what education is and ought to be about.
- As an organisation of economic development, OECD is naturally biased in favour of the economic role of public [state] schools. But preparing young men and women for gainful employment is not the only, and not even the main goal of public education, which is to prepare students for participation in democratic self-government, moral action and a life of personal development, growth and wellbeing.

The academics say the most important issue with the PISA tests, is that they endanger the wellbeing of teachers and students by increasing the already high levels of stress.

They also call for extra seats at the table to include the views of local, national and international groups. In addition, they argue that an invitation should be extended to, "parents, educators, administrators, community leaders, students, as well as scholars from disciplines like anthropology, sociology, history, philosophy, linguistics, as well as the arts and humanities."

However, a shift in the OECD's approach to testing has occurred. A February 2019 article from Quartz is entitled, 'The unlikely champion for testing kids around the world on empathy and creativity.' The article reports that PISA director, Schleicher, thinks that society is not prepared for the future of work. He says:

We're scared that human jobs will be replaced by robots. But we're still teaching kids to think like machines.

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Kids can, however, imagine, create, question, and collaborate in ways that robots cannot (at least, not yet).

The advent of AI should push us to think harder of what makes us human.

The article goes on to say that for over twenty years, Schleicher focused on what skills should be assessed and measured. He believes that the current industrial education system needs to change.

The article also quotes Douglas Archibald who is the director of 'Whole Education,' a network of schools that focuses on trying to help kids succeed academically, but also helps them to develop a broader set of skills and qualities. Archibald, "credits Schleicher for dramatically elevating the discourse about what the future of learning should look like. But he is doubtful that the scope of change Schleicher is now tackling is feasible at the level it matters most: across larger education systems."

Archibald also says that in England, the school inspection body (OFSTED), "has acknowledged that developing creativity and resilience has been difficult due to pressure from the government for schools and students to report good tests results."

(Does this make anyone else feel really sad/annoyed?)

Fernando Reimers, head of the Global Education Innovation Initiative at Harvard University, said that before PISA, "We were all just in the dark."

The OECD reports have also provided valuable information. A wellbeing study showed which students throughout the world are the happiest, and which are the most stressed. Korean students did well on the PISA tests but had high levels of unhappiness. Mexican students did not do well on the tests but had high levels of happiness.

The report showed a strong connection between student wellbeing and teacher support.

The most anxious students were found in Singapore, the U.S. and the U.K.

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Over the past few years, Dr. Schleicher has been advocating for the test to evolve and move towards problem solving and collaboration. In 2021, the next phase of evolution will include creative and flexible thinking.

Jim Knight, former U.K. education minister welcomes this news and says:

It is a great thing for OECD to help focus the mind of policy makers on educating the whole child and not just the academic child. If we continue with our fetishization of solely the academic, we won't be equipping our economy with the talent it needs for the future range of occupations that create value in the future.

When I read about the OECD's plans to expand their tests beyond cognition to include creative and flexible thinking, I contacted Dr. Schleicher to inform him of what we had been working on in the primary and secondary schools. After a few emails, a questionnaire to determine the educational philosophy of the schools and a telephone conversation with one of the OECD's analysts, I was invited to join the E2030 project as an Independent Expert. This shows that the organisation is very receptive to educators who want to be involved in shaping the upcoming plans.

The OECD describes E2030 as based on a shared vision, committed to helping every learner develop as a whole person, fulfil his or her potential and help shape a shared future built on the wellbeing of individuals, communities and the planet.

The identified challenges are listed as environmental, economic and social, all which require broader educational goals and a call for global and local solutions. E2030 contributes to the UN 2030 Global Goals for Sustainable Development, aiming to ensure the sustainability of people, profit, planet and peace through partnership.

The OECD have produced a really informative position paper, which can be found at:

[https://www.oecd.org/education/2030/E2030%20Position%20Paper%20\(05.04.2018\).pdf](https://www.oecd.org/education/2030/E2030%20Position%20Paper%20(05.04.2018).pdf)

Singapore. Although Singapore could be sitting back and enjoying

holding the top place in the PISA ranking, the education minister, Mr. Ong Ye Kung, is not so sure the ranking reflects an accurate picture, or is representative of what they should be striving towards. He says:

When we take the scores and divide them by the total learning time, that is to say, we normalise the scores by hours of study, Singapore's normalised score falls below the OECD average, behind countries like Finland, Germany, France, UK and Japan.

OECD data also shows that there is actually a negative relationship between academic outcomes and the total time spent on learning. The countries with longer learning times are not necessarily among the best performers.

In an opening address for the 'Schools Work Plan Seminar,' the Minister spoke about a recent article in the *Economist*, which lauded the success of Singapore's education system, and pointed to the fact that the country still works to improve education.

The minister refers to the various programmes, which have been introduced in the past twenty years including:

In 1997, we developed the "Thinking Schools, Learning Nation" vision, to strengthen thinking and inquiry amongst students. During this earlier phase of change, we reduced curriculum content by about 30%, enhanced teacher training, and encouraged the sharing of best practices and ideas across schools.

In 2005, we embarked on the "Teach Less, Learn More" movement as a subsequent phase to further strengthen teachers' pedagogies. Our aim was to help teachers better engage students and develop their critical faculties through real-life learning experiences. Curriculum then was further reduced by 20%, to create time and space for more active and independent learning.

"Thinking Schools, Learning Nation" was framed from a national and systemic perspective; "Teach Less, Learn More," from the teacher's perspective. Both remain relevant and important, but to help our students meet the challenges of an uncertain, fluid future, we need to usher in a new phase of change – one that is framed based on the students'

perspective.

The minister also recounts a speech he gave at the ‘Economic Society of Singapore,’ in which he talked about the trade-offs, which need to be addressed.

The first trade-off is balancing rigour and joy and the risks of education causing too much stress for young people. And how students are more joyful about their learning when they move away from “memorization, rote learning, drilling and taking high stakes exams.”

The second is about competition, managing the sharpening versus the blurring of academic differentiation in order to avoid creating an overly competitive culture in schools.

The third is a look at customisation versus stigmatisation and how the less academically inclined students can become stigmatised. By reducing assessments, the stress levels of their primary students are also reduced. The fourth and final trade-off takes into account skills versus paper qualifications, and how both need to be provided throughout life. He calls it “Learn for Life.” The provision of skills is addressed with the implementation of a national movement called “SkillsFuture.” This is a lifetime educational offering to provide skills to all members of society, from schoolchildren to those in their “silver years.”

The Minister goes on to say:

Skills mastery is more than having the right paper qualifications and being good at what you do currently; it is a mindset of continually striving towards greater excellence through knowledge, application and experience. With the help of the Future Economy Council, education and training providers, employers, unions – you can own a better future with skills mastery and lifelong learning. Your skills. Your asset. Your future.

He also points to the future of work and the advent of “lights-out manufacturing,” whereby automation is running entire factories. He talks about a “fundamental shift in our mindset,” how people need to get used to always feeling out of their depth, in order to solve the next level of a challenge. He feels that the one-time passing of

exams might not matter much in the life-journey of a child and how students “must leave the education system still feeling curious and eager to learn, for the rest of their lives.

Finland. Finland often hits the headlines due to its educational placement near the top of the international league tables for literacy and numeracy. The reformation began in the seventies, when they took their teacher training from colleges and moved it to universities, requiring all teachers to have a Master's degree. A decade later, prestige for the role of the teacher allowed them autonomy over their classrooms. In the mid eighties, a decentralization process took place and by the mid nineties, only broad educational aims and content guidelines were issued from the National Board of Education

Finland is about to implement project based learning nationwide, they call it “Phenomenal Based Learning” (PhenoBL) – or teaching by topic. This will see the students encounter all aspects of project based learning including working in small collaborative teams. Not all teachers or heads are happy with the reform, they have spent their careers focused on one subject, now they will have to co-teach and become more facilitator than leader.

The goals of this educational reform is to create deep learning and understanding. Holistic real-world phenomena provides the starting point for learning, which are studied as complete entities, in their real context, and the information and skills related to them are studied by crossing the boundaries between subjects.

Phenomena are holistic topics like the European Union, media and technology, water or energy. The starting point differs from the traditional school culture which divides information into separate and decontextualised subjects.

U.S.A. Alternative Education Revolution Organization (AERO). AERO, which was founded by Jerry Mintz, is U.S. based and leads the way in spearheading alternative education globally. It lists 18 member schools in the UK, and hundreds in the U.S., with 60 schools in California alone. One of those schools is High Tech High:

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Highb Tech High, San Diego, California. The school website poses a question:

What if school was about pursuing important questions about the world and along the way you discovered and developed your unique gifts, talents, and tastes?

School, as we know it and as designed in 1893, was not originally created with this in mind. Our school was born different.

We believe in doing real, personally challenging work that is meaningful to the world beyond the school walls – and most importantly within the context of a caring & loving community. When done well, tight-knit groups work on different aspects of the same project with a shared sense of ownership, purpose and craftsmanship.

This is the school mentioned earlier which is highlighted in the Ted Dintersmith documentary *Most Likely To Succeed*.

West Point Military Academy, New York, U.S. Another school which ‘does’ education differently is this academy which has among its graduates many world-class leaders. It is based on the educational vision of Sylvanus Thayer.

This sounds like it should be a vision based on obedience to authority and conformity, but it isn’t. There is no lecturing, and the education method is totally activity-based. An article in *Psychology Today* reports:

The classrooms have whiteboards on all four sides of the room—and all cadets are charged with engaging in activities related to the material throughout the class.

Get in a group, discuss the material, and write notes on the board—come up with a set of implications for modern life—tell the class about it. You’ve all read about this famous historical figure—discuss as a group his positive and negative attributes—and controversies regarding his life—and give a presentation to the rest of us—teach US about what his life and work implies about how the world operates now.

Trivius G. Caldwell, Assistant Professor of English at the academy, wrote an article entitled, 'A Wise Academy: The Un-Coddled American Minds at West Point:'

The liberal arts experience at West Point requires students (cadets) to seek out cognitive challenges, confront their implicit biases, and search for nuance in the understanding of leadership, morality, and selfless service.

The military faculty and cadets can be considered allies in intellectual maturation.

In my experience as an Assistant Professor at West Point, the school's homogeneous culture thwarts many of the contributing factors of coddling that Lukianoff and Haidt cite in their book *The Coddling of the American Mind*. That makes it a useful case study—one that can offer important tools to combat coddling in academia more broadly.

This approach requires cadets to take charge of their own learning. The classroom is transformed into a seminar where freedom of inquiry, diversity of thought, productive disagreement, and a sense of community flourish. Cadets are responsible for the content and synthesis of *their* ideas; faculty members are simply facilitators of thought.

Ad Astra, Los Angeles, U.S. Imagine you are one of the smartest and wealthiest people on the planet, you have five sons, and you are unhappy with their education and decide to open your own school. What type of curriculum would you implement?

This is the scenario which confronted Elon Musk, visionary entrepreneur, CEO and lead designer of SpaceX, CEO and product architect of Tesla Inc.

He opened a school in 2014, when he wanted to “exceed traditional school metrics on all relevant subject matter through unique project-based learning experiences.”

This type of school has classrooms, which contain whiteboard walls, necessary for capturing a multitude of ideas. Each student has a laptop. Sports or music, is not taught, but students follow these interests outside of school. The students can opt out of subjects they don't enjoy, they work in multi-aged groups. They receive no grades and only a few formal assessments. They help to shape the curriculum, which is re-designed every year. The projects sit alongside

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more traditional classes of creative writing, maths, physics and chemistry. They undertake online self-guided courses through various platforms including the Khan Academy. They learn entrepreneurship through running businesses. They give public presentations.

The demand throughout LA to attend the school is really high. In 2017 there were four hundred interested families for only twelve places.

Musk told a Chinese TV station about Ad Astra in 2015:

There aren't any grades (same-age years), making all of the children go in the same grade at the same time like an assembly line," he said. Instead, children aged seven to fourteen work together in teams, and while they do receive scores on their work, they do not receive letter-grades at the end of a semester.

Musk says one of the main problems with education is that it does not explain to students why they are learning certain content. He says:

Our brain is designed to disregard information, which it thinks has irrelevance. If you are being asked to memorise formulas, but you do not know why, then there is a cognitive dissonance. The *why* of things is very important.

Picking a problem, then using various educational tools to solve that problem, using math or economics or physics, is far more engaging than teaching the tools. Then you understand the relevance.

I can't help thinking that Musk heard about our primary school in Los Angeles, as most of what he provides at his school was what we were doing in 2010.

Education In The U.K.

Here in the U.K., we do not yet have an organised overseer of alternative education such as AERO. Innovative schools are rare. We don't seem to even have a central place in which to have a conversation about reforming education.

Maybe it's because there are different educational tribes?

The Roms, the Trads and the Mods

Guy Claxton helps us to categorise educational perspectives in the book he co-wrote with Bill Lucas, *Educating Ruby*. They put forward the notion that there are three educational tribes: The "Roms," the "Trads" and the "Mods:"

The Roms, short for Romantics, are all for free expression and in the extreme, believe that if you only left children alone, all will turn out for the best. Claxton and Lucas offer up alternative educational offerings such as Montessori, Summerhill and Rudolph Steiner as proponents of the Rom movement, though that might be too simplistic, for example most Steiner schools are very structured with a traditional way of teaching.

Next on the list is the Trads, short for Traditionalists, supporters of chalk and talk teaching, strong discipline and plenty of conventional exams.

Claxton has this to say about Trads:

Teachers are the holders of the knowledge and spoon-feed this narrow band of information to enable students to pass exams. The belief is that once you pass exams, go to university, get the degree you will fall into the life-long well paying job and a life of wealth and happiness. The knowledge packed into the brain to pass the exams is not important once it has done it's job, but could be of use at dinner parties or if you want to go on a quiz show. Trads believe that armies of Roms have for years been trying to take over the education system which is treated as progressive claptrap.

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The third tribe, the Mods are the Moderates. This tribe tinkers, explores and doesn't like banging big drums, and because of this it is easy to underestimate their numbers. As a self-confessed Mod, Claxton's hope for the *Educating Ruby* book is to create a more unified and confident voice for the Mods, in a careful, respectable way, slowly reviewing and experimenting. He feels that this is the way genuine progress will be made.

This slow and measured approach might be acceptable for the educationalists, but for parents and students, it is too little, too late. They don't have the luxury of time for experiments, their children are growing like weeds in front of their eyes. Many decide not to wait and to opt out of formal schooling. The reasons for this are diverse, and the decision can be controversial with family and friends casting doubt about the decision. I know that most parents usually don't take this decision lightly; it often comes after years of trying to make the mainstream system work for their child.

Whilst the *Educating Ruby* book calls for gradual reform, I believe we need radical change and a new category.

The parents of children who are not thriving in schools today, don't have the time or the inclination to 'tinker.' We can bang the drums now, loudly.

There are alternative organisations and schools who are forging new ways to educate in the UK. The following list includes most of the ones, I either knew about or could find. I will create a website for the book and include a section for all schools and organisations who are willing to bang the education drum.

U.K. Organisations

Innovation Unit

The Innovation Unit is an independent, not-for-profit social enterprise, and is tasked with providing improvements to public services. They are innovation experts and work as a collaboration of public service practitioners, designers and researching to bring life-changing solutions to social challenges. They have offices in London and Australia, and became independent from the Department for Education in 2006.

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They are currently working with the Educational Endowment Fund and collaborating with schools in the U.S., High Tech High in San Diego in particular, to test the effectiveness of Project Based Learning in 12 secondary schools in London, entitled 'REAL' Projects.

Human Scale Education (HSE)

HSE support human-scale learning environments in schools whereby the individuality of the student is respected.

They call for authentic assessment through portfolio and exhibition and real world, non-institutional workshop settings and experiences within schools.

From their website:

Human Scale Education works with schools and parents to promote human scale learning environments where children and young people are known and valued as individuals. We believe that 'humanity of scale' and the 'primacy of relationships' should inform the design of our schools and other public sector services.

The National Association of Small Schools

NASS promotes the work of smaller schools, those with 100 or fewer pupils.

NASS believes that smallness of scale has worth.

NASS believes smaller schools offer ideal conditions for young children's learning.

Personal attention leads to a sense of identity and a belief that effort is worthwhile. Loyal, committed teachers work as a team, with the children staying well on task. Small schools are caring places, close to home, family & community.

Tired old arguments that small schools cannot cope with the curriculum are now being thoroughly refuted in ways the public understands. In government inspections and national tests small schools are doing as well as and often better than the rest!

The small-scale, human-scale model of education represented in small schools is the closest to the way all of us learn in the

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real world at home and at work. It thrives on mixed talents, teamwork and individual ideas mediated through others as Vygotsky, Bruner and Wenger have so well argued.

Small schools are at the top of national performance, not least in low income and remote areas. The effective ingredient is the close partnership between parents and teachers. The children feel from the start safe and secure, that effort is worthwhile and achievement possible. The evidence shows exactly that and the high quality of teaching, relationships and related achievement endures.

Education Otherwise (EO)

EO was formed in 1977 by a group of parents and is now a large organisation, raising awareness and offering information and support to home educators.

Home education is becoming more widespread across the U.K. figures from the Education Otherwise website show 10 separate groups in London, with one groups yahoo page listing over 400 members and another yahoo page at almost 1,000. In North Wales there are 5 groups. Northern Ireland's homeschool Facebook page has almost 500 members and the Scottish Facebook page has almost 1,500 members.

Parents and/or their children decide on home educating their children for various reasons; some parents decided very early that their child won't be attending school. Others try the school system and find it is not suitable and didn't work for them.

EO takes it's name from the Education Act, which states that parents are responsible for their children's education, "either by regular attendance at school or otherwise" This has been challenged, but received approval and support to remain:

In November 2009 the Department for Children Schools and Families introduced measures in the Children Schools and Families Bill that attempted to change the law on home education in England. The Government was not successful, and the Children Schools and Families Act 2010 received Royal Assent on April 8th without any of the home education clauses passing into law.

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The current legal situation in the UK with regard to home education can be summarised in the phrase, "Education is compulsory, schooling is not."

Alternative Schools

There have been schools specifically founded to respond and appeal to children who don't thrive in mainstream schools. The following overview of schools attempts to take a look at a few of them. Some didn't survive, others are still in existence today, providing a nurturing and joyful place to learn.

The Liverpool Free School

I don't know if Sir Ken Robinson knows about the attempt to revolutionise education which took place in Liverpool in the 1970's, he was probably at university at the time, I'm sure if he were aware of it he would have been very interested.

The Liverpool Free School opened on Scotland Road in 1970. According to the school's founder, John Ord, the school was an educational 'nuclear explosion.' It was based on the philosophy of two major players in educational philosophy: John Dewey, an American philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer who believed that students should interact with the curriculum and take part in their own learning. The second player was Paolo Freire, a Brazilian educator and philosopher who wanted education to form critical consciousness and for students to question the nature of their situation, both historical and social with a view to creating a democratic society.

The school's founders were inspired by these great educational voices and their aim was to create a school imbued with the spirit of individuality, freedom and mutual respect.

I was six at the time, and my grandmother lived on Scotland Road where she had reared three sons on her own, after her husband was killed in World War II. My grandmother knew I was unhappy at school, and she also knew about this alternative school. I don't know if I would have ever been allowed to attend the school, as our family had moved to the more salubrious south end of Liverpool and I was attending one of the 'finest schools' in the city (except I didn't feel fine, I felt miserable). So it seems unlikely that I would have been

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allowed to join such an adventure in education. But it does seem like destiny brushed passed me, I can imagine what attending such a school would have done for my wounded spirit, I am sure I would have loved it there.

A BBC2 Education Special 'Lessons In Freedom' tells the story of the Liverpool Free School:

The documentary begins by telling us:

In Liverpool in the 70's a group of teachers conducted a bold experiment that challenged the educational status quo and provided a unique experience for both staff and pupils, so where are they now in 1993?

John Ord, founder of the school reminisces:

I was a teacher in the state system for 3 years and I used to think it right that every kid should work, because I'd been teaching kids for three years, six hours a day assuming they were learning things, well I soon got over that. When I came to the free school, I had a residue of that left in me, so when you see a kid sitting around talking or just reading, you think my God, why isn't he doing something? Let's sit him down, get him a pen, make him write, make him learn.

The school was only open for a few years and the roll grew to fifty students. The teachers were unpaid and the rent and supplies were paid for by donations and holding raffles in the local pubs. Unfortunately this wasn't sustainable and heartbreakingly the funds and resources dried up. The education committee did agree to partially fund the school but only on the understanding that the school would take in truants. But these extreme educational outliers proved difficult to handle and caused the school to gain a negative reputation. A year and a half later, the school was floundering. With genuine sadness in his eyes and emotion in his voice, John Ord recounts the end of the school:

The last few days were grim with no resources, no money, few staff and the feeling that things were slowly but surely coming to an end. That was depressing, and I still feel this now, when we had to close it, we let those kids down.

But even the short time they spent at the school seemed to give the students of the school with a different take on life, shown by their comments twenty years later:

Ex-student Maria, tells us that she thinks she would have been an entirely different person if she had stayed in a normal school. “The Free school made you think and the way you were treated by the teachers was totally different, everyone was treated equally.”

Another ex-student, Denis, conducts his interview from prison after he was sentenced for an armed robbery attempt. He was happy at the Free school, but things seem to have turned a dark corner when he returned to mainstream school. It makes you sadly wonder how his life would have turned out if he'd had the opportunity to stay in the Free School and find his voice, find his interests and skills. He seems gentle, reflective and says the Free school planted a seed, and made him more disciplined within himself. Then smiles wryly, acknowledging his current abode.

He talks about the School with fondness:

I think it has made me the man I am today. It sort of teaches the whole person and not just like a small piece. Not just academics, you did do mathematics and that sort of stuff, but it concentrated on the whole person, that's why they used to take you out to farms and woods, opened your mind up a bit more to life.

Greg Quiery from the Liverpool Education Guidance was interviewed and asked if the Free school had a wider impact on the world of education.

He responded by saying that the Free school movement was part of a general call for reform and that the school was “right at the cutting edge, trying to put these new ideas into practice.” He also says that, by 1992, many of the ideas from the Free School are now an accepted educational practice, such as child centered education and democratic education, whereby students are involved and have a say in their learning. Greg finishes his interview by saying although ideas had been introduced; closer control of classrooms had left little room

for further experiments in education.

Tom Weld is an ex-teacher from the Free School. The interviewer asks him if he believes it is possible to introduce radical ideas into mainstream education. To which he responds:

I have grave doubts about that, I believe in the state system there are pockets where people are able to honor children's individuality and potential and give full expression to children's creativity, but I think they are very few and far between... I still think it is crazy to try and work with 35 or 40 or even 30 children to do a lot of things, I still think it's an accident of the way that education is set up.

Tom goes on to explain that the Free School was an attempt by a number of people to do things with the assumption that anything was possible even up against many agencies trying to convince them of the opposite. He says, "I think having had that experience, the belief that anything could be possible has stayed with me to some extent. It has taken a battering, but it's still there."

The film returns to the school's main founder, John Ord. When the school closed, John was reprimanded for his foray into a different way of educating and was told he couldn't return to mainstream education; it took time to work his way back. He says the Free School left him with a feeling to want to change things so he went into politics.

The interviewer asks John about the situation after the closure of the school John felt that the school had proved its point. The interviewer asks what was that point. The answer comes, I imagine sounding still as fresh and strong as the first time he said it:

Well, the point is, that things can be done differently in education, that community matters, that solidarity matters, that a radical education is possible. You can do it, you don't have to sit in a chair and write about it you can get out there and work with people, in working class areas and inner cities and you can achieve things and for three or four years we achieved a lot. But we ran out of money, ran out of resources and in the end couldn't sustain the effort. But it is possible and that is the point that I was making at

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that time, a radical approach is possible, it's also necessary.

If you look at what's happened to education since I think the point is proved, we still need to take the radical approach and we can still do it.

Yes, John Ord, we can still do it.

Summerhill – Suffolk, UK

Summerhill was founded in 1921 by A.S. O'Neill who was named as one of the twelve most influential educators of the 20th century by the Times Educational Supplement in 1999.

This is the world-renowned school where pupils decide when and what they will learn. The aims of the school are listed as:

- To allow children freedom to grow emotionally.
- To give children power over their own lives.
- To give children time to develop naturally.
- To create a happier childhood by removing fear and coercion by adults.

A.S. Neill Writes:

My view is that a child is innately wise and realistic. If left to himself without adult suggestion of any kind, he will develop as far as he is capable of developing. Logically, Summerhill is a place in which people who have the innate ability and wish to be scholars will be scholars; while those who are only fit to sweep the streets will sweep the streets. But we have not produced a street cleaner so far. Nor do I write this snobbishly, for I would rather see school produce a happy street cleaner than a neurotic scholar.

That said the school has faced many challenges. I once considered the school for my two sons, we lived about a forty-minute drive away, and I decided to attend an open day. The school is primarily a boarding school, but also takes day students. An older student of about fourteen or fifteen welcomed the visiting parents and showed us around the school. The thing that struck you with the older children was how at ease they were with adults, they looked you in the eye and talked to you as an equal. I found that really refreshing as

it's not common for teenagers to show such maturity and confidence.

There was an arranged talk with Zoe, A.S. Neill's daughter. The lunch room was full and we sat on the benches huddled together, Zoe came in and sat in front of the piano, we all waited for her words of wisdom, for a prepared talk of why we should send our children to her school. Instead Zoe looked around the room said, "Hello, welcome, I am here to answer any questions you may have." People looked around at each other, and tentatively some started asking questions: "do the children play sports?" came voice from the back.

"If they want to, the school doesn't organise it, but the kids will put a game of football together sometimes," Zoe answered. I liked her for her genuineness. I really liked the school. I had really liked all of the teachers I'd met. The sense of community and respect for each other was unlike anything I'd ever experienced. I started to feel something close to excitement and relief, the boys would love it here, the freedom, the friendships the total support from staff. As I sat listening to various questions from visitors, going over the details in my head of how I could make this work logistically for the boys to attend as day students.

However, as I was leaving, a conversation with the school's administrator interrupted the feeling of relief and excitement. She was just making conversation and started chatting, when I told her I loved the school and would be looking into enrolling the boys as day students, she said: "The day students usually end up boarding as they feel like they are missing out on the social activities on the weekend, they all love the fun stuff, the parties".

"When do they see their parents?" I asked nervously.

"At holiday time, we have long holidays" she said sensing my change of mood and trying to be reassuring. But it wasn't reassuring at all; it created a panicky sad feeling.

As much as I loved the school, and thought my boys would love it, I couldn't come to terms with only seeing my young sons during the school holiday's even if they were long. So, sadly, Summerhill wasn't for us.

Sands, Devon

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Sands was founded in 1987 by three teachers and fourteen students from Dartington Hall, which had recently closed. A 2013 Ofsted report cited it has “Outstanding personal development because of the exceptional impact of the democratic principles.”

From the school’s website:

Our school is so different from the mainstream that it is hard know where to start!

It looks different – there is no uniform or even a dress code for students.

It sounds different – there are no clanging bells or unnatural quietness.

But mainly it feels different – there is no “us and them” division between staff and students

This all stems from Sands being a democratic school: students and staff run the school and make decisions together in a spirit of equality and mutual respect. There is no head teacher, no one is called ‘sir’ or ‘miss’, a student chairs the School Meeting and the student council sorts out the day-to-day niggles of school life. Listening to what our students say has shaped how we learn and live together by:

Allowing students to go at their own pace in the classroom.

Keeping class sizes small.

Allowing students to sit exams when they, as individuals, are ready.

Re-introducing practical life skills in the school day such as cooking, debating, cleaning and building.

Valuing the students as physical and emotional beings not just as exam candidates.

Good food and eating together as a central part of the day.

Acorn School, Gloucestershire

I spent the day at the Acorn School and was generously hosted by the founder Graeme Whiting. I was given free access to talk to the students about their experiences of the school, one sixteen year old girl told me “I didn’t know who I was until I came to this school.” They have consistently received ‘Outstanding’ Ofsted reports, with a

2012 report citing: “Students leave the school as well educated, intelligently opinionated, freethinking adults.”

From the school’s website:

The school’s ethos is to educate students as threefold human beings, nurturing the will, feeling, and thinking elements which are related to the head, heart, and hands. It is the school’s aim to provide an education and environment that is conducive to this threefold developmental concept, cultivating all three aspects in equal measure to support students as they develop into free-thinking adults.

The education in the Lower School encompasses the main elements of Graeme Whiting’s life work in education, while Upper School students receive a stimulating and highly academic programme, supported by our own internal examination and assessment system. Every student who has applied to university direct from The Acorn School has achieved a place, without state examinations!

Brockwood Park- Hampshire

Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986) was a philosopher, speaker and writer. In his book, *Education and the Significance of Life*, Krishnamurti states:

When one travels around the world, one notices to what an extraordinary degree human nature is the same, whether in India, or America, in Europe or Australia. This is especially true in colleges and universities. We are turning out, as if through a mold, a type of human being whose chief interest is to find security, to become somebody important, or to have a good time with as little thought as possible. Unfortunately, the present system of education is making us subservient, mechanical and deeply thoughtless; though it awakens us intellectually, inwardly it leaves us incomplete, stultified and uncreative.

The Krishnamurti Foundation bought land in 1969 and established Brockwood Park School. The school is not exclusively academic and says on its website: “Its mission is to help students learn the art of

living, bringing together aspects of learning, sensitivity, open-mindedness and self-reflection, that are too often ignored.”

The aims of the schools are set out in a document called *The Intentions*. They include:

Educating the whole human being, exploring freedom, responsibility and selflessness, and enabling pupils to discover their talents, with an aim of achieving academic excellence. There is an emphasis on pupils learning to be healthy, to appreciate the natural world and to value a sense of order and silence.

The school's inspection report shows excellent personal development within small class sizes. Pupils feel cared for and parents are highly positive, secure in the knowledge that their children are safe and well cared for. Also included in the report is the fact that all students are provided with a 'Personalised Academic Programme,' along with a collection of independent work on inter-disciplinary topics and projects. If and when appropriate, students can sit exams. Links are established with community groups in the UK and abroad.

The pupils' discussions are grounded in ethics and their cultural development is strong. There is an emphasis on a broad understanding of cultures, faiths, religions, laws and politics, celebrating and respecting differences.

By the time they leave school, the students have acquired a good level of maturity, enquiring minds, and are able to relate to adults in a respectful way.

Teachers and pupils enjoy positive relationships in an informal and friendly atmosphere. Students speak of their teachers with respect and warmth.

The staff supports the ambitions of the students, nurturing and supporting them in their goals.

Schumacher College, Totnes, Devon U.K.

The college was founded in 1990 by Satish Kumar and John Lane, and first opened to students in January 1991. Its first visiting teacher was the scientist and environmentalist James Lovelock, best known for his Gaia hypothesis, also known as Gaia theory or Gaia principle, which proposes that the Earth is a self-regulating complex system and all organisms are closely integrated.

From the school's website:

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Schumacher college attracts students from over 90 different countries, of all ages and backgrounds, drawn by its reputation for cutting-edge learning relating to ecology and sustainability.

We focus on interactive and experiential education to develop the practical skills and strategic thinking required to tackle many of challenges we face in the 21st Century.

Students work in small groups which embrace the learning principles of head, hand, heart. This takes place in the classroom, the gardens, the kitchen – it is part of everything we do.

Here you will discover things about yourself, develop a deep participatory relationship with nature, make new friendships with people from around the world and start a lifelong connection with the College.

They run short course, postgraduate courses, and horticulture programmes. They also have public open evenings where their short course teachers provide sustainable earth talks. They also provide talks from partner Transition Town Totnes, which is the home of the international Transition Movement.

Eton, Windsor U.K.

Eton is obviously inaccessible to most students, but provides an interesting study to determine what type of school produces so many leaders. What looks, from the outside, like a traditional school, actually turns out to be far more non-compliant.

Eton is an all-boys school, founded over five hundred years ago, and located on the bank of the River Thames. They seem to be doing something differently at Eton than at most other schools, this school regularly churns out prime ministers; David Cameron was the 19th prime minister to have attended Eton, and he brought thirteen school chums along with him to fill his front-bench team.

We know that there must be an excellent networking, good old boy system in place, but is that all it is, what about the actual education?

If you think Eton offers a traditional, rigid, conformist educational provision, boasting the best exam results in the country, you would

be wrong.

According to Nick Fraser, author of "The Importance of Being Eton" the reason for the success of Etonian students lies in the freedom the school gives - the clubs, the activities are all run by the students, with certain students being elected to positions of influence.

Ticky Hedley-Dent from Tatler Magazine states that the ability to exude confidence without appearing haughty or conceited is a practiced art. He says you can spot an Etonian, because, "they are going places with a certain goal in mind, and they just go for it."

In the book, Palash Dave, who attended the school in the 1980's says: "Kids arrived there with this extraordinary sense that they knew they were going to run the country." A series of speakers who visit the school tell the students this is the case, and the students believe them. Dave also states that the school puts a premium on individualism, "You're encouraged to pursue any dream you might have, Eton also allows a degree of dissent and, to a certain extent, encourages it. That's very helpful to anyone who wants a leadership role."

Cory William Johnson was a master at Eton College from 1845-1872. He was thought by many to be the most brilliant Eton tutor of his day. Arthur Coleridge described him as "the wisest master who has ever been at Eton." However, the story of Johnson's resignation/dismissal from Eton is covered in controversy. Claims of inappropriate closeness with the students conflicts with a view from William Lubenow, a U.S. Professor, who states that Johnson wanted to "create a community where power and personality, desire and discipline, and love of learning were integrated."

In a letter to Rupert Hart-Davis (Eton Reform II) Johnson wrote:

At school you are engaged not so much in acquiring knowledge as in making mental efforts under criticism. A certain amount of knowledge you can indeed with average faculties acquire so as to retain; nor need you regret the hours you spent on much that is forgotten, for the shadow of lost knowledge at least protects you from many illusions. But you go to a great school not so much for knowledge as for arts and habits; for the habit of attention, for the art of expression, for the art of assuming at a moment's notice a

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new intellectual position, for the art of entering quickly into another person's thoughts, for the habit of submitting to censure and refutation, for the art of indicating assent or dissent in graduated terms, for the habit of regarding minute points of accuracy, for the art of working out what is possible in a given time, for taste, for discrimination, for mental courage and for mental soberness.

Here we are, so many years later, and education is still singularly focused on the acquisition of knowledge, facts and figures.

Johnson also had this to say about the primary aim of the school:

To encourage each Etonian to be a self-confident, inquiring, tolerant, positive young man, a well-rounded character with an independent mind, an individual who respects the differences of others. By the time he leaves the school, we want each boy to have that true sense of self-worth which will enable him to stand up for himself and for a purpose greater than himself, and in doing so, to be of value to society.

Free Schools in England

Free Schools were founded by New Schools Network, set up in 2009 by Rachel Wolf, a former adviser to Boris Johnson and Michael Gove, then Secretary of State at the Department for Education. A trip to New York to look into the city's Charter Schools was the initial impetus for the introduction of the Free Schools. In 2011 the first 24 schools opened allowing teachers, parents, charities or other organisations to apply to set up a school. The applicants had to show there was a need for Free school either through lack of placements or schools or for a desire to raise standards in their local community. Currently there are around 500 Free Schools either already in operation or have been approved, offering over 330,000 new school placements. Once established, free schools are legally Academies so are funded by central government and have a range of freedoms. From the New School's website:

- They can extend the school day or year: most use this freedom to add more time for learning or extra-curricular activity.

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- They have to offer a broad and balanced curriculum, but this does not have to be the National Curriculum: some schools use this freedom to teach in an innovative way, whether that is focusing on STEM subjects or taking on a different approach to learning, such as outdoor expeditionary lessons.
- They have more flexibility in the way they employ their staff: some choose to offer teachers performance related pay to keep and reward their best staff while others choose to bring in outside expertise by employing people without traditional teaching qualifications.
- They decide how they spend their full budget: they receive all of their funding direct from central government, which means they have complete independence over how it is spent
- They have independent governance: free schools are run by an Academy Trust, and are independent of Local Authority oversight.

The Free Schools programme is not without its critics, however Natalie Evans, New Schools Network Director, responds to this criticism in a 2015 Telegraph article:

As much as the critics cry foul play, wanting to paint free schools as unwanted and isolationist, the facts refuse to play that game. Inconveniently for some, neither is true.

The overwhelming majority of free schools are opening in areas where there aren't enough places to go around. More importantly though, whether free schools are opening in areas where there is a shortage of places or not, they are committed to collaborating, supporting and sharing expertise with neighbouring schools – an approach which will improve standards across communities, benefiting all local children. But free schools aren't just helping address the outright shortage of places; they are also addressing the shortfall of good school places. Nearly half all primary free schools, including those approved to open, are in the areas where results are average or worse, and over 70 per cent are in areas where parents are less likely to get their first choice of school.

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Here, free schools are also having an impact by driving up local standards – with their pupils directly, but also as a result of neighbouring schools raising their game and local schools, including free schools, working effectively together.

Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts (LIPA)

One of those Free Schools is a new sixth form addition to LIPA, which was founded in 1996 by Sir Paul McCartney and Mark Feathersone-Witty. On the LIPA website Sir Paul cites, “LIPA has proved itself. Now [with LIPA Sixth Form College] we are offering what we do earlier. It’s an exciting development.”

The sixth-form college opened in September 2016. In the run up to the opening, I met with the director, Charles Bartholomew. He turned up for the meeting dressed for building work, busy with the final stages of the new school’s renovation set within the LIPA campus in the heart of the city. It includes a studio theatre, recording studio, music technology suites, dance and drama studios and a scenic design and construction workshop. Charles was very charming and approachable and offered an impressive, ambitious view of this new Free school, passionate about making the school a success. On the LIPA website, part of Charles’s message is to reassure students:

It may help you to know that a significant proportion of our first student intake did not have any formal training or experience in their subject. This reinforces our belief that what matters is not necessarily what you have done previously – we realise that not everyone will have had the same opportunities so far. As a potential applicant for entry, should you be called for interview and audition, your existing abilities and experience will be important, but we will be just as interested in your potential to build on what you have done and to develop your skills with us. We will do our best to make sure that your two years with us will stand you in good stead for going on to Higher Education or straight into work.

In return for your commitment, dedication and hard work, we will devote ourselves to you and your future.

I love that line “we will devote ourselves to you and your future.” Yes Charles, I believe you will.

Educational Reform in England.

Changes for mainstream schools have previously been called for. A fundamental change almost occurred through the work of Mike Tomlinson. I found an article written about him which states: “There are really, really good kids who are being let down by the system, but everybody has something that they’re good at in them. I just want teachers to find that.”

The same article went on to tell us about Tomlinson:

He built a groundswell of support behind a plan to put academic and vocational qualifications on an equal footing, by introducing a new overarching diploma that would include in it details of any A-level pass or BTec qualification gained by students. The proposal won support from the Confederation of British Industry, then the Schools minister, David Miliband, and virtually all of the teachers’ and heads’ organisations, but it fell at the last hurdle when the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair, vetoed it, apparently anxious that Daily Mail headlines would accuse him of abandoning the “gold standard” of the education system, A-levels, in an election year.

Who was this Mike Tomlinson, and what was this report that almost overturned education? What had happened to it? I was intrigued.

Mike Tomlinson joined Ofsted in the late 1970’s (then called Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Schools). Following the first Gulf war he helped to re-establish the education system in Kuwait. He then became the Chief Inspector of Schools in the late 80’s, until he retired. Shortly after he retired he received a call from the British Government asking him to look into A-level grading, as there was a lot of controversy surrounding the exams. He set up and chaired the ‘Working Group’ in 2003 to examine the possibility of reforming the syllabus and qualification structure for 14-19 year olds in England. This culminated in: ‘The Tomlinson Report’ which opened with:

It is our view that the status quo is not an option. Nor do we believe further piecemeal changes are desirable. Too many

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young people leave education lacking basic and personal skills; our vocational provision is too fragmented; the burden of external assessment on learners, teachers and lecturers is too great; and our system is not providing the stretch and challenge needed, particularly for high attainers. The results are a low staying-on rate post-16; employers having to spend large sums of money to teach the ‘basics’; HE struggling to differentiate between top performers; and young people’s motivation and engagement with education reducing as they move through the system.

Our report sets out a clear vision for a unified framework of 14-19 curriculum and qualifications. We want scholarship in subjects to be given room to flourish and we want high quality vocational provision to be available from age 14. These are different, but both, in their own terms, are vital to the future wellbeing of young people and hence our country. We want to bring back a passion for learning, and enable all learners to achieve as highly as possible and for their achievements to be recognised. We must ensure rigour and that all young people are equipped with the knowledge, skills and attributes needed for HE, employment and adult life.

The report makes for inspirational reading, even at 118 pages long. The main points are helpfully outlined in a 2004 Guardian article:

- Replace GCSEs, A-levels and vocational qualifications with a new single diploma over 10-year period of reform.
- Slash the number of exams pupils have to take.
- Replace all coursework with a single extended project. Some hands-on courses, such as art and design, would still have project-based work, but this would be done in school - rather than independently - to reduce cheating. Cheats would also be weeded out when they had to sit an oral exam.
- The diploma would come at four levels: entry (equivalent to pre-GCSEs), foundation (GCSEs at grade D-G), intermediate (GCSE A-C) and advanced (A-level).
- Students would be able to progress at their own rate, paving the way for mixed-aged classes.

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- Advanced-level students would be able to sit extra hard questions to get even higher marks than are currently available under the A-level system to add extra "stretch". These would be introduced to A-levels as A-plus and A-double plus before the diploma was introduced.
- The diploma would be made up of the modules, which would be adapted from the existing A-level and GCSE modules.
- Students could pick their own combination (open diploma) or opt for one of the 20 pre-designed combinations (specialised diploma). This should give stronger and more respected vocational qualifications.
- Introduce a new "core" which all pupils would have to do to pass the diploma, made up of: "functional" maths, ICT and communication skills, an extended essay, and "wider activities" - work experience, paid jobs, voluntary work and family responsibilities.
- "Graduates" of the diploma would be given a transcript of their achievements, including a breakdown of individual module marks, which would be available to employers and universities online.

Many of these points were exactly what we had implemented in our secondary school, which had seen great success.

What an absolute shame these ideas didn't have an opportunity to be put into practice. The reason the plan didn't see the light of day is part of a larger problem with education; it is wrapped up in the chessboard of politics.

The much admired and respected BBC education journalist, Mike Baker who sadly passed away in 2012, wrote an insightful article entitled, "Why Tomlinson was turned down." He told us:

Rarely has a government-commissioned inquiry done its job so thoroughly. For two years, Sir Mike's working group sifted the evidence, took advice, cajoled and persuaded. By the end he had achieved the near impossible: a very broad consensus in favour of wholesale reform of the examination system.

He had found a way of doing precisely what he was asked to

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do, specifically to recommend "a unified framework of qualifications" to cover all types of learning.

The problem was that while he was beavering away the political landscape was changing.

When he embarked on this inquiry he had just finished an investigation into the fiasco over the marking and grading of A and AS-levels in the summer of 2002.

Ministers were grateful to him for helping them out of a hole.

It was too late, of course, for Estelle Morris who had already lost her job as education secretary. But her legacy was a government department still committed to wholesale reform of examinations.

In a Green Paper in February 2002, Estelle Morris had made her direction clear, saying, "For too long, vocational studies and qualifications have been undervalued."

The consultation endorsed that view and a year later, the new Education Secretary Charles Clarke published a White Paper saying ministers had been "confirmed in our view that we need to create a clearer and more appropriate qualifications framework for the 14 - 19 phase."

He too anticipated a "unified framework of qualifications" and that was when, in January 2003, he formally commissioned Sir Mike Tomlinson to find a way of doing just that, asking him to report within 18 months.

Green light.

At the time, that generous time-scale seemed right: after the rushed introduction of AS- levels no one wanted to take things too fast. Slowly and surely was the motto.

But the report was not ready by the summer of 2004, although an interim report had indicated where it was heading: the replacement of A-levels and GCSEs by a new over-arching diploma.

At this point, no one in government was warning Sir Mike that he was heading into dangerous or undesirable territory. There was still a green light ahead for reform.

However, publication of the final Tomlinson report was

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delayed until October 2004. By then things were changing.

The prime minister's popularity had plummeted, the Tories were pinning their electoral flag to a defense of A-levels, and an election was looming.

The first orange warning light flashed on the day of publication: the prime minister used a speech that very evening to say A-levels and GCSEs would stay. Then, within eight weeks, another education secretary was gone.

In the reshuffle following the resignation of David Blunkett, Charles Clarke was replaced by Ruth Kelly.

Moreover the Schools Minister David Milliband was also moved. Sir Mike found himself reporting to a completely new ministerial team which had only weeks to make up its mind on one of the biggest education decisions for several decades.

For any government, at any time, it would have been a bold move to accept the Tomlinson proposals in full.

For a new minister, close to an election, it would have taken enormous clout and courage to leap into the unknown.

But there were some reassuring factors: the plans were backed by the government's senior qualifications adviser, the head of Ofsted, the teacher and head teacher associations, most university leaders, and many employers.

On the other hand, the "phoney" general election had begun, the problems over AS- levels had fallen quiet, and there seemed few short-term political advantages in taking big risks on examination reform.

So, although many aspects of the Tomlinson proposals were accepted, the core principle of a single, over-arching qualifications framework for both academic and vocational courses was rejected.

So too was another key component: the shift from external exams to greater internal assessment.

Neither was popular with large sections of the popular media. If accepted they may have attracted hostile newspaper headlines which may have frightened parents, and voters, in "middle England".

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However, with so much support from the education profession, it may well have been that parents, students, and employers - if they had been given a chance - would have welcomed a change from the dominance of the 54 year-old A-level system.

Now, though, the door has slammed in the face of wholesale reform.

That door hasn't opened since.

For the past few years, with all political focus on Brexit or Remain, and Indyref2, a focus on education, despite teacher dissatisfaction and high rates of student mental illness, has been absent.

Education in Scotland

Unfortunately, Scotland has yet to move towards any type of Free School initiative such as exists in England. The Minister of Education, John Swinney initially seemed supportive of change in education, but has since backed off any major developments, cancelling a promised new Bill of Education.

Bill Nicol was the director of the Hometown Foundation, a registered charity engaged in various initiatives designed to improve education in Scotland. His article in the *Times Educational Supplement*, April 2016, puts forward his argument:

Recent reports by the likes of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development show that Scotland has been falling behind other countries, including England, in educational outcomes. This is causing concern for employers and academics, as well as for parents; these concerns must be addressed as soon as possible. Every day lost to barren consultations to placate vested interests will result in even more young Scots having to leave school without the tools that they need to make a success of their lives. The foundation firmly believes that a good quality and inclusive education – irrespective of religion, background or wealth – underpins every successful society. Not only is it important to keep up with our competitors, we must also enable our children to achieve more prosperous and fulfilling lives as well.

We believe that a combination of progressive, innovative and proven solutions is needed to improve the quality of education available to all pupils in the state sector.

A significant part of the problem in Scottish education relates to areas of responsibility. At present, direct responsibility for raising standards and improving education does not reside with the school or head teacher.

Funds are passed from the Scottish government to local authorities to provide education and raise standards. Local authorities are not hands-on or properly accountable for

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standards, and their involvement also adds a great deal of bureaucracy and cost. Scottish education has largely been based on the comprehensive system, which was introduced just over 50 years ago. Despite this system being regarded by many as not being as effective and efficient as it could be, there has been real bias against change and an unjustifiable defense of the status quo.

This resistance has come mainly from individuals and organisations that have vested interests in maintaining it, including teaching union representatives. From people who are not truly putting pupils, teachers or, indeed, attainment first.

The Hometown Foundation is promoting a model specific to Scotland, built on innovation, collaboration and engagement. The idea is not simply to adopt what is happening south of the border. The best aspects of what is working well will be embraced. We believe that it is possible to create a new state-funded education system that is more responsive and diverse, which, of course, is a recognised prerequisite for learning organisations.

We worked with Bill for almost two years. He was trying to convince the Scottish government to at least visit a few of the alternative independent schools throughout Scotland, ours being one of them. Unfortunately, they were uninterested in his request.

Independent Alternative Schools in Scotland

Although any type of Free School arrangement seems to be unavailable to the students of Scotland, there are a few independent alternative schools including a Steiner school in Edinburgh. My sons attended a Steiner school in the U.S. and in the U.K. There are wonderful elements of the pedagogy, and there are also areas which would not suit some children. An “eyes-open” approach is needed to determine if your child would thrive in these schools.

Edinburgh Steiner School

This school was founded in 1935. From their website:

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Unique to Steiner Schools, Main Lessons provide every pupil with a broad spectrum of learning experiences throughout their education.

Beginning in Class 1 and continuing throughout the 12 years of their education, Main Lessons are topic blocks, which are carefully constructed to provide a balance between Humanities, Sciences and Crafts.

Upper School teacher, Renske Brune, describes a recent Main Lesson for Class 11:

The most important aspect of the Main Lesson is to address the heart, the hands and the head of the pupil in approximately equal measure.

In more anthropological terms, these three aspects are called the feeling, willing and thinking. The feelings are engaged through stories and beautiful imagery, the willing through practical work around the subject and creating the main lesson books, and the thinking through the more intellectual content of the main lesson.

Glasgow Steiner School A fire caused the Glasgow Steiner School to close in 2013. There are now plans to turn the school into a block of apartments. A lower school has registered with Education Scotland and opened in August 2016.

Aberdeen Waldorf School

This school closed in 2014

Drumduan, Forres, Scotland

Drumduan was founded in 2013 by the actress Tilda Swinton and Ian Sutherland McCook, along with a group of parents and teachers. It is based on the principles of Rudolph Steiner. I visited the school and met the Principal Teacher, Krzysztof Zajackowski. He is inspirational in his view of education. He moves away from the very traditional practice of many Steiner schools and offers his students a place to find themselves. His statement from the school's website illustrates his view:

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We live in an age where much of our establishment is now under question and rightly so. Long held traditions, religions and major institutions are being scrutinised, yet are enough of us asking the fundamental questions? What is the true purpose of our education system? Why do we sit at desks for much of the day at school for over ten years? Are we teaching our pupils the life skills they need?

We ourselves are the product of a post-industrial model of education, so it's not easy to imagine an alternative to this mind-set. Yet, if we continue to inquire, we begin to find answers. At Drumduan we are living with these questions and implementing many of the answers, with passion and with practicality. The emergent future and the health of society will be defined and shaped by the very same young people who come looking for their answers at our schools.

Aaron Hicklin wrote a nice article about the school in 2015 in the *Guardian*:

Late last year, Drumduan Upper School received its first government inspection. In an era of merciless performance targets and obsessive testing, any school administrator would naturally feel apprehensive. Drumduan's head teacher, Krzysztof Zajaczkowski, a working-class son of Polish immigrants who has an instinctive distrust of authority, expected to be shut down. He had not forgotten his last school inspection, 10 years earlier, which he compares to a visit from the Gestapo, and he worried that Drumduan's radical ideals – no exams, no tests, no hierarchies, no sitting at desks whenever possible – would count against the school.

That is not what happened: the inspectors sat in the classes and watched the students. And if you watch the students at Drumduan, you soon notice they are confident, articulate, highly motivated and respectful. These are, in fact, the words used by the inspectors in their subsequent report. You might even believe the students at Drumduan wanted to be there.

Time to Enlighten Scotland's Education?

A request to offer alternative education through Free Schools or Autonomous Schools is a call to introduce a new way of educating

the youngsters of Scotland, not only to bring them up to current standards, but also to bring forth an intellectual storm similar to one that occurred during the Scottish Enlightenment. This period of time during the 18th century saw philosophy, sociology, engineering, economics and architecture flourish and expand in innovative progress.

Winston Churchill had this to say:

Of all the small nations of this earth, perhaps only the ancient Greeks surpass the Scots in their contribution to mankind.

So what brought about this time of enlightenment, this ‘contribution to mankind?’ A series of people and events contributed to Scotland’s Golden Era:

- The Presbyterian Church of Scotland became more accepting and tolerant of new ideas.
- Scottish scholars, from the 13th century had been educating themselves in the universities of Europe, particularly Paris, bringing back innovations and ideas. By the 17th century many scholars seeking a professional education found their way to the Leiden, near Rotterdam, Holland. By 1880 almost 1500 Scottish medical and law students had been enrolled at Leiden. Upon returning to Scotland these graduates dominated the Faculty of Advocates and provided the basis of modern Scottish law. In Medicine, the world famous Medical Faculty in Edinburgh’s University had been founded by Alexander Munro, he and four of his professors had all studied at Leiden. The medical curriculum for the Faculty was based on Leiden’s, and Edinburg’s Royal Infirmary, opened in 1741, was modeled on a hospital from Leiden.
- The 1707 Union with England saw Scottish politics drawn down to Westminster, leaving a gap for Scottish thinkers and intellectuals to freely cast their thoughts and opinions to conversations other than the politics of the day. These conversations and debates were informal and sociable, made up of inquisitive philosophical and literary clubs, which took place mainly in taverns over dinner and wine.
- These new ideologies could be shared through the emergence of new publications such as the Scots Magazine. Intellectual

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books opened up a world of philosophical reasoning and understanding:

Scottish philosopher David Hume published *A Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects*. The Treatise was written from 1738 to 1740 and contains three books, which explores an investigation into human cognition, emotions and free will, moral ideas, justice, obligations and benevolence.

Another philosopher and pioneer of political economy, and good friend of David Hume, was Adam Smith. His book, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), was the first modern work of economics and laid out a theory of free market economics.

The Reverend Francis Hutcheson arrived from Dublin in 1727 and became a professor at the University of Glasgow, where he taught and influenced Adam Smith. Hutcheson is often described as the father of the Scottish Enlightenment. He wrote many books including, *Logic, Metaphysics, and the Natural Sociability of Mankind* (1723), *An inquiry into the original of our ideas of beauty and virtue* (1725) and *A system of moral philosophy, in three books* (1755)

In reviewing the Scottish era of enlightenment it seems it came to be due to:

- A tolerance for a new ideology.
- An exploration into best practice.
- A space and place to discuss and debate.
- A sharing of those new ideologies through the publication of books and magazines.

The last half of the 18th century produced a never-to-be-repeated intellectual movement in Scotland. The driving force came not from political alliances or by royal decree or handed-down traditions. It was not a single ideology, but a rich and diverse new perspective. The driving force came from a well-educated population; outspoken, thinking for themselves, eager for reform and a desire to improve life in Scotland.

Is it time for the Second Scottish Enlightenment movement, starting with education?

- Time to tolerate a new ideology about education?

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- Time to explore and implement best practice from overseas and from alternative schools in the UK?
- Time to have true discussions with input from pupils, parents and teachers?
- Time to publicly share those ideas?

It is not due to a lack of looking for new ideas to improve education in Scotland. The Curriculum for excellence was an attempt to revolutionise educational design.

Curriculum For Excellence (CfE)

In 2002 the Scottish Executive undertook the most extensive consultation ever of the people of Scotland on the state of school education through the National Debate on Education. In the debate, many people - pupils, parents, teachers, employers and others - said that they valued and wanted to keep many aspects of the current curriculum. Some also made compelling arguments for changes to ensure all our young people achieve successful outcomes and are equipped to contribute effectively to the Scottish economy and society, now and in the future.

The debate identified the following priorities:

- Reduce overcrowding in the curriculum.
- Make learning more enjoyable.
- Make better connections between the stages in the curriculum from 3 to 18.
- Achieve a better balance between 'academic' and 'vocational' subjects.
- Broaden the range of learning experiences for young people.
- Equip young people with the skills they need now and in future employment.
- Make sure that approaches to assessment and certification support learning.
- Offer more choice to meet the needs of individual young people.

In November 2004, the Review Group provided the proposed Curriculum for Excellence. This new curriculum would:

- Achieve clearly defined rounded outcomes for young people

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- Smoother transition between different stages of education, especially the entry to formal primary schooling
- Offer new choice, space and time within the curriculum to teachers and schools to design learning to suit the needs of young people.

The group's aim was to focus on skills and apply learning to real-life situations, giving greater flexibility and choice to schools. Its ambitious mandate states, "Young people are expected to develop as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors as a result of their school education."

The initiative called for teachers to be agents of change and professional developers of the curriculum. The CfE was inserted into schools, more information about this soon.

In January 2017, Fifteen years after the initial consultation, a new consultation entitled Education Governance Review took place. Open meetings were arranged for various places within Scotland, I attended the Aberdeen Consultation on November 24, 2016 and wrote a piece for a Facebook page I initiated, entitled Campaign for Educational Choice in Scotland:

The welcome pack announced the objective of the consultation in bold capitals: EMPOWERING TEACHERS, PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES TO ACHIEVE EXCELLENCE AND EQUITY IN EDUCATION: A GOVERNANCE REVIEW.

After a short, overview by Shirley-Ann Somerville MSP, Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science, we were asked to initiate group discussions at our tables.

Each table was assigned a facilitator asking questions and taking notes. At my table the conversations centred on equity in school funding, teacher shortages and parent fund raising. I sat quietly listening. After around 90 minutes the facilitator looked around the table and said she was aware that there were a few people who hadn't yet spoken. Her eyes fell on me and she prompted me with a subtle nod. Okay, I thought, you asked...

I began telling them about our small independent school, and how we are able to help students who are "disengaged from

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education”. “Disengaged from Education” covers a multitude of reasons – socially challenging situations including bullying, work pace too slow/too fast, not enough support, stressful environments - all resulting in unhappy students.

Nobody interrupted and I took this as a positive sign, I continued with an explanation about schools still operating the same as they did over a hundred years ago – age segregation, chalk & talk, big class sizes, total focus on exam preparation. No room to explore creativity, entrepreneurship or individual skills – many of the attributes required to meet the challenges of Aberdeen’s future economy and industry. Many students disengage, become unhappy and frustrated, but nobody has the time to either notice or to find a solution. Not to throw criticism at teachers, how can they possibly keep a close nurturing relationship with 30 students? I kept talking, telling them about how students have arrived at our school completely closed down, their confidence was on the floor. I explained that six months later they had flourished, eyes sparkling and confidence lifted, and able to do anything they want.

After my passionate plea for the need for education reform, I looked up to a table full of blank faces looking back at me like I had just fell from the sky and was now speaking in an alien language.

After an awkward three-second silence, the group facilitator said,

“Scotland doesn’t do that, we don’t fund schools outside of the local council authority”.

“Yes, I know” I replied.

“It would take years to implement a new system of education,” the facilitator added.

A teacher added his opinion, in agreement - it was too massive an idea to even consider, it would take new legislature. I recognised the futility of continuing and as the conversation quickly moved back to staff shortages, my contribution to the discussion was officially over.

These consultations took place all over Scotland, and were arranged

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to collect information, allowing the Scottish Government to consider education reform, in an effort to put head teachers and schools in charge of education. I'm sure that those in power will consider this information and it may affect the overall approach to the governance review. The problem is that it feels like tinkering and not the much needed transformational reform. The parents and teachers who have submitted business plans for autonomous schools feel that there is a need for radical reform of the education system in Scotland. The Government needs to listen to concerned employers, academics and parents and act quickly. A combination of progressive, innovative and proven solutions are required to improve the quality of education available to all students in the state sector. Scotland was once a world leader in education; with strong leadership and innovation this could be the case once again.

So is now the time to reform education in Scotland? Is it time to tolerate new ideas and create a new ideology? Is it time to explore and implement best practice from overseas and from innovative schools in the UK? Is it time to create the opportunity for true discussions with input from pupils, parents and teachers?

As part of the consultations a questionnaire was sent out to parents, complete with seventeen questions, including:

- What are the strengths of the current governance arrangements of Scottish education?
- What are the barriers within the current governance arrangements to achieving the vision of excellence and equity for all?
- Should the above key principles underpin our approach to reform? Are there other principles, which should be applied?
- What changes to governance arrangements are required to support decisions about children's learning and school life being taken at school level?
- What services and support should be delivered by schools? What responsibilities should be devolved to teachers and head teachers to enable this? You may wish to provide examples of decisions currently taken by teachers or head teachers and decisions, which cannot currently be made at school level.

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According to a Herald article from January 9th the recent questionnaire left parents “puzzled and excluded” by an official consultation into plans for radical changes to the way schools are run:

The Scottish Parent Teacher Council (SPTC) said fewer than one third of members were able to contribute to key questions on the reforms because of the way they were worded. “The consultation presumed high levels of knowledge about the existing governance model in Scottish education and used language which would be familiar only to those working in the sector.

The report was widely criticized, a *TES* article wrote:

Parents have said they don’t understand it, councils chose to bypass its ‘leading questions’ and the EIS teaching union said that it struggled sometimes to grasp what it was being consulted on, given the lack of firm proposals.

The same article asked, “Is the Curriculum for Excellence, really, well excellent?” It claimed the jury is still out after less than favourable reports from the Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy and the Programme for International Student Assessment results. The situation seems to need to be salvaged and the implementation of the CfE brought under the spotlight. The author calls for detailed research into what is and what is not working. This seems a most sensible urgent request when a 2015 study by the World Health Organisation cited that Scottish 15-year-olds were among the most stressed in the world – are these stressed out teenagers seeing superb results in their schoolwork? Not according to another article, by John Greenlees, in the same *TES* issue. He reports that two decades of upheaval have hit Scotland hard:

The latest Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) rankings indicate Scotland’s worst-ever overall performance for reading, maths, and science suggesting that the country is far from being the world leader in education that it once was.

The Scottish government have since decided to extract their students from the tests, though results gathered before this decision will be available in December 2019.

How can the Curriculum for Excellence be measured? Can we find out what has been successful and what hasn't? The recent consultations didn't seem to have these answers, which would have been helpful for teachers and parents. Can we gain some insight from news reports and magazine articles? What has and hasn't worked since the implementation of CfE?

Feedback about CfE from students is minimal. Whilst response from students showed some positive trends, they enjoyed more exploring and investigating etc., there were some examples of more independent work, but no significant boost to engagement was being reported. A TES article from November 14 2016 claimed:

CfE is failing to engage large numbers of pupils and by secondary school well over a third think "learning is boring."

A *Herald* article from 12th Jan 2016 gave a damning report:

Scotland's new curriculum has lowered attainment and widened social inequality, but ministers have failed to remedy the problem, education experts have warned.

Dr. Jim Scott, from Dundee University, said the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and associated new National Qualifications have had a negative impact on education in Scotland.

Feedback from teachers is easier to find. An in-depth review of teachers response to CfE can be found in a 2013 paper entitled - Curriculum for Excellence: 'A brilliant idea, but...' The paper was written by Professor Mark Priestley and Sarah Minty from the School of Education, University of Stirling and provides us with a good insight. The paper claims that there was greater evidence of participation within primary schools with inter-disciplinary planning and progress did seem to be happening in some primary and secondary schools with regard to collaborative and collegial professional working practices. Some teachers also spoke about moving away from using textbooks and introducing more active and collaborative lessons. There was also a sense of openness towards experimentation from some of the teachers.

However, even if teachers were willing to support the changes, and were even enthusiastic about their new role, they still claimed that these practices were very challenging and required a relinquishing of control and a move out of their comfort zone.

Priestley and Minty garnered most of their information from interviewing teachers in 2011. Their research questions asked the following questions:

- What are stakeholders' understandings of CfE? How does this differ from teachers' existing practices?
- What changes have emerged as a result of CfE, in relation to whole school practices, school culture and teachers' personal abilities?
- What factors have enhanced or hindered teachers' implementation of the changes?
- How do teachers respond to perceived increased levels of professional autonomy and creative freedoms inherent in CfE?

Examples of teacher responses to the questions:

Because you go from a situation where you are very much in charge and you are directing things within quite limited parameters, to a situation in which you are still in charge but the kids are doing more of the moving and shaking. And you have to accept that that's happening without losing what you consider to be acceptable control within your classroom. And that's quite scary.

From another interview:

I think it's a difficult thing just now; everybody is getting used to it. I think it's so easy to fall back into just teaching the way you're used to teach, but you have to make a concentrated effort to think about how to do things differently. I think that's what we find is very difficult.

The authors found a lack of innovation in terms of whole-school approaches to timetabling and "only minimal innovation in terms of the organisation of knowledge, subjects remained the order of the day, and inter-disciplinary approaches tended to appear only on the margins."

Citing other studies, they report that "assumptions about the role of teachers as agents of change have been shown to be highly problematic. Scottish government policy has tended to focus on raising individual capacity, while not addressing the structural and

cultural issues that might constrain or enable teacher agency. So how are teachers supposed to implement the expected mandate; teachers as agents of change, a shift from knowledge to skills; successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors?

Perhaps the answer lies within the primary years. This was apparent in the report; primary teachers spoke of being able to 'go off on tangents' and to be creative. Without the looming pressure of exams, primary teachers hold the autonomy necessary to be facilitators in learning. It is definitely an easier task for them than for secondary teachers, especially if they have been trained in integrated project based learning. But secondary education? How do we align the readying for exams with interdisciplinary and engaging learning? How do teachers relinquish control of learning to the students whilst fretting about assessments, results and inspections? How do teachers become autonomous experts in the educational progress of up to thirty-five unique characters?

Teachers are always under pressure and the responsibility is enormous. A parent from our school once sent me a quote she'd found: "Educators are the only people who lose sleep over other people's children."

If the underpinning philosophy and an agreed plan is in place to offer what the individual student needs, the pressure, anxiety and worry of the responsibility of providing an education should be drastically reduced.

Some teachers interview responses from the Priestly/Minty paper back this up:

I don't think we do enough of 'let's look at the philosophy behind it'. How often in a school would teachers sit down? You just said to me 'have you got a philosophy of education?' I'm sure most people have. But we don't talk about it. We don't ever sit down and say 'right let's all share our philosophies and come up with a philosophy for our school'. We just look at minutiae.

Teacher Workforce Survey In Scotland

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A paper was published in June 2018 by The Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Stirling and was funded by the Scottish teachers' union NASUWT. It was based on an online survey which looked to determine teachers' work patterns, workload, morale and CPD (continuing professional development).

The paper opens with a reference to an open letter, sent to the First Minister from a biology teacher, in which he says: 'Today, right now in schools across Scotland, teachers are losing morale on a scale I've never seen.'

The paper goes on to provide the information taken from the 1,395 teachers who responded:

44 per cent of teachers agreed that 'the advantages of being a teacher clearly outweigh the disadvantages'; whereas 30 per cent disagreed and 26 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed. About 54 per cent of teachers would still choose to work as a teacher if they could decide again. More than a third (33 per cent) of them would choose a different profession. It is very clear that teachers collectively felt undervalued: 72 per cent of teachers disagreed with the statement that 'teaching profession is valued in society', whereas only 14 per cent agreed with this statement. Despite the feeling of not being valued, the majority of teachers are proud of the work they do. Their job satisfaction, however, is not particularly high: only 50 per cent of them felt satisfied. In addition, 54 per cent of teachers were happy with their schools and would recommend it as a good place to work.

Additional summary information stated:

- Teachers reported high levels of workload, especially teachers in secondary schools; Teachers' morale is generally low. In particular, teachers felt their profession was undervalued. However, teachers scored highly on the item of being proud of their own work;
- Activities that take up the most of non-contact hours are marking, maintaining records and other administrative and support work;
The lack of time and cover were reported as major barriers to teachers' CPD; Teachers reported that there is a lack of clear policy or guidelines on career development;

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- The value of the professional update process was not highly regarded, which is related to gender and age; Teachers were very positive about the atmosphere of inclusive education at their own schools;
- Levels of awareness of policy changes, relating to pay and conditions among teachers, were generally low; Funding cuts in educational spending have significantly influenced ASN provision and teachers' workload.

International Opinions on Scottish Education

The teacher survey is disheartening. What is being done about these many voices of despair from the people who are influencing the young people of Scotland?

It's not as though there isn't a great deal of effort put into trying to improve education, the First Minister has even put together the International Council of Education Advisers (ICEA,) who have been meeting twice a year, since 2016, to review education in Scotland.

The ICEA published their findings in a 57 page document in June 2018. The following September saw another report from the Scottish government in response to the 19 recommendations.

Examples from the ICEA report:

Recommendation 1

Consider how the current policies aimed at improving the education system, and those in the future, support the full aspirations of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) so that young people in Scotland can continue to fulfil their potential.

Government Response:

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation. We recognise the need to retain and ensure clarity in relation to the vision and holistic approach of CfE. We will continue to place this at the heart of all we do in the development and delivery of education policy to ensure that we deliver the aspiration for all young people that they should be successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, and effective contributors.

Recommendation 2

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Develop the skills and attributes of the 4 capacities of CfE - successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, effective contributors - and pursue them alongside the important National Improvement Framework (NIF) priorities.

Government Response:

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation. CfE remains at the heart of the Scottish education system, and we will ensure that the specific improvement activity in the NIF and Improvement Plan 2019 places greater emphasis on continuing to enhance the effective delivery of CfE and the importance of the 4 capacities.

Recommendation 3

Consider how improvement in the health and wellbeing of young people is defined, gauged, and evaluated so any progress can be clearly established and validated with any negative effects avoided.

The Government Response

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation...

I looked through the 19 recommendations and responses and didn't see any mention of the results of the teacher survey – from either the ICEA, or the government representatives. This teacher survey - which reports that over a third of teachers in Scotland would choose a different profession, that 72 per cent of teachers disagreed with the statement that 'teaching profession is valued in society' and only 50 per cent of teachers feel job satisfaction – did not seem important enough to comment on.

The first meeting of the year with the ICEA took place in February 2019 attended by Deputy First Minister John Swinney, plus 10 international ICEA members, and six members of the Scottish government.

A trip was made to a high school in Edinburgh to meet with the National Parent Forum of Scotland (NPFS). The minutes stated that points made during the discussion included:

- On the whole, parents are proud of the Scottish

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education system, and have seen improvements over the years.

- Schools have become a lot more accessible to parents, and children are learning in different ways and are gaining a deeper understanding of why they are learning something, rather than learning by rote.
- Schools are trying to find ways to enable working parents to engage more, for example, introducing Google classroom, having parents meetings and school performances in the evening, and holding school events such as fairs at the weekend.
- Pupil Equity Funding is also helping to provide parental outreach workers to engage with the wider school community to break down some barriers.

I couldn't find any notes from a formal meeting with representatives of teachers, however a lot was talked about pertaining to teachers:

- Pupil equity funding has helped to strengthen the sense of teacher agency and empowerment, however we need to do more to allow the creativity of CfE to flourish.
- We want to encourage a confident profession which can be more assertive about regulating its own workload.
- There remain challenges around the culture within schools and the perception that they need to be capturing information for inspectors, local authorities etc. Inspection should be welcomed as part of the improvement agenda.
- Schools and teachers still operate within a very hierarchical system. How do we empower senior leaders to step back and allow teacher agency to flourish?
- Professional leadership training and development needs to be continuous and to take place with teachers learning

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from each other in the classroom, not just on in-service days.

- Our programme of work aims to create a school, and teacher, led education system, empowering schools and school leaders. Headteachers will be empowered to be the leaders of learning and teaching in their schools.
- Decade of development in professional learning and leadership in Scottish Education.
- Narrative around professional learning and leadership in an empowered system.
- Consider how to shift the narrative so that it speaks more directly to teachers. Examples of improvement within schools will have more impact if they come from the experience of classroom teachers.

There were presentations from two of the ICEA members:

Pasi Sahlberg gave a presentation about the importance of play as part of children's learning and wellbeing. He said that Scotland was already ahead of the game, as a number of local authorities are currently testing 'active play', which is a play based intervention to support health & wellbeing in the primary years, developed by Inspiring Scotland, in co-operation with the University of Strathclyde. However we could do more to raise awareness and make people understand the power of play. Five key messages for Scotland were:

- Create a workforce that is trained in unstructured play
- Increase the focus on outdoor pedagogy;
- Educate parents so they understand the benefits of play;
- Sharpen the message about the power of play; and

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- Take the lead on play based learning and put free outdoor play at the centre of learning.

Pak Tee Ng gave a presentation on the latest developments in Singapore. The key messages were:

- Singapore is a very examination heavy country which is looking to make some education reforms and to reduce the number of tests that young people take. However, reducing the number of tests is only one of the strategies. The important point is the philosophy behind the change, which is about developing the joy of learning.
- They don't yet have an answer to the optimal age up to which you simply let children play. You have to be serious about studying the idea of play so that children can enjoy the activities of play while benefitting from the highly developmental aspects of play at the same time.
- Can we inspire young people to truly love or truly be inspired by an aspect of learning?
Part of the joy of learning is the sense of achievement. We diminish the satisfaction of achieving a goal if it is made too easy, and we do our young people no favours by removing the need for them to work hard to achieve their goals.

It is interesting to see how two of the international advisors think play in education is of great importance. And the optimal age up to which you let children play? If Portal Projects are implemented into the classroom, play can continue right through education.

It is always a good idea to explore best practice from both around the country, and from around the world. It seems there is a lot of work goes into trying to improve education in Scotland. But does the involvement of the ICEA in Scottish education align with the realities of the challenges highlighted in the survey of teachers?

An Answer?

Maybe an answer could begin with another survey for Scottish Schools. The questions in the survey would be different for heads, teachers, teaching assistants students and parents. After this information is collated, then a discussion could begin around the following areas:

- The feedback from the surveys.
- The underpinning philosophies of current alternative Schools such as Summerhill, Acorn, Drumduan, which all create a balance between learning and nurturing, not sacrificing the emotional development of the student for the academic development.
- A reflection on the original 8 Priority Points from 2002 could be reviewed. Using these points, a clear, concise taxonomy for a new Philosophy of Education in Scotland could then be created. This could then be followed by heads, teachers, students and parents:

The original Eight Priority Points:

1. Reduce overcrowding in the curriculum.
2. Make learning more enjoyable.
3. Make better connections between the stages in the curriculum from 3 to 18.
4. Achieve a better balance between 'academic' and 'vocational' subjects.
5. Broaden the range of learning experiences for young people.
6. Equip young people with the skills they need now and in future employment.
7. Make sure that approaches to assessment and certification support learning.
8. Offer more choice to meet the needs of individual young people.

What if we reviewed and revised the Eight Priority Points?

A look at them point by point:

1. **Reduce overcrowding in the curriculum** (*and in schools – my addition*)

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2. We should introduce student choice. The ability to access various exams or to choose programs in areas such as environmental, entrepreneurial, filmmaking etc. Students could blend subjects; an exam in English and a portfolio work in screenwriting and filmmaking for example. Or maths National 5 coursework with a study of architectural design.

Reducing overcrowding in schools is urgently needed. Success will depend on trusting relationships being built between school staff and students; this can only be done by reducing the size of classes and schools.

3. **Make learning more enjoyable**
As a result of student choice, learning will be more enjoyable, engaging, meaningful and useful.
4. **Make better connections between the stages in the curriculum from 3 to 18**
Project based learning can be used seamlessly; students shouldn't feel a huge transition between kindergarten, primary school and secondary school. Valuable learning takes place when schools merge ages.
5. **Achieve a better balance between 'academic' and 'vocational' subjects**
See number 1.
6. **Broaden the range of learning experiences for young people**
See number 1
7. **Equip young people with the skills they need now and in future employment**
See number 1
8. **Make sure that approaches to assessment and certification support learning**
Students are measured against their own development; credits and certification will be earned for completion of agreed tasks to build individual portfolios.
9. **Offer more choice to meet the needs of individual young people**
See number 1

Maybe the Eight Priority Points could be built around student needs and simplified to five Priority Points:

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1. **CHOICE:** Provide different forms of secondary education - available to every child.
2. **MENTAL HEALTH:** Protect and support all victims of Adverse Childhood Experiences so they receive immediate and ongoing support to help them recover their health, dignity, self-respect and social life.
3. **AUTONOMY:** Allow every child the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters which affect them.
4. **ARTS & PLAY:** Safeguard every child's right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.
5. **POTENTIAL:** Establish a curriculum in which every child's personality, talents and abilities are developed to the full.

These five priority points are what we focused on in our primary and secondary schools. The following chapter outlines a report for the secondary school created and published by Education Scotland.

CHAPTER 4

Our Inspection

The date for the inspection of our secondary school in Aberdeen loomed ever closer. I would work myself up into a panic, then talk myself out of it again convincing myself that if the worst were to happen, if the inspectors found the school to be unfit for any child to cross the doorstep, then we would just close down and start a small homeschool group, which was originally the plan anyway. This self-talk would work for a while, sometimes a whole day, but then I would wake up with anxiety sitting on my chest like a heavy stone.

Finally the day arrived. There were two inspectors, one was the original inspector who had visited us to approve the registration. She had also visited twice, once to look at a building we were considering as a new venue for the school, and another time to inspect the current venue. I felt she was really supportive of the school, so I felt reasonably comfortable. The other inspector I had not met before, so this caused me a great deal of discomfort, would she be as supportive of would she be hyper-critical? Would they play a good cop/bad cop scenario? I know many schools have all sorts of ways to put on a show for inspections, but I decided to opt for transparency and when the inspectors first arrived, I gave them an honest overview of the first year. I told them that the school had faced many challenges, staff changes due to not be the 'right fit.' And losing students due to Aberdeen's economy which had recently suffered a downturn causing many families to leave the city. I was also really honest about exactly what the school could offer and what it could not. Then they went to inspect.

It was an intense three days, the inspectors were friendly but formal, gathering information asking many questions, sitting in on lessons and talking to teachers and students. By the end of the three days I was really ready to hear what they had to say, exhausted but eager to receive judgment. I can't really remember how the inspectors began the conclusion meeting, it sounded formal and informative about how they would issue the report to the registrar and when the report

would be sent to the media and made public. I thought I looked poised and professional, nodding in agreement, but I was obviously giving non-verbal signs of anxiety. Eye flickering? Miniscule facial muscle ticks? Fidgeting fingers? Who knows how we look when we're trying to hide anxiety. But these ladies were experts at reading body language and they deviated from the script, and in unison, looked up and told me not to worry, it would be a positive report. I smiled and relaxed, a little. Then they told me they were impressed at how I was holding the school together on my own. I relaxed more, then too much. My voice unexpectedly cracked as I thanked them. Then I froze as I realised their kindness and acknowledgement had triggered an implosion of emotion, which was now working its way to my throat and up to a stinging at the back of my eyeballs. I dug down to stop the emotion from finding its way out through my eyes, not wanting to exhibit a display of sentiment and buckets of tears, I quickly blurted out some sort of gallows humour remark, which I can't even remember now. They laughed; I laughed and we moved on.

The wait for the resulting report slowed down time and made the days seem twice as long. I tried to put it out of my mind, but people were curious and constantly asking when the report would be out. Then Education Scotland sent me a confidential draft and soon after the report was live on their website:

3 November 2015. Dear Parent/Carer, The Aberdeen Green School. The Aberdeen Green School, located in Maryculter on the outskirts of Aberdeen, was inspected in September 2015 following the recent registration as a new school in August 2014. This inspection provided information to the Registrar of Independent Schools about the quality of the school's educational and care provision. The school opened in August 2014. HM Inspectors conducted a pre-registration visit in July 2014. The school was registered with the Registrar of Independent Schools to provide education for a maximum of 30 pupils of secondary school age. The school is managed by a Director.

How well do young people learn and achieve?

Young people are keen to learn and participate well in class activities. Learners' experiences are motivating, varied and include frequent

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opportunities to learn outdoors, which is central to the ethos of the school. All young people are keen to progress and have ambitious plans for their future learning and possible careers. Staff are successfully building the confidence of young people as independent learners. As a result, young people are increasingly taking control of their learning and directing classroom discussions. All young people take great pride in their work, which is produced to a very high standard, with little or no prompting from teachers. The very helpful personal learning planning discussions between teachers, parents and young people, which take place every four to six weeks, help all concerned to review the progress young people are making and to plan future goals. Young people are now ready to set smaller targets for their own learning, in order to reach their longer-term academic and career goals.

Young people are achieving well and are acquiring a variety of important skills for learning, life and work. They are developing their knowledge of the world of work by independently researching a range of careers, including interviewing professionals who hold these roles. They enjoy and benefit from meaningful work-based learning placements and from participating in entrepreneurial projects, including the Young Enterprise initiative. The school is still to present young people for national qualifications, but plan to do so in 2016. Young people are increasingly undertaking a range of assessments and tests, which help to measure their progress. The results of these assessments show that all young people are progressing well in the core subjects of English, mathematics and physics. Staff should consider developing partnerships with other local schools to help moderate and benchmark the standards that young people achieve in their course work. In all lessons observed by inspectors, young people were confident in discussion with their peers and teachers. Almost all young people are articulate and convey their thoughts and ideas particularly well. Teachers have high expectations of young people's presentation of work. Young people write in detail and with accuracy. They research topics of interest to them and present their findings through information posters, essays and presentations. Young people have a sound knowledge of current affairs and are able to challenge each other's views on a range of topical issues. Staff should consider the use of national accreditation, or the development of their own awards scheme, to capture the skills that young people are developing through the full range of their experiences. As the school expands, staff should also consider

looking at more formal procedures for monitoring and tracking young people's progress across their learning.

How well does the school support young people to develop and learn?

Staff involve parents and young people together very well in looking at how individual learning needs are met. As a result, teachers have a very good understanding of young people's strengths and talents, as well as any potential barriers to their learning. Teachers are good at adapting tasks and activities to ensure suitable challenge for all young people. In almost all lessons observed by inspectors, the pace of learning was brisk and focused. Teachers plan interesting and creative projects which encourage young people to extend their thinking and organise their own work, including study at home. Teachers are developing a clear and shared approach to the structure of lessons, across the different areas of the curriculum and contexts for learning. Staff should build further on this positive approach by now agreeing ways to provide consistently effective written feedback to young people on their work.

The Aberdeen Green School curriculum has a clear rationale, based on providing bespoke learning to young people, which is very closely connected to their ambitions beyond school and their intended careers. Staff actively pursue links with universities, training providers and businesses in order to determine the best progression route for each learner. Learning outdoors and the promotion of environmental stewardship is central to the rationale of the curriculum. As a result, staff are developing important partnerships with local organisations, such as the Maryculter Woodland Trust. This is providing meaningful opportunities for young people to develop their skills and knowledge in environmental science and geography. Young people demonstrate creativity in their learning through weekly drama lessons and high quality art work. There are authentic opportunities for young people to develop literacy skills through projects and authoring frequent newsletters to parents. Staff should seek ways for young people to also develop and apply their numeracy skills across their learning. As the school continues to become more established, we have asked staff to continue to ensure there is appropriate breadth, depth and challenge across all curricular areas, including personal and social education.

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How well do the accommodation and resources support learning?

Classrooms are bright and appropriate places to learn. An open area provides ample space for young people to relax, play table tennis and have lunch and breaks. The accommodation is well-maintained and appropriate steps are taken to ensure young people are safe. The school accommodation is set in extensive woodland grounds, which provides ideal surroundings to deliver outdoor learning. There are displays of young people's work in classrooms, which showcases their talents and achievements. Digital technology is modern and used well by young people and staff. A few learners opt to use their own devices in school. Appropriate controls are in place to ensure that young people access the internet in a secure and safe way. Staff should continue to expand the range of practical resources available to young people, for example for science and mathematics.

How well does the school improve the quality of its work?

The leadership of the Director is very effective. She is focused on providing high quality educational provision for all young people. She supports and challenges staff through honest classroom observation and professional discussion. She has appropriately high expectations of teachers. Currently, The Aberdeen Green School Parents' Group acts as the main consultative body for the Director to share the school's successes and areas for further development. The Director provides the Parents Group with regular financial reports and information on curriculum developments. The school has encountered challenges in instituting an appropriate board of governors. They should press ahead with their plans to strengthen governance arrangements by establishing an independent Advisory Board who can provide strategic leadership and direction to the school.

Staff are clearly committed to improvement through self-evaluation. Teachers reflect on their teaching and are developing approaches accordingly. They are keen to improve and participate in professional learning. The Director actively seeks the views of parents and young people to evaluate the development of the school. The young people have a strong voice in shaping their school and its curriculum. The Director is clear about the future short and longer term priorities for the further development of the school. She should now formalise

these priorities more systematically in a clear improvement plan with measurable outcomes, which can be shared with the whole school community.

This inspection of your school found the following key strengths.

- Articulate and motivated young people who have a mature attitude to their learning and development.
- The personalised approach to learning which supports all young people to learn and progress well.
- The positive, caring ethos of mutual respect which is created by all staff and young people.
- The vision and commitment of the school's Director in ensuring the continued development of the school.

We have agreed the following areas for improvement with the school.

- Strengthen the governance arrangements of the school to ensure appropriate transparency, accountability and strategic leadership and direction.
- Continue to formalise self-evaluation approaches to ensure they impact on learning and teaching and the further development of the curriculum.

The inspection took place before we implemented The Portal Projects, it would have been interesting to see how the inspectors would have viewed them.

We were overjoyed with the positive comments, and it gave everyone at the school a real boost of confidence. We had been inspected, judged and found to be worthy of helping young adults to move through this challenging part of their lives.

In spite of the fact that I spent a lot of time telling our secondary school students there was more than one road to success, that higher education should be a considered choice, not an assumed next step, most of the students did go on to higher education in various forms. Some went to university, others to college, some took Open University courses. A few took time to decide on their next step, working for a year or so, either locally or abroad. The subjects they chose to study are diverse and include: childcare, maths and

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engineering animal care, business and biology. They have all found their way, without fear-based coercion, nor exam-overload. Many of the students, those who came from mainstream schools, were very vocal in their gratitude for their time at the school, they say it turned their life around, and they felt like they were able to get to know themselves in a relaxed environment and with adults who were interested in them as individuals and who were willing to interact with them as equals.

The End

Into the Flames

I watched a television series called *Tribal Teens*. Each episode told a different story about heartbroken parents, who were at their wits end with their teenagers. They had agreed to take part in a documentary, which saw their children travel to far-flung corners of the earth, such as Peru, Mongolia and Kenya. The teens were sent off in an attempt to wrangle themselves free from self-imposed limitations or self-aggrandizing ways. The teens were required to integrate with a local tribe and join them in their daily quest of basic survival.

After facing what was probably the most difficult experience of their lives, all of the teenagers claimed to have developed a richer and more appreciative view of life. One of the teens said they had gained a whole new mindset, another teen wanted to forge a better relationship with their parents, and a previously pampered princess said she had learned more in the week she'd spent with the tribe, than in her previous sixteen years.

The tribal teens had been sent into the flames and after facing their fears, with support from a caring community, emerged on the other side having burned off all of the character traits, which were not serving them well in their lives.

Dr. Jordan Peterson explains the flames metaphor nicely in a video entitled, *Let Your Insufficiencies Burn Off Like Deadwood*. In the video he talks about deciding what part of your personality you should carry forward with you, and what you should burn off, like deadwood. He reminds us of the benefits of allowing a forest fire to burn in order to remove all of the dried materials from the forest floor. If these are not occasionally burned off, eventually, a huge fire will destroy everything, leaving a barren desert.

Peterson tells us this is a phoenix-like process:

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Shedding all those elements of you that are no longer worthy of the pursuits that you're valuing...as you do that, you shape yourself ever more precisely into something that can withstand the tragedy of life and that can act as a beacon to the world.

In order for young people to have a similar experience, we shouldn't need to pack them off to be immersed in another culture, we need to create our own culture, our own vision of educating, a path which will propel them forward into controlled flames of challenge.

So they can withstand the tragedy of life. So they can act as a beacon in the world.

As we saw through the proposition of the Big 5 character traits, each student has a unique set of personal traits, which will either add value to their future pursuits *or*, which will hold them back. They are able to take themselves on their own journey to explore and understand these traits, of getting to know themselves, if they are given the opportunity, if the flames lay in front of them.

But this requires a new way of educating, and this topic seems to have been exhausted. So much has already been written about new ways of teaching, learning, thinking and communicating in education - with very little change. I have shelves full of books calling for educational reform - but it doesn't come. You can walk into most classrooms in a primary school, a secondary school or a university and classrooms will look the same as they did a hundred years ago. Big rooms containing rows of desks supporting rows of kids who are usually hunched over a textbook, noting down the words of wisdom from the teacher at the front. How can there be monumental change in education when any shift has to occur within a rigid framework? Where is the platform to question and debate? Where is the connection?

Dr. Brené Brown, in her most recent book *Braving the Wilderness*, writes about a spiritual crisis of disconnection, she claims that true belonging requires us to believe in ourselves so we can be a part of something, but we also need to have the courage to stand alone when necessary. She says:

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In a fitting-in culture – at home, at work, or in our larger community – curiosity is seen as weakness and asking questions equates to antagonism rather than being valued as learning. The only true option is to refuse to accept the terms of the argument by challenging the framing of the debate. But make no mistake; this is opting for the wilderness. Why? Because the argument is set up to silence dissent and draw lines in the sand that squelch debate, discussion and questions - the very processes that we know leads to effective problem solving.

Where are those people who are challenging the framing of the debate? Do they come from the higher echelons of education? It seems as though this is rare, there are not many Professors such as Carnes or Mazur, looking to change education from within.

We need to un-squelch the debate, and invite people from diverse backgrounds. From the schools which have reframed education. From the organisations who are supportive. We also need to recognise that the thinking which created the system is not able to reimagine it - (thanks Albert). We need to hear the voices from outside of the education world, from those who are not boxed in by traditional orthodoxy and indoctrination.

Peter Joseph, founder of 'Zeitgeist,' the world's largest grass-roots social movement, talks about 'credentialism' in his book, *The New Human Rights Movement*:

While I have definitely done my homework over the past decade, exploring hundreds of texts on social theory, history, and economics, I have no plaques or honorary degrees to impress you with. Given the emphasis our society places on perceived authority, the cynicism I often sense is not surprising. Most people who rise through the ranks of orthodox higher education, experience an almost inevitable process of indoctrination, sometimes one needs to exist far outside the box to make a difference.

A difference needs to be made to this system which shames our young by telling them they are failures unless they make a success of

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academia and pass exams. A system which often allows a hierarchy of violence and abuse. A system which induces then ignores signs of mental anxiety and depression and pulls young people away from their true creative natures. A system which cuts those connections children and young people should have to their families, their peers and themselves. This system is unable to deliver what they need, what we all need for a healthy society. We have hypernormalised the current educational model, but it is time to take the blinkers off and see that it is too often dehumanizing, ill equipped and defunct, for everyone.

In the last words of her book, Dr. Brown leaves us with this:

There will be times when standing alone feels too hard, too scary, and we'll doubt our ability to make our way through the uncertainty. Someone, somewhere, will say, "Don't do it. You don't have what it takes to survive the wilderness." This is when you reach deep into your wild heart and remind yourself, "I am the wilderness."

I have spent many years navigating through the wild world of education, and I know well those times of standing alone, as a mother of unhappy children, or as the leader of a school bringing in unhappy students.

I was often surrounded by the "don't do it" voices of fear and doubt, my own included. But when it came to protecting those children and young people, and allowing them to be joyful during those early precious years of life, I refused to accept the terms of the argument. I stepped into the howling wind of wilderness. I found ways to help them connect to each other, connect to themselves and connect to their future. I encouraged them to fly into the flames, burning off their perceived or real inadequacies, leaving behind everything that didn't serve them well. So they could freely fly off, as light as could be.

And if I could do that, so could we all.

Appendix

Iain McGilchrist Interview

April 09, 2018 – Isle of Skye

Diane Elliott:

You write about education, you've mentioned that a lot depends on education and that it should concentrate less on learning facts, that children are not stretched enough and also that teaching should be more rigorous.

Iain McGilchrist:

I think it's easy to confuse two things, one is freeing both teachers and children in the process of education and the other thing is going soft on education and the children, and those aren't the same thing. In fact part of the problem is we think the way to improve outcomes is to drill children more and more in rather narrow ways and that is the mistake. But demanding things from children is extremely important, we all thrive on facing challenges. In fact if we don't have challenges, we invent them for ourselves. I'm certainly not suggesting that education should be any less rigorous but I think it needs to be vastly more imaginative. I think if it were more imaginative, children would find it much easier to put more effort into it. Whereas it's very hard to put effort into something that means nothing to you at the time.

What I feel is that there is a number of things going on. One is the hamstringing of teachers. If education is to be good then teachers need to be free to do what they do best. At the moment their hands are tied and they spend far too much time, as do all professionals, from the police to doctors, nurses, everyone, in the meta-process, in documenting things, forecasting things, analyzing things, reporting on them and auditing them. In the past we seem to have had extremely good teachers and very high educational standards without any of that, so we know that is a waste of time.

I've just been reading a marvelous book called *The Tyranny of Metrics*, by Jerry Muller, an American philosopher which

demonstrates very clearly that this whole business of constantly measuring has done nothing to improve the real things that we want improved. In fact it distorts the process, so that people try to game the system in order to come out well on the statistics and they spend a lot of time and ingenuity on that, that really should be spent on focusing on education.

So that is one error. I think another is that we think the way to get ahead is to concentrate almost exclusively on what are called STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects, and I'm somebody who naturally was inclined to such subjects. My grandfather on one side was a scientist, on the other was a doctor, my father was also a doctor and I was brought up in a household in which it was projected that I would be a scientist. As a child I loved all of those things but also I discovered, as soon as I was introduced to them, how incredibly rich and how important the world of the humanities is. Not only is it very imaginatively stimulating and enjoyable to study, but it actually gives us very important values and a context in which to understand why we do the more technical things that now have become the focus. And if we don't produce a future in which people have a grounding in those wider values then it will make no sense for us to be pursuing ever greater technical aptitude.

Without giving children, therefore the people who will be trendsetters and value makers of the future a broader education, it's like putting machine guns in the hands of toddlers because we will have ever greater power to do things through technology, but no commensurate increase in wisdom about what we are doing with that technology. So I'm very concerned about how that will pan out, I already think that there are far too many apparently clever people who don't see any problem with the fact that when we increase our capacity to manipulate the world and one another, we don't necessarily do so for good ends. And even if we do so with good intentions it will only be a few milliseconds before the extremely bright, but not well-intentioned people will pick up those techniques and use them.

I also think we've misunderstood the importance of play, which is often considered to be a waste of time. Also sleep is now

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considered as a waste of time and people are trying to find ways of enabling us to do with ever less sleep. But in fact both play and sleep although they are not apparently productive, are incredibly important to the functioning of a sane human being, and also to the stimulation of imagination again. I keep coming back to imagination because it's an essential thing. Imagination is part of how we create the world on an everyday basis. This is something that Coleridge saw and wrote about, building on contemporary German philosophers, that the world we experience is partly a world we make, and if our imagination is poor, then we'll be living in a poorer world. So imagination is central.

All of those things need to be taken into account, we need to liberate teachers and students from very narrow curricular and constant assessment, we need to drastically reduce the amount of meta process involvement for teachers. We need to improve the content of the courses so that they are not purely STEM related and we need to introduce areas of creativity, music, drama, reading poetry and so forth, which are very important to the fulfillment of a human life.

Elliott:

The students worked on a project about the Highland Clearances, when thousands of Scottish people were moved off their land to make way for sheep to sell to the wool factories. It was a role-play project whereby one group included Patrick Sellar and his cohort and then the other group were the people who had been moved off the land.

We presented them with a tough philosophical problem and let them hash it out. Through that process, they have to look at their beliefs and their perspectives. I was interested to read where you wrote about truth and certainty, about how truth needs to be something which is uncovered, rather than through certainty. So it leaves young people with the idea that to get to the truth of something, you have to keep chipping away, and you have to take everyone's perspective into consideration.

If you could speak about accessing that process through the right hemisphere attributes; about wisdom and truth and certainty and how important it is for young people to have an opportunity to open up the right hemisphere rather than closing it down.

McGilchrist:

I suppose implicit in the education that is offered to many children is the idea that there are correct answers. They might be surprised to discover that in most traditions the wisest people are those who say they know least, and certainty is a sign that you are not there yet. Most of the training of Zen monks is about trying to disconcert this idea that there is a right answer. This does not mean that there are no truths, that there is no meaning to the idea that something is truer than something else; if we didn't believe certain things were truer than other things there would be no point in getting up in the morning because nothing would be better than anything else. So clearly that is an untenable position. That needs to be driven home because there is a tendency in certain streams of modern philosophy to say, because we can't be certain about truth, that means there is no truth. I would resist that very strongly.

So, if there are different kinds of truth how do we achieve them? Well interestingly, science, as it should be practiced, is a very good example of this. It is well known that you can never actually prove that a certain thing is true in science, you can only prove that the alternatives are false. Now that's not just applicable to science, it's applicable to how we acquire a wise understanding of the world. It's to see how going down this path leads to folly. We don't see this as the road to wisdom, we just know there are certain things we must steer clear of. It's rather an intuitive process, it requires a lot of hard thinking as well. People use intuition better when they've done a lot of hard thinking and people think better if they've paid attention to their intuition. So these things are not contrary to one another. In fact, most of our thinking, actually all of our thinking, goes on at a level below consciousness. The stuff we do consciously is just like the tip, the tiny tip, of an iceberg.

So, how can we help children to see that there are multiple truths? Well, one would be to stop helping them to believe that there's a body of knowledge that they need to acquire in order to get a good grade at A Level. Nowadays, for example, if you are studying Jane Austen, while you may be allowed to enjoy reading it, you have to know that there are six or eight things you must say in your essay to get full marks. In fact, it would be a much better principle to say what are all the things that people say about Jane Austen? Now turn them on their head and see what happens. During my training at Oxford I

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was very lucky to have a very good tutor, John Bayley, he was constantly taking what people say and inverting it and seeing what happened. It doesn't mean to say that there was nothing in the original position, but it meant that it was often masking something that you were just excluding because of course it must be "like this." So that habit of taking one position and then taking the other, is very important. I would like, as part of all educational systems, to see the discipline of arguing for a point of view as strongly as you can and saying "okay, that's what you believe, now argue against it as strongly as you can, and we're going to mark you on how you argue against that position. And marshal all the possible ways you can of countering what you've just said." So I think that's a very good discipline for anyone who is going to be thinking critically, and if you are going to be at the top of any enterprise, you've got to think critically, you've got to think differently. It's no good just accepting the wisdom; it would be very foolish to jettison that wisdom that's been acquired, but you need also to be able to question it and to think independently.

There is such a thing as knowing the way things normally work before you are free to jettison them. You learn the rules so you know how and when to break them. So it's not an invitation to chaos. Too often, attempts to make people creative are an invitation to chaos. For example, brainstorming is not really a creative thing to do, because there is nothing about the creative process that is purely random. In fact if you had to find a suitable hypothesis to test and you just tested all the possible hypotheses randomly, you'd never get around to any of the interesting ones. So we're automatically creating things, at a level which we don't quite understand why, that further a certain point of view. So it's not an unguided process, it's just that it's guided unconsciously, it's guided intuitively. It's not guided by processes, algorithms that can be taught and can be followed out sequentially.

Elliott:

It's interesting that you bring up about taking up a different view. Another project we did at the school focused on the Scottish referendum. Just after the referendum took place all of the students were talking about the effects of the result, they were very passionate about their views, so we decided to create a project around the issues. We knew the political viewpoints of the students, so we assigned

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them to the opposite camp. They then had to look at all of the information that they'd bypassed in their beliefs as to whether Scotland should or shouldn't be independent. They were immersed in the opposing arguments. The more balanced viewpoints they expressed after the project had finished was incredible.

McGlichrist:

That's education!

Elliott:

It really was education. And also, through that, you see that they are accessing a different way of thinking, which continues after the project, and it does align with all of the right hemisphere attributes. It's so apparent when you look at it, you could almost check it off a list.

McGilchrist:

Well, one simple difference in my view, which is how the two different hemispheres approach the world, is that the left hemisphere is always looking for the correct answer and narrowing down and closing the conversation on that correct answer; whereas the right hemisphere is always - what Ramachandran calls - "the devil's advocate." Ramachandran is a famous neuroscientist who has looked quite a bit at the different hemispheres and he calls the right hemisphere "the devil's advocate" because it's the one that says "but actually it could be like this." And we need, of course, both of these processes; if we were constantly saying - "well it might be this, it might be the other," - we'd never get anything done. So, for purely practical purposes, we need to be able to close down. In other words, there is a dialogue which should be happening between the tendency to close down, and the tendency to open up. I sometimes describe what the world, as the left hemisphere sees it, would look like, and it looks surprising like the modern world in which we live. And people say to me - "so what would a right hemisphere world look like?" And I say, well, very balanced, because the right hemisphere understands it needs the left, it wants to enter into a dialogue, into a harmony, or a tension at any rate, between apparent opposites that can create something new. Whereas the left hemisphere thinks that

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anything that is, as it were, a fruitful tension or the other end of the pole, is to be cut off and dismissed. The trouble is, you can't cut off the other pole; if you take a magnet, it's got a north pole and a south pole, and you cut it in half to get rid of the south pole, the south pole is still there because a north pole and a south pole need one another! There are many things in life which are like this, all electricity is like this, you need a positive and a negative. And indeed all values are like this. I would like people to question every single value that they hold dearly, up to a point, and see when does this become a problem? There isn't anything that you can name that doesn't become a problem if it is taken solely and singularly to extremes. There is always this tension built into reality, we need both kinds. But in the political realm in which we work now, you never hear that, you only hear "this is right," versus "that is right." There's no fruitful coming together of these points of view. Which, in my view, is how we produce a stable, healthy society.

Also, we should stop thinking about education as preparation for a job. It may well turn out that it is a preparation for a job, but it shouldn't be pursued as a preparation for a job. It's a bit like playing a game; actually the value of a game is in playing the game. And in doing education, the value of it is the process which changes one in ways that can't necessarily be specified or measured, though you can spot them. A trained teacher or any commonsensical individual can spot the difference between a bright enquiring mind and a dull and not inquisitive mind. So what I'm really suggesting is there is too much emphasis on productivity – which - may turn out to be counterproductive. And actually the way to make people flourish is not to say "you get this grade, so you get that job, and the more hours you work at that job, etc., the better you will become."

One of the paradoxes in economics is that Germany has the strongest economy in Europe, or certainly one of them, and people work the shortest hours; whereas, in Greece, they work the longest hours. So it doesn't work that way.

Another thing that I like is a point made by John Kay. He's the economist who pointed out that there were many large corporations that flourished into the 80's, including for example, Citigroup, Glaxo Smith-Kline and ICI, and they were then taken over by people whose expressed view was that the only thing that mattered was "the bottom line." And they then ceased to be profitable, ceased to

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produce what they were supposed to be producing. Surprising enough, the way to flourish is not to concentrate on the bottom line but concentrate on producing a good product! The rest takes care of itself.

Japan Airlines had got into severe financial difficulties so they appointed to head the company - a Buddhist monk. The monk was in his mid-seventies, and had no experience of running a large corporation; but within two years he had turned the fortunes of Japan Airlines around completely, and it is now a very successful corporation. When asked what his secret was, he said "if you want eggs, look after your hens." In other words, instead of constantly berating and pushing, and making your employees feel scared and anxious, which just makes them close down and produce poor quality work, you make them feel valued and give them some freedom and they will then feel motivated and freed up to do things that will make them enjoy their work; and what will be good for them will be good for the company. There is no necessary opposition between the good of the individual and the good of society. So in a good society, individuals will be fulfilled, but by just pursuing individual fulfillment, we will not have a good society.

Elliott:

You could just take that story and apply it to education. Value the children, don't make them feel that if they don't reach a certain performance level they're failures. If you academically fail in school, then you are a failure in life, that's the message, which is so difficult for them, especially if they tend to be creative. I've known highly intelligent students, intelligent in many different ways, but they're just not exam-takers, they just close down when they know they are going to be timed. They feel they've got nothing to offer, they've got nothing that is valuable.

McGilchrist

My view is they will find it difficult in the workplace, because you can't just say I need absolutely no constraints, I'm not being timed. To an extent, you have to be able to discipline yourself. In fact, self-discipline is a very important thing that comes out of an education. The trouble is, the more you micro-control students from the top, the less self-control they will develop. In fact if they have to discipline

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themselves, they will turn out to be much more mature when they go to university, instead of finding that, "at last nobody is breathing down our neck, we'll spend three years partying." It may be a very nice way to spend three years, but it's not a good use of a university place, which is a very valuable thing. So actually learning self-discipline is probably as important as anything else in education.

But I know what you mean about the creative people who don't respond well to exams.

Elliott

Often they don't mind being assessed, it's the time constraints, whereby they've got an hour and a half to write a paper and they know people who go to university who have a couple of days to write a paper and have time to amend and to reflect on the work.

So there is that, and say if you are really interested in art, the way the exam is designed is quite narrow, you have to achieve certain criteria, which is difficult for students if they want to express themselves in a different way; it's closed down.

McGilchrist:

But does it have to be a conflict, does it have to mean if you want to be creative, you can't respond quickly and accurately? For example, I think you should be, as you quite rightly say, given time to ponder to read, to think, but when it comes to delivering your answer, I would be the opposite of what you are suggesting. I would be absolutely rigorous, and I would say it has to be in by nine o'clock on Friday morning and if you bring it to me at ten past...- well, I would be flexible - effectively, it's no good.

Elliott:

Yes, I agree they need deadlines.

McGilchrist:

You need deadlines, in fact, in life, deadlines are very creative. As I myself know, you need them. Often, one of the ways I fine-tune my life is to give myself long periods when I'm not under any pressure and also give myself engagements or dates by which I must have

delivered something. This combination works well for me. I suspect it works quiet well for a lot of people, in talking to them. I think we need discipline and we need self-discipline, but that absolutely does not mean turning one's back on the creative, in fact it's the opposite. It maximises the spice of creativity if there is a degree of pressure.

Elliott:

We implemented the Arts Award, provided by Trinity College in London. The students can choose any creative area of work including photography, animation, fashion design, web design, anything at all which consists of creating a portfolio of work. Part of the process is for the students to find people who are connected to a creative profession and ask them to be their mentor. They also have to show their work publicly, so for example, if you're an artist you have to arrange a gallery exhibition which will be open to the public. The students also have to explore how their work would transfer into a real business skill. They have to find people who are actually making a living doing this. They are taken through the process and although there is no time limit on it from the college, we did put deadlines in place pertaining to pieces of work. At the end of the process, an assessor from Trinity College marks their work, and if they pass, they receive the equivalent of an A Level. It works brilliantly. It's these types of programs we want to make schools aware of, that there is a different way to have students access creativity.

McGilchrist:

I think that is very useful and helpful.

I'm also thinking about this puzzle, at the same time: that we have got far more focused on, say, maths, and far more routinised in the way maths is taught, yet the standard of mathematical understanding is going down very fast. I've just been reading and writing about the puzzle of what has happened to intelligence, and it's too big a topic to go into now, but there is something called the "Flynn effect," which is a popularly known phenomenon, and is perfectly valid; which is that, generation by generation, people seem to be able to score higher on an IQ test. But they don't actually seem any more intelligent than people were in the past! Actually that has now gone into reverse, something called: "the reverse Flynn effect." To

explain the possible factors that went into the Flynn effect in the first place, and have now gone into the reverse Flynn effect, would be beyond this conversation. But one of the things that comes out is that university teachers in subjects like maths and engineering were completely appalled by the standards of mathematical understanding that were coming out of schools, at the same time that, apparently, high scores in A Levels were being achieved. So for government targets, the propaganda was good: lots and lots of people achieving high scores at A Level. But clearly, a number of things were happening. Number one, and I'm sorry to say this, but it is clear that the standards that achieve an A Grade are not the same as they were in the past. Also the understanding behind them is not there. And when you compare children's understanding of Piaget's developmental tests, (Piaget, as you know, was the famous educational theorist who developed a number of tests), as children reach a certain level of maturity they should be able to intuitively answer, through an understanding of how maths and physics work, (you don't need to be technically chained to this), eleven and twelve year-olds should be able to tell that if you put a large object into water, it will displace water not in proportion to the weight of the object, but in proportion to the volume of the object: that's a fairly straight-forward point. But despite the apparent level in maths education being so good, an absolutely whopping decline in capacity between the 1970's and the first decade of the 21st century has happened. So in 1975-6 54% of boys and 27% of girls were able to understand that task; now there is equality, but that equality is 17%. So the girls have got less good, and the boys have got massively less good. Progress?

There is a whole problem about boys' education here, which perhaps we should talk about. Boys respond to a completely different style of education which is exactly the opposite of the one which is now being promulgated. In other words, they respond particularly badly to being sort of drilled in procedures; what they like is risk, what they like is thinking outside the box. And they need to be encouraged to do so, and that's exactly what this 'education' doesn't do. They also need to be allowed to play in the outdoors and play with their peers in natural settings. Now people are trying to find ways of helping children by taking them out into the outdoor environment and not supervising them excessively. The trouble is that because of

litigation, people have been worried about children coming to harm. In fact unless they are able to take risks, they won't ever learn anything and will remain vulnerable.

Elliott:

Even with the older teenagers in our school, they go outside and build dens, as younger children would. Just because they are teenagers, it doesn't mean they need to stop play; they still need that outlet of being in nature, going for walks, being able to mess around with sticks and fires.

McGilchrist.

Yes. Three years ago, I was in Burma, it was then, it might be different now, a largely non-Westernised society. I had the extraordinary privilege of being in the country and seeing people sitting and talking and playing. There were two things that struck me. One was that I was there for two weeks, and in the entire two weeks, in a country with a very high fertility rate, I never heard a child have a tantrum, scream, complain or whine. They seemed to be peacefully getting on with being children, and they were welcomed into the adult world in a most extraordinary way. They would be sitting around the fire and you'd see these little toddlers approaching the fire, picking things up. I saw a little boy with a knife, in the Western world he'd be told to "put that down!" And that was the other realization: risk.

My father died a few years ago and my brother and I got out the old ciné film that he'd taken of us as children growing up in the nineteen-fifties. I'd bought a projector so we could watch them. There we were playing, and my father was happily filming us doing things that nowadays people would think was too dangerous. My bother and I kept calling out 'elf and safety!' And what a dreadful mistake.

Elliott

Again, it's a closing down of a natural state.

McGilchrist

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It *is* a closing down. Children are so inhibited now from doing anything that comes naturally to them. And I think that also, to take the conversation further afield, I think that fuels some of the more unpleasant crime. If you contain and cage children, particularly adolescent boys, they will find ways - if they can't find benign ways, they'll find malign ways - of rebelling against the system. They'll do things that probably, if they were older and understood more about the consequences of what they were doing, they wouldn't do. But at that age, the frontal lobes are not very well developed, so they're not inhibiting very much. Suddenly like a pressure-cooker exploding, all this containment is let out, in what I believe is a show of rebellion against the repression, or oppression, of our culture. I am not saying we should not be strict about discipline. One of the problems is discipline, which is extremely useful for all children and very important for them to learn boundaries; it's not properly instilled. So teachers must be empowered to be more rigorous in discipline. A lot of this is just common sense.

Elliott:

I have two teenage boys and I've written about a journey I took in trying to find a school for them. Schools were not interested in boy energy, and a lot of teachers didn't want boys to express anything other than sitting down and being quiet. Anything outside of that was bad behaviour which they wanted removed from the classroom. Another type of approach I encountered was at a primary school, where boy energy was tolerated, on the playground, so the students were let loose to run wild, with no boundaries or supervision. Many kids were getting bullied or hurt.

McGilchrist

Which is not good either. Always there needs to be a balance; everything has to be this balance between elements which are effectively in tension with each other. And the mistake is to think one must be good, and the other bad; which is probably the most fundamental error in our thinking these days. People are full of things that they think are marvellous. The more of them they get, however, they're not, they're only marvellous up to a point: then they start to become toxic.

Elliott:

Another thing which was really interesting to me is the area of empathy, inculcating empathy in young people. How are we able to do that? What do we have to do to have children have empathy for each other? Right now, they are mostly in a competitive environment where they are pitted against each other and empathy is missing. It's difficult to be in a class where you have to compete and are in a race to prove yourself. One of the things we try to do in our school, through The Portal Projects, is to explore empathy through the characters. However the projects are also highly competitive.

It is interesting how you say that empathy is a right hemisphere attribute, can you say anything about that?

McGilchrist:

Well, I've got a number of thoughts about it. One, to pick up on what you said, I would question whether a healthily competitive environment needs to be low on empathy. I don't think so. I think that organisms and all societies thrive on the right balance between cooperation and competition and we've been sold a story that nature is simply about competition. But absolutely not, nature is mostly about cooperation. However, there is an important element of competition and we shouldn't think it's bad and get rid of it, any more than we should think that the cooperation saps the energy of the competition: things work together.

I'm just thinking about a number of fairly highly competitive environments in which I was educated, where I was nonetheless impressed by the level of empathy. As a result, I left school thinking, in life, I would meet only nice and friendly people such as I'd been brought up with, as on the whole we'd got on incredibly well. And then I discovered, actually, in life, it isn't like that! Sometimes you have to learn the hard way.

I think the answer may be deeper than an educational answer can fully address. So, I would say that it's not to do with the school system, but to do with the society in which we live. Certain measures of empathy, one might think, were higher than they used to be, now everybody virtually agrees that one ought to be tolerant of, and kind

to, people who are different from yourself, less well off, or whatever it might be. But, I'm afraid the evidence seems to be that generation by generation, young people are less empathic than they used to be.

I was very struck by something, years back when I was lecturing in Toronto. A woman came up to the microphone and said: "I teach five-to seven-year olds, and my colleagues and I have discovered, just in the last few years, that we actually have to teach our class how to read the human face." That was extraordinary to me, because, until that point, I would've thought that only children quite some way down the autistic spectrum would need to be explicitly taught how to understand the human face, how to read it. Almost like a machine could be given an algorithm: 'when the face does that, it means this.' Extraordinary. Then I put that together with two other things. One was, to come to your point about empathy, the research that suggests that people now respond less empathically to scenarios than they did thirty or forty years ago. And the other one is the one I get from teachers who, knowing nothing about one another, write to me with a very similar story. They're saying, "I've been teaching all my life and I'm now nearing retirement. I've always given my class a certain test, and I can only remember one child in ten years that wasn't able to do it; but now I find about a third of the class can't do the test which requires sustained attention." This has happened in the last few years. If you were to be as classic, as conventional, in your view of the right hemisphere as possible, you would say the three most clearly right-hemisphere-based things in neuropsychology are: 1) reading faces, 2) empathy and 3) sustaining attention. You won't find people anywhere in the world who dispute that any of those things are very largely right-hemisphere-mediated. And they all seem to be on the wane.

So I may be literally right that the right hemisphere is not being fed, nourished, fulfilled, in our society. Now whether anything you can do in a classroom can really alter that, or whether this needs to go much deeper into family life and so forth, I don't know. I'm going to make myself very unpopular by saying this but I think that the whole business of fixating on social media and technology, of one kind or another, is part of the problem. It may also be that television has eroded, because the change in empathy started before social media, it started really with the widespread watching of television. Of course,

on television you get several things, you get to experience a scene from somewhere else in the world that is perfectly horrifying and it's flanked by perhaps an advertisement for cornflakes and a picture of a happy family doing something. These juxtapositions of images decontextualized and fragmented are something we've had to get used to. We have to be able to somehow distance ourselves in a way that is rather unusual. I think on top of that if you are interacting with people through a mechanical interface it is not the same as interacting with them embodiedly, face to face, and we therefore miss a lot of what is essential in human communication, which is the non-explicit, the implicit.

It has to do with things that we are very good at picking up, well below the level of consciousness. So we can detect a very slight change in a facial expression that lasts only for a few thousandths of a second and we're able to discriminate an enormous number of fine changes through looking at faces all of the time. The trouble is, that when you are writing things and sending texts, first of all you are very restricted in what you can express by the sheer scope of it, you're encouraged to abbreviate the way in which you put things, so a lot of the fine tuning in what you're saying goes and you're not actually interacting with a face, you're interacting with words. That does alter communication.

I think all of these things, including of course, the corrosive effects of being tied to a mobile phone, in situations which in the past would have been very important for developing empathy. One of the biggest ones is the family sitting around a table; it's sort of a sacramental image, right back through the entirety of civilization, in fact civilization probably emanated from people sharing food around a fire. Wherever you go in the world you see this as the focus (which literally means "the hearth" in Latin), around which people are gathered. But now, we're no longer gathered around the fire talking, or around the table talking to one another. The sharing of meals has, to some extent, been eroded, so people tend to help themselves from the fridge at random times. But also when they do sit together, they don't fully concentrate on one another. I know it's corny to draw attention to this, because it's so obvious, but it is extraordinary to see a couple out for dinner, and instead of looking like a couple out for dinner, both of them are looking at their phones. I suppose their lives are incredibly pressured and they feel the need to do this, but

somehow we've got to push back against it.

Sometimes, someone will come in to see me with a diagnosis of depression or anxiety, and the first thing they will do is take a device out of their pockets and put it down on the desk, and sometimes will remember to turn it off. I say to them: "Before we start, that might be part of your problem." They would go on to describe nothing very pathological in themselves, but a wholly pathological organisation in which they were working. In which they were constantly being pushed to work ever harder, with fewer of them to achieve more targets, until people went off sick. 'It's not you who are pathological,' I tell them, 'it's the system.'

Elliott:

I recently read a book by Johann Hari called *Lost Connections*. In it, he talks about loss of connection in relation to mental health and medication and how some people are going straight to medication without trying to fix the things that are wrong in their life.

McGilchrist:

Not that there is anything wrong with medication, nor that there's anything wrong with computers or mobile phones, that's not my message: it's about balance. And the balance comes somewhere very much further down towards not using them than we now think.

Medication is one I just want to comment on, because I think, for some people, medication is definitely not the answer and they need to do psychological therapy. But for some people, it's very important: it's life- saving. Again it's knowing when, and how much, and for whom. There isn't a one size fits all answer to any of these questions: it depends on who you are dealing with.

Elliott:

Is it time to look at people individually and to figure out what that solution is?

McGilchrist:

Absolutely. It's a wonderful idea, how on earth did we forget about it? The answer is that we now think that the accurate way is to use an algorithm, which of course is a generalisation that doesn't apply to any one individual. So for example, as a doctor, you are advised to treat depression in a certain way: you do this, you try that, then you move down to this level, where you do this one, and if that one fails you do another one. This is absolute nonsense, because there is no such thing as "the depressed patient:" there are only depressed individuals who are struggling with their lives. And they all are different, and the job of a good psychiatrist is spotting what this person needs, which will not be the same as what the last person needed. So, although these algorithms seem more precise, they are less accurate, in that they don't really refer to any one individual that's in front of you. Instead, as a doctor, as a teacher, you should be thinking now, what is best for *this* person, and it might not be in this class, anymore than the right thing for my patient would be to be in this particular group. Great for some of my other patients, but not for this one.

Elliott:

So it's that algorithmic, mechanistic kind of approach, which is the problem?

McGilchrist:

It's a huge problem. Once again though, it's not true that algorithms are never helpful. What is clear, to cut a very long story short, is that when people are beginning to learn something, it's quite helpful to have an algorithm. Hubert Dreyfus and his brother have done a lot of work on levels of skill: and they effectively divide skills into five levels (it doesn't really matter what they are), in the lower three, actually having rules to follow helps, but in the higher two, it positively gets in the way, it decreases skill, whereas originally it improved skill. A lot of the things that we "roll out," as they say, across the population are derived from seeing that you can make some quick gains, at a low level, by instituting something: you pick, as it were, the 'low-hanging fruit,' the ones that will easily respond to a measure that can be quickly put into place. But the mistake then is to

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think that that works across the board; and often what it will do is make a small improvement, for a while, for certain groups, but actually will get in the way of improvement for the really gifted and the brighter ones. We ought, as a society, to be paying at least as much attention to the really bright ones. At the moment we are paying most attention to the ones who are struggling; that may sound hard, we should pay attention to them; but everything has got to be proportionate. It's a question of well some children may not want to be in a school, and why should we force them to do so? They might be much happier doing something very skillful and practical, which they could learn, master and be very happy doing. One size does not fit all.

The notion that more schools with longer hours, longer terms, and more homework - this is not the way to improve education. It's rather like supposing the Greeks must have a healthier economy, because they work the longest hours in Europe, whereas the Germans will have a poor economy, because they work the shortest hours. It's not about the hours! It's about the quality of what's going on. So we need to re-think that one as well. Just forcing this process is not a good thing.

Elliott:

Absolutely, it's hard to see a way out because the system of education is so big and there is so much invested in the way we "do" education. Many people write about changing education and what we could be done, but very little actually changes.

We need to get our message out about how we changed education in our school, even to just add it to the other voices.

One of the things that you write about at the end of your book is about culture. I've been reading about D.T. Suzuki who brought Zen Buddhism to the west, he writes about satori, which is seeing to the true nature of who you really are. This is what we try to focus on when new students come in to our school; we try to focus on the individual and ask "who are you?" Then we see if we can pull out those interests they have, and merge it into what is happening in the school.

Suzuki defines satori as: “an intuitive look into the nature of things, in contradistinction to the analytical or logical understanding of it. Practically, it means the unfolding of a new world hitherto unperceived in the confusion of a dualistically-trained mind.”

So, again, it is this going back to what is usually taking place within schools, the training of the dualistic mind.

McGilchrist:

Absolutely. It's really what I was talking about earlier, we 'think this is right, that is wrong,' whereas it's actually about not being dualistic about it, but bringing things together.

Elliott:

To take that point into culture, looking at the difference in Asian and Western students, whereby the Asian students are more holistic with little use for categories, they notice relationships and have more of an appreciation of the whole. This part of your research is really interesting. I looked at it from an art perspective and found a matrix on the differences between Eastern and Western art which was created by a university in Texas. What the report puts forward is that from a Japanese perspective, art is a way of life, aesthetics are integrated into aspects of daily life like the tea ceremony or the Japanese gardens...

McGilchrist:

And calligraphy, many children now find it difficult to use a pen at all. Whereas there's this deep idea, not a superficial idea, that actually the making of strokes on a piece of paper is expressive of something that is beautiful.

Elliott:

Yes, the university report says that art for us in the West is considered to be elitist, elevated and separated from most aspects of daily life. Art objects are displayed in museums. Whereas art making in Japan is an expression of ritual and tradition and obligation to the group. Here in the West, it is more about individuality and personal self-

expression.

Maybe you could talk about your experience of the research you have written about in this area. Is there any way that we could incorporate an element of this Eastern outlook into our society?

McGilchrist:

It's a very good point. One of the saddest things is that, just at the point when we in the West really need to learn from the East, the East is trying to turn itself, as fast as it possibly can, into a copy of all the things we did wrong. Particularly China, which is very sad, because China is, of course, an ancient and very sophisticated civilization, it is now turning itself into a shallow civilization as fast as it can. Whether it succeeds in doing so, I don't know, because these things run so deep in China, that I imagine after a while the Chinese, being a very intelligent people, will start to think, this is a very poor trade we've done. But I think there are ways in which we could easily learn: the trouble is, as I said earlier, it's not something that just can be fixed at the school level, it goes into the fabric of society.

For several hundred years we have emphasised competition at the expense of social cohesion. For several hundred years we've been doing away with rituals, sidelining art as something pretty and ineffective, which is viewed as, if you're really going somewhere in life you don't need to do it, it's only a nice thing to do for relaxation at the weekend. Go to the opera in the evening, take your mind off your *real* work. This is a terrible inversion of reality; we don't have art as a sort of side dish to enable us to enjoy the main dish of making money. The only point of making money is to support a civilization in which the arts can flourish.

So the real business of life comes in things that we now sideline; and all that, to be honest, incredibly, dull stuff that people do in enormous offices under strip-lighting, under great pressure, all day long, staring at figures, it's not what a civilization is about, it's not what life is for. There's an enormous amount of very basic wisdom that we could have learnt from Oriental traditions; and one of the things I really loved about what I found out about the Japanese, is that it's not simple, they're not, in some ghastly sort of Soviet-style way, submissive to the group. They do think that the important thing about being an important member of society is not standing out, but

playing your part and fitting in. Yet, they also are very private people who believe in individual difference, and that these things are rich and fulfilling, so they shouldn't be striving one against another. So you should aim to excel, you should do well, but not in some horrible competitive way, putting your boot in the face of someone else who might compete with you; you work together to produce good results, which is one of the things Japanese companies have always been said to be much better at than Western ones.

There's an enormous amount there that is very rich; and one of the things I didn't talk about there, but have thought a lot about since, is that in Western universities, where a lot of particularly Chinese, Korean and Malaysian students now go to be educated, they're often seen as somehow either rather passive or perhaps not contributing, or not doing well, because they're *quiet*. Their natural reaction to something is that you speak only when you have to, because the real processing goes on when you're silent, and that speaking interferes with intellect. Whereas in the West we think that intellect is all about talking, and that silence is when nothing better is happening. It's another example of how we disproportionately value the very tiny bit that is explicit, and devalue the 99.9% of all that we're thinking and doing and learning, which is not explicit.

So that's another interesting thing to throw into the mix – that - actually teaching children to be peaceful would be a good thing. I'm not very good at being prescriptive, but if I had to be prescriptive, one of the things which I would think that ought to be mandatory at schools is teaching children to sit quietly, and learn mindfulness, for perhaps ten to fifteen minutes every day, maybe before entering lessons, so that their minds are settled and focused. This would have a number of good effects; it would make them no doubt study better, and perhaps make them more peaceful in getting on with each other, but that's really not the point. The point of mindfulness is it is valuable in *itself*, because it centres you now, here, in the world. You only have one shot at being alive; if you spend all your time somewhere else in your head, you've never actually been here. So it's very important to learn that fairly early on in life. Far too late, people come, sometimes through a mental breakdown, to learn that actually they need to cultivate peace.

One of the things people said to me when I came to live here (on Skye) was: “will you not be bored?” Well, nobody who knew me really well actually asked me that question, because I do not know what it means to be bored, I’ve never been bored for an instant in my life. I love peace and quiet, it’s then that all the rich stuff happens, it’s not in the constant chatter. When I have to go to places, and do a lot of talking, I find it quite exhausting, not because I don’t enjoy talking, as you can see, I can talk the hind leg off a donkey! It’s just that it takes a lot out of me; you have to come back and replenish in quiet and solitude.

If there was one piece of advice for young people it might be: learn to prize being quiet with yourself, not always having to be stimulated by something outside of you. In fact, learning to centre things in yourself is very important, because, in the all-important questions you are asking, about what do we do about education, what do we do about many things in our society, there is a sort of one-way ratchet which makes it hard to go back. The more you control, define and limit what people do, the harder it is for them to cope on their own. It’s not as easy as saying: well, we relax some of those things. If you imagine a society in which people are so micro-controlled that there are millions of rules, people start to take the attitude, well, if it’s not forbidden by the law, then it should be allowed, I can do it. Indeed, we’re starting to get into that world: well, if there’s no law against it... Well of course there’s no *law* against it, because any normal person with any kind of moral sense would see that this is not a good thing to be doing! We don’t have to have laws for everything; a society full of fulfilled people, a healthy society, is one with very few laws, because largely you’re relying on the fact that these things are internalised.

There are many stable civilisations which had very few rules and laws, though actually as you get more into civilisations you start to need more - what I should say is: there were cultures, and still are cultures, often ones that we look down on, because they’re not advanced cultures, in which there are very few such rules because these things are taken for granted, because they are taken within. If your moral sense has to be forced on you from the outside by a lot of rules, it’s rather like a lot of scaffolding that holds up a building: eventually, if you take it away, the building collapses. Or in the case of a patient

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who needs to build strength, often a physiotherapist will say: “no, you can’t rely on the wheelchair, you can’t rely on your crutches, you’re going to walk, on your own.” Of course that can seem cruel, and it has to be done gradually: physiotherapists are sometimes thought of as rather cruel people, but of course by doing this they are helping people get their core strength back. If we are going to help people in the future, we have to help them do it from within, not by imposing things from without.

Education is never about putting something in from outside, from someone else, it’s about drawing out what is already in there latently. If it’s not in there latently, no amount of pushing or shoving things in will help: you have to draw it out from that person. So we’ve now got into a view that education is about a lot of information that is pushed into a person, at the top end and comes out at the bottom end as a sheet of paper. But this is not what education is: education is about a relationship, a relationship between teachers and their charges, in which something is kindled and something -that should be rather electrifying - is happening in which the teacher responds to the children, the children respond to the teacher. If that is not there in the classroom, no education is happening.

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